

# Editorial: Remembering Carl F. H. Henry (1913-2003)

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It was the great reformer, Martin Luther, who once reminded us that the true test of a disciple's loyalty and faithfulness to the Lord Jesus Christ is not merely found in his professing the truth of God with the loudest voice and clearest exposition, but doing so precisely at the point where the world and the devil are at that moment attacking. In fact, as Luther allegedly went on to say, for a disciple to stand firm at every point of doctrine—except where the battle rages—is evidence of failure, compromise, and disgrace.

Sadly, in the history of the church, and especially during the last century, we, particularly the leaders and teachers of the church, have often failed Luther's test. Instead of maintaining a proper biblical balance by proclaiming the whole counsel of God in the context of the specific challenges of our day, we have tended towards two extremes. Either we have tended to fixate ourselves on truths of God's Word that are important in their own right yet are not central to the current debate, or we have tended to engage contemporary challenges in ways that have led to an unfaithful rendering and surrendering of God's truth. To find Christian pastors, teachers, and theologians who understand our *Zeitgeist*, and are able both to pinpoint the crucial challenges of our day with biblical-theological precision and address our situation in a prophetic voice with the truth of the gospel is indeed rare. When such individuals are found, we would do well to learn from them and to listen carefully to them. In our day, Carl F.

H. Henry was one such individual.

When Carl Henry passed into the presence of the Lord on December 7, 2003, the church not only lost a gracious and godly Christian gentleman, a man passionate for the gospel and its spread to the ends of the earth, but also a profound evangelical leader and thinker, a giant in the faith, who demonstrated by both word and deed what it means to be a faithful disciple to the Lord. Henry's importance and role within the rise of evangelicalism in the last century is without parallel. Serving as the editor of *Christianity Today*, teaching at key evangelical institutions, helping organize countless evangelical groups, writing voluminous works on evangelical theology, ranging from occasional articles to his massive six-volume work, *God, Revelation and Authority*, Henry stands as one of the most important evangelical leaders and thinkers of the twentieth-century.

But what many of us will remember most was his ability to stand courageously, wisely, humbly, and faithfully for the gospel precisely where it was under the greatest attack. As a result of the impact of modernism on the gospel, Henry saw with clarity and precision that the issue of the day was objective truth. In light of the various systems of thought, including the rise of non-Christian religions, what needed to be emphasized more than anything else was the Triune God of Scripture and the Scripture of the God who speaks with all authority and power. That is why Henry devoted so much time to the crucial issues of theological method;

a defense of a revelational epistemology in light of the impact of modernism and the rise of neo-orthodoxy; the authority, sufficiency, and inerrancy of Scripture; and behind all of those issues, the one, living, and true God who creates, sustains, rules, redeems, and reveals. Without this foundation for theology and truth, Henry rightly argued, there are no answers for the dust of death that is settling on our culture and world. If the church is to speak in a relevant fashion to our day, it must, as Henry argued, not compromise one iota at these points otherwise we will have nothing to say to our generation and, even worse, we will be found as unfaithful disciples of our Lord in our generation. Henry's example in both the content and structure of his thought, as well as in his understanding of the issues, must not be ignored by a new generation of evangelical pastors, leaders, and teachers to whom Henry has now passed on the baton.

With that in mind, in this edition of *SBJT*, our goal is to remember the life, lasting legacy, and contribution of Carl Henry. All of our contributors have benefited greatly from him and write of their indebtedness to him. In these diverse articles, we have sought to emphasize both Henry's importance for the evangelical church in the last century, as well as his ongoing significance for the evangelical church today. It would be a shame merely to remember Henry and his contribution to evangelicalism and not to learn from him as a role model for today's pastors, leaders, and teachers. Our aim is not to idolize the man; Henry himself would abhor such a thing. Rather, it is our desire to learn from Henry, both personally and intellectually, and to stand on his shoulders as we face the pressing issues of the twenty-first century. No greater honor and

tribute could be given to him than that.

No doubt, Henry's work and thought is not the final word for evangelical theology; it too has its shortcomings as some of our contributors point out. Additionally, we are convinced that his writings should not be read and repeated merely as slogans for the initiated; this would disappoint him. Rather, we must learn from his work and, like Henry, we must learn afresh how to discern the pressing issues of our generation, to analyze our time with biblical-theological accuracy, and to build, as he certainly did, on the only foundation for theology, truth, and life—the living and true God and his authoritative Word-revelation. If there is any lesson to learn from Henry it is this: to compromise at this crucial point is certain disaster—a lesson that is probably more important to learn in our postmodern era than at any time in the history of the church. It is our prayer that our reflections on this giant of the faith will spur us on to read his works and to do what he did in his generation, to remain a faithful disciple until we all meet at Jesus' feet lost in wonder, love, and praise.