Is Carl Henry a Modernist? Rationalism and Foundationalism in Post-War Evangelical Theology

Chad Owen Brand

Introduction: Post-War, Post-Fundamentalist Evangelical Theology

If the aftermath of the Scopes Trial witnessed a perceived decline in the public fortunes of fundamentalism, the aftermath of the Second World War marked the meteoric climb to prominence of a post-fundamentalist movement, one whose immediate origins are traced to the establishment of the National Association of Evangelicals in 1942, but which became most broadly identified with the work of evangelist Billy Graham. This movement was post-fundamentalist in that, while it sought to retain the essential theological commitments of such men as William Bell Riley and Curtis Lee Laws, it rejected the separatism and elitism characteristic of some of the fundamentalists and it longed for less dogmatism on peripheral theological issues, such as the nature of millennial expectations.

Harold John Ockenga, one of the prime movers of the new coalition, was convinced that what was needed was “a progressive fundamentalism with an ethical message.” This became the passionate concern of the rising breed of conservative leadership. There soon followed respectable journals, such as Christianity Today, top-notch seminaries, such as Fuller and Trinity, and new forums for theological discourse, such as the Evangelical Theological Society. But one thing was needed in order for these to accomplish their purpose—the arrival of a new generation of intellectuals who could preserve the accomplishments of those who had gone before, but who would not be restricted by the doctrinal eccentricities characteristic of the more intransigent and separatist fundamentalists. The one man who soon rose to the top of this new cadre of intellectual leaders was Carl F. H. Henry.

Carl Henry began teaching at Northern Baptist Seminary in 1942, shortly after receiving his Th.D. degree from that institution. Seven years later he would add a Ph.D., earned at Boston University. In the meantime he moved to the faculty of the newly founded Fuller Theological Seminary in 1947 and published his first influential volume, The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism. This book would identify him clearly as a member of historic American evangelicalism, but would at the same time call evangelicals to take a hard look at the problematic aspects of fundamentalism. Over the next four decades or so, few American theologians would make as many contributions in publishing (many books, including his magnum opus, God, Revelation and Authority), teaching (at Fuller, Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, and several guest professorships), editing (as editor of Christianity Today and various symposia), and as a statesman for evangelical missions, theology and ethical concerns (through...
World Vision). Henry’s multi-fold contribution to evangelical Christianity and his articulate resistance of theological liberalism and reductionism have become proverbial.

**Carl Henry as the New Modernist**

It has been fifty-eight years since the publication of Carl Henry’s first theological book. One of the new twists in the discussion about and among post-fundamentalists is the allegation that some of the leading lights of the post-World War II evangelical theological renaissance are employing a theological method that is informed by or even governed by Enlightenment models of rationality and discourse. This is a rather remarkable indictment, since evangelicals have long claimed to reject most of Enlightenment epistemology due to its autonomous, humanistic, and non-theistic tendencies. It seems worth considering, then, whether evangelicals have long claimed to reject most of Enlightenment epistemology due to its autonomous, humanistic, and non-theistic tendencies. It seems worth considering, then, whether it might be the case that the demon they excommunicated through the front door was in fact allowed to return by the servants’ entrance.

Oddly enough, Carl Henry has become the candidate of choice for critics seeking to implicate evangelical theology in this new modernism. He has been at the forefront of evangelicalism’s attempts to carve out a scholarly theological alternative to the reductionist traditions that are current in Continental theology. This alone has made him a marked man. But more than this, Henry’s tendency to write in a polemical fashion on the topics of revelation, anthropology, and the doctrine of God has resulted in more attention being paid to him than to those who have been less committed to apologetics in these sensitive areas.

One of the first thinkers to accuse Henry of being a modernist was Hans Frei. He noted that theological typology and theological method cut across the ordinary lines of distinction between liberal and conservative paradigms. “For example, a contemporary liberal theologian like David Tracy of the University of Chicago will look more like a conservative and evangelical theologian such as Carl Henry than he will like many a fellow liberal in regard to the basic affirmation that theology must have a foundation that is articulated in terms of basic philosophical principles.” Since Henry’s theological method incorporates many features of rational discourse, the Yale theologian categorizes him with others who deploy similar methodology, regardless of the actual content of their theological system.

Frei observes that Henry criticized Karl Barth for his failure to submit his theological reflections to “the law of contradiction, the so-called congruity postulate, and the criterion that all propositions must be arrangeable in the form of axioms and theorems.” This sort of intellectual move constitutes sufficient grounds for Frei to lump the evangelical theologian with the revisionist Tracy.

Several evangelical scholars have also posited that Henry has made concessions to the modernist Weltbild. Stephen Spencer of Wheaton College wrote, “Carl F. H. Henry’s writings display this recourse to modernist epistemology as the sole alternative to subjectivism and relativism (whether modernist or postmodernist), despite Henry’s frequent criticisms of modernism and his call for us to reject both modernism and postmodernism.” Spencer then claims that evangelicals who
hold such views believe that “Christian [sic] have no right to proclaim Christianity universally true without first establishing its truthfulness—which seems to mean proving it [to] them [sic].” In other words, such Enlightenment-influenced evangelicals equate the apologetic task of the church with its dogmatic task. In contrast to what he believes he sees in the methodology of Henry, Spencer proposes that “truth is not objective, if that means that it is self-existing or impersonal, abstract. Rather, truth is rooted in the triune God. Truth is what this tri-personal God knows and says. . . . Truth is personal because God is truth.” Spencer seems to be saying that “evangelical modernists,” such as Henry, have forgotten this fact.

Evangelical theologian Roger Olson notes that several conservative theologians, among them Carl Henry, believe that “in revelation God communicates information about himself in factual statements or in language the meaning of which can be expressed in factual statements.” He further, correctly, observes that Henry argues that the acts of God left to themselves would not provide an adequate basis for the knowledge of God since they would be ambiguous. What is needed is act plus interpretation. Olson finds this dissatisfactory, since, in his assessment, Henry is arguing that the “main purpose of revelation, so it would seem, is to communicate correct doctrine so that we humans will think right thoughts about God.”

Donald Bloesch insists that there is a rationalistic trajectory in much of evangelical theology. Modern theologians, under the influence of Enlightenment rationalism, have incorporated methodologies which are explicitly founded upon either “the logic of deduced conclusions . . . or the logic of evidential confirmations.” In this they often allow philosophical concerns to determine the form of their theological methodology. Allowing that he agrees with Henry in his concern about arguments from empirical evidence and his warnings about biblical obscurantism, he insists that Henry reduces Christianity to a “logical system that rests on unde-monstrated axioms (presuppositionalism) rather than a fellowship of faith whose witness is always reformable and open-ended.” Gordon Clark has called for a new evangelical rationalism in his various writings and is in some ways the pacesetter for this model. For Clark, theology is a deductive enterprise, “deriving conclusions from given rational principles.”

Norman Geisler, similarly, finds the law of noncontradiction reigning “sovereignly and universally over all thinking and speaking about God.” Bloesch argues that Carl Henry has provided real assistance to evangelicals in identifying the ontological immanentalism of modern theology and in warning the church about capitulating to the dangers of modernity, but he has not been circumspect enough to avoid epistemological immanentalism and he has in effect called the church to “a return to the rationalistic idealism of the early Enlightenment.” Further, Henry’s strong focus on propositional revelation drives him to find the unity in Scripture in a “logical system of shared beliefs.” Bloesch insists that this places too much emphasis on the rational aspect of revelation. In Bloesch’s opinion, other evangelicals could be added to this group of rationalists, as could the work of certain thinkers out of a more liberal tradition, such as Pannenberg, whose theology allows the world “to become another criterion for faith beside the God
of the Bible.”

The most wide-ranging indictment of Henry as a modern thinker has been offered by James William McClendon, Jr. This theologian argues that Henry’s theological method fits neatly into the modern paradigm, as his “philosophical work” is characterized by the “four recurrent marks” of that epistemological paradigm: it is “human-centered, universalizable, reductionist, and foundationalist.” Modern thought is anthropocentric in that it makes human nature the measure of all things. It tends to universalization by assuming that “what matters for anybody must matter for everybody.” This tendency assumes that one set of experiences will provide the norm for the rest of culture, and is, thus, “imperialistic” in its approach to knowledge. Further, modern thought is reductionist in its tendency to reduce everything to its components in a manner analogous to the scientific tendency to reduce analysis to molecules, atoms and subatomic particles, (an approach found in Positivism), rather than to widen the angle to a more expansive investigation. The fourth of McClendon’s attributes of modernist thought requires a bit more comment. Foundationalism refers to the tendency of Cartesian and, to some extent, Lockean epistemologies to construct all of knowledge upon self-evident and indubitable foundations. It is the attempt to find an Archimedean Point from which one’s entire system can be recursively built. Descartes wistfully proffered, “I shall have the right to entertain high hopes, if I am fortunate enough to find only one thing which is certain and indubitable.” Descartes sought to ground his system in a set of rational first principles, principles which were, then, metaphysical in orientation. An empiricist version of this passion for epistemological certainty is found in Locke.

Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters without any ideas: How then comes it to be furnished? . . . First, our Senses, conversant about particular sensible objects, do convey to the mind several distinct perceptions of things. . . . And thus we come by those ideas we have of yellow, white, heat, cold, soft, hard, bitter, sweet, and all those which we call sensible qualities.

There does seem to be less of the indubitable triumphalism in this project than that which is proposed by Descartes, but certainly similar ideas are found here. The empirical form of foundationalism came to its most consistent expression in the logical positivism of such figures as Carnap, Ayer, and the early Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein began the Tractatus with the observation, “The world is all that is the case.” After spending seventy tortuous pages delineating what can and cannot be included in his theory of the declarative sentence, he concluded it with, “What we cannot speak about we must consign to silence.” Common to both the Cartesian and the positivist systems is the belief that philosophy is “largely an exercise in epistemology.”

The foundationalist enterprises of Descartes and of positivism constituted a search for a rational or empirical starting point which was clear, indubitable, and noninferential, a starting point whose delineation would then set the pattern for the philosophical edifice which each would then construct. But this approach to epistemology has been dealt severe blows by recent thinkers, particularly thinkers in the Anglo-American tradition.
Early criticisms were offered by William James and Charles Sanders Peirce, each of whom contended in his own way that the purpose of philosophical inquiry was not the articulation of epistemological grounds for knowledge, but was that it be a tool for the clarification of thinking in order that habits of practical conduct could be reformulated.43 Wittgenstein, though, delivered the most telling blow to the foundationalist project. Rejecting his earlier positivist conclusions, in which he believed he had solved all philosophical problems, the Cambridge professor now proposed that language was not a picture of reality, but rather that languages were local realms of discourse which had ultimately pragmatic purposes, and which must then be evaluated only within the limits of each such local discourse.44 Since there is no metalanguage, with one universal key to determining all of reality, specific languages are only sets of social pragmatics marked out by specific communities of discourse.45 Philosophy, now, for Wittgenstein, was the attempt to remove the bewitchment to understanding caused by language. This means that there is no such thing as final truth, construed as correspondence to reality, since each community of discourse does nothing more than attempt to mark out, in a coherent fashion, the language game46 which is endemic to that community. At best, truth is judged by the coherence of the game, or perhaps only as that which works.47 The search for indubitable and noninferential foundations to universal truth claims, it would seem, had now been permanently banished from the field of respectable intellectual inquiry.

For McClendon, these four matters constitute the criteria of the modernist epistemological gestalt. Exactly why he chooses just these issues as the essential crystallizations of modernism rather than others, such as specific conceptualizations of rationality or human epistemological autonomy over against revealed theology, is not clear from his presentation.48 The exact constitution of the “modernist paradigm” is a matter about which there is no common consent among theologians and philosophers. The purpose here is to examine the manner in which he indicts Henry on these counts; and he does believe that Henry has committed himself to the modernist paradigm. “It is helpful to compare Henry with Descartes: though their thought is not identical, whether it be rationalism, dualism, the philosophical role of God, or the role of ideas that correspond to reality by divine guarantee, Henry will be ranked as a twentieth century Cartesian.”49

McClendon accuses Henry of being anthropocentric in that he grants to the imago Dei a “central role.”50 Henry’s philosophy is universalizing in the place he gives to the role of reason. Henry is also a reductionist, a fact that can be seen in his tendency to reduce “Scripture’s content to rational propositions.”51 According to McClendon, he is a foundationalist, as can be seen in his commitment to “the architectonic [system] with its threefold foundation.”52 These thinkers have claimed that Henry is a modernist, a Cartesian, a Rationalist. Is such an asseveration justified?

Carl Henry on Reason, Truth, and Foundations

Henry’s discussions of these issues is so expansive that one faces an impossible task to address the matter within the space limitations of a study such as this. But this section of the discussion will
attempt to summarize his views on the specific issues which have been raised: the nature of truth, the role of human reason in theology, and the problem of the foundations of Christian theology.

Henry uses the word reason to refer simply to “man’s intellect, mind or cognitive powers.” It is not, however, to be widened to include everything that is not irrational. He views reason in theology as an instrument for recognizing truth, though not as a source of truth or as a tool for constructing models of cognition based on the autonomous reflection on empirical data or on universal principles not derived from Scripture. The very notion of revelation “gives no quarter to the idealistic illusion that human reason is intrinsically capable of fashioning eternal truth.”

Reason is “man’s logical capacity.” Again, “Christian doctrines are not derived from experimental observation or from rationalism, but from God in his revelation.” As a means of recognizing truth, reason can serve a verification role, a way of testing the truth claims of Christianity, since it has the ability to “recognize and elucidate” truth, but even the divine image in humans does not enable them either to intuit or generate truth claims.

The epistemological foundation of the Christian faith is divine revelation. This revelation is “rational communication conveyed in intelligible ideas and meaningful words, that is, in conceptual-verbal form.” Henry rejects the Kantian attempt to deny that humans can have knowledge of God or of doctrinal truths. He skirts the Kantian epistemological bifurcation, which claims knowledge only for that which is phenomenal and posits faith alone as the means of encountering the realm of noumena, by asserting that God, in his divine condescension, has done what would otherwise be impossible—he has made true theological knowledge and true knowledge of himself available to humanity through Scripture. This revelation is available to believing reason. For him, faith and reason are not to be divorced. “If reason is the precondition of all intelligible experience, then it will be necessary to avoid the divorce of faith and logic.” This is not the same, though, as saying that the Bible will allow a “total correlation of reality, reason, meaning and progress with the providence of empirical scientific methodology.” The mind can receive true knowledge through revelation in Scripture, though this knowledge will not be exhaustive or final. “Divine revelation does not completely erase God’s transcendent mystery, inasmuch as God the Revealer transcends his own revelation.” It is also the case that every interpreter is potentially fallible. Every interpretation must be open to the reforming, correcting work of God’s revelation in Scripture. Henry has no sympathy with positivism, whether theological or scientific.

Henry has repeatedly observed that the language of the Bible is clear and understandable and is in the form of “objectively intelligible statements.” He is not sympathetic with Barth’s concern that human language is an inadequate vehicle for the communication of divine truth. “If language is the product of sin, conditioned by man’s perverted nature and unsuitable even when revelation grasps it, there arises the question whether God would or could use it.” That does not mean that the “words we use are identical with the objects they designate,” but rather that we can have some confidence that God would not deceive us by using language
that has no real correspondence to reality.\textsuperscript{68} Furthermore, Henry observes that the Bible does not present us an “extended treatise” on religious epistemology, and does not endorse a “single correct system of epistemology,” and so it would be “unjustifiable to identify any one scheme as biblical.”\textsuperscript{69}

Henry is convinced that theology can be constructed without appeal to a dialectical method and without conceding that doctrines contradict one another. He affirms that it may be difficult at times for theologians to understand the relationship between such doctrines as divine election and human responsibility, but he will not concede that they flatly contradict one another. He appeals to the law of non-contradiction, not to determine the truth of revelation, but only as a negative test for truth.\textsuperscript{70} “Logical consistency is not a positive test of truth, but a negative test; if it were a positive test, logical consistency would accredit all views, however conflicting, that consistently follow from differing starting points.”\textsuperscript{71}

Is Henry, then, a rationalist? That would depend on what one means by the term. Henry did not reject the designation for himself, as long as he had the right to give his own definition of the term.\textsuperscript{72} Certainly he was convinced that the biblical revelation was credible and reasonable, rather than incredible and irrational.

The main issue for the intellectual world is whether the biblical revelation is credible; that is, are there good reasons for believing it? I am against the paradox mongers and those who emphasize only personal volition and decision. They tell us we are to believe even in the absence of good reasons for believing. Some even argue that to seek to give good reasons for the faith within us is a sign of lack of trust or an exercise in self-justification. This is nonsense.

Against any view that faith is merely a leap in the dark, I insist on the reasonableness of Christian faith and the “rationality” of the living, self-revealed God.\textsuperscript{73}

Henry then affirms that revelation is rational, but he denies that one can construct theology on positivist or rationalist grounds. Henry’s rationalism is more in line with the Anglo-American tradition, in which reason functions as a means of coming to truth, but does not itself provide the content of truth, an approach one finds in the Continental tradition of Descartes and Kant. Reason is functional, not normative or teleological. Further, his presuppositionalism served as a counterpoint to his understanding of reason, a commitment on his part which further insulates him from falling prey to traditional forms of autonomous rationalism.

McClendon’s paper raised one other important issue—Henry’s use of the \textit{imago Dei}. McClendon contends that Henry’s repeated appeal to this makes humans the measure of all things. Henry contends that the universe has its ground in the divine Logos, which is the source of creation. The first chapter of John notes that the Logos is the creator and it also affirms that this Logos enlightens the mind of every person, making knowledge possible.\textsuperscript{74} This guarantee of human rationality is most clearly detected in the Bible’s teaching about the \textit{imago Dei}. While the \textit{imago} contains various elements—spiritual, rational, moral—it is the rational that holds priority. This means that humans come equipped with the formal realization that truth and error, right and wrong, and God and not-God are actual objective distinctions.\textsuperscript{75} Anthropology, in Henry’s opinion, is one of the most volatile areas of contemporary theology.
The contemporary view regards man’s conceptual apparatus as a by-product of experience shaped by the evolutionary past. Moreover, it claims to derive all the content of human knowledge solely from empirical considerations. Ever since Darwin, man’s reason has been routinely assigned an animal ancestry, and since Freud the deepest commitments of his psyche have been anchored in myth.76

It seems pretty clear that a major reason for Henry’s detailed discussion of this issue arises from the place anthropology has assumed in contemporary thought, whether in the realm of theological discourse or sociological discourse. Carl Henry holds to a form of the correspondence theory of human understanding, but a form of correspondence that is modified by his presuppositionalism and by his understanding of divine revelation. What the human mind knows does have some correspondence to that which is real, for “if the human mind cannot know reality itself, but only what corresponds to it, the consequence would seem to be skepticism.”77 White concludes, “Henry offers a modification of the correspondence theory of truth, . . . [a] correspondence understanding in terms of divine revelation, which gives us reality in true correspondence.”78

Critical Assessment: Is Carl Henry a Modernist?

Is Carl Henry a modernist? Is he a modern incarnation of Descartes? Is his theology anthropocentric, universalist, reductionist, and foundationalist? The charge of anthropocentrism is unfounded. One cannot read (or even skim, since few have actually read all of it) his six-volume *God, Revelation and Authority* and not come away with the impression that God is majestic and sovereign and that this is a theology which sees God as high and lifted up. That Henry spends a great amount of time dealing with such issues as the *imago Dei* is not in itself proof that this is an anthropocentric theology. Few thinkers have accorded the image of God in humans as much attention as did Emil Brunner, who also construed the *imago Dei* as an apologetic point of contact, but McClendon does not paint him with the brush of “modernity.” Henry makes it clear that his concerns over anthropology are apologetic and polemical, but it is pretty clear that his dogmatic project is not determined simply by such polemical concerns, and it seems certain that his methodology does not locate “morality and reality alike in *human beings,*”79 but in the sovereign God.

Does Henry’s approach to doing prolegomena and speaking directly to the question of truth reflect an Enlightenment model of Christian epistemology?80 Several responses to this question seem to be called for. First, does it not seem rather that Henry’s formulations reflect the need to reply to Enlightenment objections to Christianity? The “modern” situation has raised questions not broached in earlier times in the church. The rise of modern natural science and of historicism and positivism have created apologetical problems for the church not heretofore encountered. Henry’s discussions of revelation and truth are a response to this scenario. And while this one set of concerns may be relatively new, it is not a novelty for the church to be forced to face deadly objections in the intellectual world, questions which may not be addressed specifically and straightforwardly by biblical texts. In the early church Athanasius stood for two-nature Christology, as this was the
area of Christian truth under attack at the time. There were Christian thinkers in his day who held that he was using improper methodology or that he was going beyond the explicit, didactic concern of the biblical text. He was later accused of displaying a greater commitment to Greek scholasticism than to the biblical narrative. Yet orthodox interpreters agree that Athanasius was right and his detractors were wrong. Henry’s work stands as testimony to the need to articulate the doctrines of anthropology, revelation, and theology proper in a climate in which these biblical teachings are being reduced by those with an alien worldview. It might be the case that Henry’s style and language of dealing with axioms and postulates is a little old-fashioned and off-putting to a post-modern generation, but style is not necessarily an indication that substance is rationalistic. It is possible, then, to read Henry’s work as a continuation of a polemical tradition which has ancient roots, and not one which is modernistic in orientation.

McClendon also claims that Henry is reductionist in that he reduces Scripture to only a set of propositional truth claims. This is patently not the case, as Henry notes the variety of genres in Scripture and concludes that the wealth of images in the text must be considered in constructing a systematic theology. Henry further recognizes the presence of narrative materials in Scripture and affirms that theology ought to give due attention to the Bible as a metanarrative. What he is unwilling to do, however, is to allow those concerns to negate the need for a theology constructed on or woven out of the conviction that revelation is cognitive.

What of the foundationalist concern? Central to some of these assaults is the notion that revelation is essentially non-cognitive and that it involves self-referential language. McClendon asserts, “I can be strict in my knowledge-claims, it seems, only by remaining strictly at home.” In another place he notes, There is no essence of religion; religions are neither . . . all more or less true nor . . . all more or less evil. It follows that generalizations about religion are generally mistaken, since religions differ in kind, and only concrete, sympathetic historical and empirical study can tell us about any particular religion. We may call this the practical theory of religion . . . in the sense that its concern is the life shaping . . . practices religions embody.

In a similar manner, Kenneson’s essay in the volume, *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World*, proposes that Richard Rorty offers an appropriate model for doing Christian apologetics today, a model which eschews correspondence and cognitive truth claims in favor of a coherence or pragmatic model of truth. Both McClendon and Kenneson deny that they are relativists. Yet, one is hard pressed to read their methodological proposals without concluding that the ghost of relativism is rattling its chains somewhere in the house.

Is Henry a foundationalist? If one means by “foundationalist,” the search for Cartesian certainty through the discovery of indubitable and noninferential truth claims arrived at through reason or reflection, then the answer is a resounding, “no.” For McClendon, Spencer, and Frei to allege as much is surely itself a reductionist and impressionistic claim, one which can not be substantiated from an analysis of Henry’s writings. It might be correct, on the other hand, to call Henry a scriptural foundationalist, a term used by
Nancey Murphy in her discussion of Donald Bloesch. Henry is clearly a biblical foundationalist in that his entire edi
cifice is founded upon a rock-ribbed conviction that the Bible is to be trusted, while all philosophical systems are suspect, even Platonism, Aristotelianism and, certainly, Cartesianism.

But it may be possible to push the description of Henry’s foundationalism a bit further. He believes that the law of noncontradiction can be used as a negative way of assessing truth claims. McClen
don, Bloesch, Frei, Olson, and Spencer do not. But one has to wonder, how can one do evangelical theology and reject some usage of noncontradiction? Many of these thinkers prefer the coherence theory of truth to the correspondence theory, but does not this itself entail the idea that A is not non-A in the same manner and at the same time? How can one hold to a belief in biblical inerrancy and reject this assertion? How can one believe in cognitive revelation and not maintain a commitment to such a conviction?

A commitment to foundationalism, then does not necessarily imply a commitment to indubitable and noninferential truths. There is, for instance, such a thing as fallibilist foundationalism. While Henry certainly believes the truths of Scripture are indubitable, he recognizes that human knowledge is always subject to error and revision. In regards to Script
ature, Henry is certainly a firm, biblical foundationalist; in regards to the out-
working of the theological implications of biblical asseverations, it appears that Henry is a soft foundationalist, one who is willing to admit that all our claims to understanding are subject to the eternal bar of God’s judgment.

Conclusion
The postmodern evangelicals want to move in the direction of a narrative theology which exists in der Luft, with little or no commitment to a cognitive understanding of revelation. If theology is essentially a description of the intra-
biblical rules for speaking about Christ, thus regulating the idiom and ensuring its consistency, one might raise the ques-
tion of its relation to the world outside the narrative framework of Scripture. In other words, is it possible to make truth claims “in an ontological, rather than an intra-
systemic sense”? Bultmann assumed that the kerygma lay “beyond challenge or justification.” His students later rejected this as untenable and so inaugurated a new quest for the historical foundations of the Christian kerygma.

Evangelicalism is flirting with danger when it takes its new gurus to be Wittgenstein, Frei, Austin, Lindbeck, and Rorty.
It seems better to hold, with Henry, that revelation comes to us in both narrative and cognitive forms, and that both narrative and cognitive revelation speak of the God who speaks and shows in a manner that corresponds to, though certainly does not exhaust, who he really is.

Carl Henry has resisted the move toward epistemological skepticism and rank fideism, without at the same time capitulating to Cartesian or Lockeian foundationalism. This article has sought to demonstrate that fact. He is a biblical foundationalist who utilizes a modified form of the correspondence theory of truth in apologetics and who stands generally within the Anglo-American tradition of understanding rationality, while resisting the recent trend of that tradition to drift toward postmodernism. Rather than moving in the direction of modernism, Henry steers the church away from modernism and toward Scripture, which he claims can be trusted in all that it claims about God and the world. He affirms that its truth claims are extratextual as well as intratextual, in contrast to the exclusively narrative approach of many of his detractors, even those who identify themselves as “evangelical.” Henry does in essence challenge theology to make two faith affirmations—one that Scripture is true and the other that Christ is the one hope for humanity—but he sees the two faith affirmations as part of the same indivisible package. 98 The allegations from McClendon, Spencer, Bloesch and others that Henry is a Cartesian evangelical simply do not bear up under the weight of scrutiny.

ENDNOTES

1 This article originally appeared in Trinity Journal, n.s., 20 (1999): 3-21. It is used here with permission and has been slightly revised.

2 This decline was only perceived. The decades after 1925 witnessed the flourishing of the fundamentalist institutions. Joel A. Carpenter, Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 13-32; George M. Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 193-95.


6 Harold John Ockenga, “Can Fundamen-

7The previous generation of antimodernist conservatives included thinkers such as Warfield and Machen, who could in no wise be lumped with radical, anti-intellectual fundamentalists such as J. Frank Norris. David B. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary. Volume 2: The Majestic Testimony, 1869-1929* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1996), 77-236. It is also important to see the links between Machen and Warfield on the one hand, and the tradition that arose in the evangelical revivals in the early eighteenth century on the other hand. Chad Owen Brand, “Defining Evangelicalism,” in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, ed. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 281-306.


14Ibid. He makes this claim after critiquing R. Albert Mohler’s criticism of Stan Grenz on the grounds that he [Grenz] refused “to begin theology by establishing the role of Scripture in Christian theology.” Ibid., 6. It ought to be noted, for the sake of accuracy, that Mohler does not use the word “begin” in his critique. He says, quoting from Grenz, that “Grenz . . . suggest[s] that efforts to establish the role of Scripture in Christian theology are ‘ultimately unnecessary.’” R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “The Integrity of the Evangelical Tradition and the Challenge of the Postmodern Paradigm,” in *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Assessment*, ed., David S. Dockery (Wheaton: Victor, 1995), 80. It is one thing to believe in the need to “begin” (one assumes, both chronologically and apologetically) the theological project by establishing the foundational role of Scripture; it is quite another to contend that such a project is ultimately a necessary component of the theologian’s task.


16Charles Scalise offers a similar criticism, when he contends that Henry begins with an architectonic prolegomena and an elaborate doctrine of revelation, an approach which results in an “Enlightenment-fueled transformation of the doctrine of revelation from a secondary doctrine waiting in the wings to the primary doctrine on center stage.” Charles J. Scalise, *From Scripture to Theology: A Canonical Journey into Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 37.

17Roger Olson, *The Mosaic of Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity and Diversity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 84.

18Ibid., 85.


30James William McClendon, Jr., “Christian Knowledge in the Sunset of Modernity,” unpublished paper delivered at the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, February, 1998, 8. It ought to be noted that this is an unpublished paper. It must be read, therefore, in the context of McClendon’s published opinions on these matters.

31McClendon contends that “post-medieval (i.e., modern) theology,” both orthodox and liberal, moved in a conscientiously anthropocentric direction: “Instead, modern theologians located morality and reality alike in human beings—in a word, modernity was deliberately anthropocentric.” James William McClendon, Jr., *Systematic Theology: Doctrine* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 49 (emphasis in original).

There is some ambiguity in McClendon’s use of terms. In personal correspondence with this author he indicated his preference for the term “modern” over the term “modernist” in referring to Henry. Yet, in his systematic theology book he also lumps conservatives with other advocates of “modernity” whom he refers to as “modernists.” Ibid., 49-50. In his writings, then, he has not made clear the distinction he wishes to draw between these terms.

32McClendon, “Sunset of Modernity,” 2. “It is not assumed (though it may be true) that the standards of adequacy appropriate in one community are appropriate in others. . . .” James William McClendon, Jr. and James M. Smith, *Convictions: Defusing Religious Relativism* (2nd ed.; Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press, 1994), 43.

33Ibid., 8.

34Ibid., 20.


Ibid., 7.0.


There are vast differences in the types of foundationalism found in the Cartesian/Kantian system over against the logical positivist system, since logical positivism is attempting to limit the sphere of knowledge to that which can be established by physics or mathematics, while the Continental rationalists are attempting to build an indubitable basis for knowledge based on metaphysics. Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 172-73.

Thiel, *Nonfoundationalism*, 8-10.

One school of interpreting Wittgenstein claims that his later views developed out of his earlier views quite naturally and consistently, not by radical disjuncture. Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin, *Wittgenstein’s Vienna* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1973), 229-38. The outcome of this dispute in no way affects the thesis of this argument.


McClendon prefers the phrase, “linguistic practices,” to the more colorful Wittgensteinian designation, “language game.” McClendon and Smith, *Constructions*, 42.


Nancey Murphy’s work is more specific in this regard. See her *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*, 1-18; idem, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism*, 11-15.


Ibid. McClendon summarizes his own perceptions of what Henry believes—there are no citations from Henry in his paper.

Ibid.

Ibid. It is not readily apparent what McClendon means by the “three-fold foundation,” since he does not elaborate on this matter at this point in the paper. Likely, he is referring back to his earlier comment about Descartes’s foundationalism, when he noted that human thought was built on the foundations of “the existence of [one’s] own self or mind, backed by the existence of that mind’s Cause, the mathematically infinite God.” Ibid., 5.


Christianity is distinguished by its “objective truth, and must adduce the method of knowing and the manner of verification by which every man can become personally persuaded.” Ibid., 213; idem, *Toward a Recovery of Christian Belief* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1990), 37. For a brief discussion of how the Bible employs such an approach to verifying truth claims, see David L. Wolfe, *Epistemology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1982), 78-82.

Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 1:226. Henry’s views on the role of reason place him within the Anglo-American tradition, which sees reason as instrumental, rather than the Continental tradition, which views reason as teleological and normative. Reason in the Anglo-American tradition refers to the ability of persons to understand given data and might include the ability to adjudicate between claims to truth by use of canons of rationality, such as consistency, but does not itself determine what that truth is. It is, thus, an inherently skeptical approach to rationality. Henry differs from the Anglo-American...
tradition, as seen, for instance, in Hume, in that he does believe in the possibility of knowing truth, a possibility dependent ultimately on seeing the world through the lens of Scripture.

Ibid., 1:12.


Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:223.

Ibid., 1:117.

Ibid., 2:9.

Ibid., 4:296-352.

He rejects the evidentialist notion that a person can infer truth from mere historical inquiry. Events such as the resurrection of Jesus will not yield their meaning to the historian. Ibid., 1:223. Rather than historical observation, “divine revelation is the epistemic source and Scripture the methodological principle of the Christian interpretation of history.” Ibid., 2:320.

Ibid., 1:223.


Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 3:289.

Ibid., 1:224. See also White, What Is Truth?, 94, for further treatment of this question.


Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:387.

Ibid., 2:125.

Ibid., 1:152.

Ibid., 1:237. This appears to be another rejection of Kantianism, this time the Kantian a priori forms of cognition. Kant’s “Copernican Revolution” in epistemology argued that the mind does not correspond to what is “out there,” but what is “out there” is only perceived in accord with the a priori categories of cognition which are hard-wired into the human psyche. This, of course, produced, in the next generation of German philosophy, an intractable skepticism about the reality of the external world.


To use McClenon’s phrase once again. McClenon, Systematic Theology: Doctrine, 49.

This claim is made by Scalise, From Scripture to Theology, 37.

At the purely biblical level the debate between Arius and Athanasius was very nearly (but not quite) a draw. The Nicene crisis instantiates the “need to transfer theological reflection from commitment to the limits and defining conditions and vocabulary of the New Testament itself, in order to preserve its commitment to the New Testament proclamation. The genesis of doctrine lies in the exodus from uncritical repetition of the narrative heritage of the past.” Alister E. McGrath, The Genesis of Doctrine: A Study in the Foundations of Doctrinal Criticism (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 7. McGrath agrees with Henry here that narrative theology, left to itself, is not adequate to complete the doctrinal task. It is somewhat puzzling, then, when Murphy makes the claim that McGrath is “a narrative foundationalist rather than a scriptural foundationalist.” Murphy, Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism, 19.

I have argued in another place that though left-wing evangelicals and theological reductionists accuse people like Henry of capitulating to alien philosophical models, the truth is that these critics are far more guilty of such compromises than conservative evangelicals. Chad Owen Brand, “Genetic Defects or Accidental Similarities? Orthodoxy and Open Theism and their Connections to Western Philosophical Traditions,” in Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity, ed. John Piper, Justin Taylor, and Paul Kjoss Helseth (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003), 43-76.

It has become popular among postmodern thinkers to eschew questions that broach the academic discipline of philosophy of religion. In a volume dedicated to McClenon, one contributor voices his appreciation to McClenon for leading the discussion away from ques-
tions of “truth” and in the direction of pragmatics. When considering the objection that this might entail relativism, he replies, “Perhaps one person will have to consider the ‘proofs’ and ‘moral demands’ of Tibetan Buddhism and Shi’ite Islam, and another those of Methodist Christianity and heathenism. . . . But it is possible that the practices we properly undertake in varied religious traditions are analogous enough so that we can come in different ways to different forms of eternal happiness and joy, even if not to the same belief.” Terrence W. Tilley, “In Favor of a ‘Practical Theory of Religion’: Montaigne and Pascal,” in Theology without Foundations: Religious Practice and the Future of Theological Truth, ed. Stanley Hauerwas, Nancey Murphy and Mark Nation (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 73.


86McClendon, Systematic Theology: Doctrine, 421. Though McClendon does argue for the convictional nature of religious affirmations in terms of speech-acts, he is not clear in indicating how this relates to revelation and he is further non-committal in how his theory of language can be employed to understand the nature of metatheological discourse. This is a quite serious omission. Millard Erickson, The Evangelical Left: Encountering Postconservative Evangelical Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 57.


88McClendon attempts to position himself between relativism and “imperialism,” (a designation he would likely assign to the methodology of Henry) in a position he calls “perspectivism.” McClendon and Smith, Convictions, 9. Kenneson writes, “In short, because I have neither a theory of truth nor an epistemology, I cannot have a relativistic one of either.” Kenneson, “There’s No Such Things as Truth,” 161. Mohler wistfully asks concerning this comment, “Are we to be relieved?” R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “‘Evangelical’: What’s in a Name?” in The Coming Evangelical Crisis, ed. John H. Armstrong (Chicago: Moody, 1996), 39.

89To his credit, McClendon rejects Deconstructionism and he is at least skeptical about the possibility of a thoroughly Wittgensteinian methodology, but his affirmation of Austin’s Speech-Act theory of language combined with Imre Lakatos’s proposal for articulating scientific research programs as the model for assembling method leaves him still with (at least) a soft relativism. See his discussion in McClendon and Smith, Convictions, 47-196.

90Murphy, Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism, 17, 19.

91Of course, not all of these “evangelicals” affirm inerrancy. McClendon, Systematic Theology: Doctrine, 473-77; Murphy, Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism, 16, 43. Spencer, on the other hand, does affirm biblical inerrancy, as is clear from the fact that he is a member of ETS.

92Here Donald Bloesch’s approach is seen to be problematic, since he does affirm cognitive revelation, but will not affirm that the law of noncontradiction can be applied to theological construction. He contends, rather, that theological constructs must be formulated dialectically, in the absence of any philosophical or rational certainty. “Theological reasoning is dialectical in that it moves through thesis and antithesis toward a synthesis that is realized only in eternity. But at the same time, it is controlled by its original starting point, which determines the parameters of its reflection.” Bloesch, Holy Scripture, 208. There does seem to be an inherent lack of coherence in this model.


94Jürgen Habermas may be the best representative of this position in contemporary thought. He affirms that rationality is teleological, but he is unwilling to inhabit the edifices of macro-foundationalism that have been handed on by Descartes and Kant. Thomas McCarthy, “The Critique of Impure Reason: Foucault and the Frankfurt School,” in Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate, ed. Michael Kelly (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 251-52.

95Alister McGrath, “An Evangelical Evaluation of Postliberalism,” in

96 McGrath makes this comparison. McCrath, The Genesis of Doctrine, 30. For comments by Bultmann which justify this depiction, see Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology (New York: Scribners, 1958), 84.


98 In 1950 Union Theological Seminary sponsored a public discussion between C. H. Dodd and Paul Tillich. The two men discussed the role of historical investigation and biblical scholarship in reference to living faith. Tillich offered that he had been grasped by the power of the new being, to which the New Testament presented an “analogy,” but that “faith did not guarantee any historical (i.e., historically reconstructed) picture or ground any historical assertions concerning this or that fact of the historical Jesus.” F. W. Dillistone, C. H. Dodd: Interpreter of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 242. He claimed that this made his faith superior to its alternative, since it required only a “single risk.” Dodd rejoined that no risk of faith is possible unless it has a historical ground, for one cannot “move from an inner feeling in the present to any sort of affirmation (via historical inquiry or not) about a past event.” Ibid. He agreed that his position entailed a “double risk,” but went on to contend that the preliminary historical risk “was really not all that great.” Ibid., 243.