

PAUL B. HENRY INSTITUTE

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news

FOR THE STUDY OF CHRISTIANITY AND POLITICS

Henry Institute Completes First Year

The Paul B. Henry Institute for the Study of Christianity and Politics was established at Calvin College in September 1997 in honor of the late U.S. Congressman Henry, who taught at Calvin in the 1970s before beginning an auspicious career in public service. Henry was first elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1984, and served there until his untimely death in 1993, at age 51, of brain cancer. In both his academic and public life, Henry, son of evangelical theologian Carl F. H. Henry, was a leader of Christian vision and action. The Henry Institute continues Paul Henry's quest to promote serious reflection on the interplay between Christianity and public life by becoming a national forum for research and information on their interaction.

The Institute has begun a variety of programs to achieve that end, including sponsoring regular national conferences on critical topics in this area, creating a survey data archive on religious and political matters, generating individual or collaborative research projects on relevant emerging issues, offering research opportunities for graduate and undergraduate students, and sponsoring an annual Paul B. Henry Lecture featuring a Christian who has served or is serving in public life. This newsletter, of which this is the initial edition, hopes to generate additional discussion and research on the critical issue of the interplay between Christianity and politics. We welcome your participation in this exciting endeavor.

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Conference on Religion, Social Capital, and Democratic Life

Much has been written in recent years on the subject of how civil society and social capital help to undergird and promote democratic life, but little systematic scholarly attention has been given to the role of religion in fostering a vibrant civic society and in generating social capital.

This conference asks questions such as: Why may religious institutions be among the more effective generators of social capital? How may religion serve to empower

people politically? And how should religious beliefs, values, and speech be expressed in the public arena of democratic discourse and debate?

Beginning with an assessment of the nature of civil societies in an era of globalization and ending with an evaluation of how religion may contribute to the revitalization of democratic life, this conference brings together scholars from a variety of different disciplines to address these issues.

The Mind of Christ in Rome

J. Budziszewski

On November 17, 1997, Professor J. Budziszewski, professor at the University of Texas-Austin and noted scholar on religion and politics, delivered the inaugural scholarly lecture for the Paul B. Henry Institute for the Study of Christianity and Politics. What follows are extended excerpts from that address.

Every day the position of Western Christians seems more and more like the position of the early Christians in pagan Rome. Really it never ceased to be like that, for although for some time in some countries the rulers have made free with the name of Christ, and although for some time in some countries the bread of the law has been leavened by the word of God, the world has never become the city of God; it remains the city of Man against God. We are in Rome.

So long as we remain in Rome, each of us has two responsibilities. The first is to put on the mind of Christ; the second is to carry His mind into the Roman public square. I will address you about our second responsibility.

Every Christian should be ready to bear public witness, but it is a systematic necessity for two groups of Christians in particular. Those of the first group, the evangelists, are called to bear public witness to the *special* or *saving* grace by which God redeems those who turn to Him in faith; those of the second group, the sustainers, are called to bear public witness to the *common* or *preserving* grace by which He keeps the unredeemed world from becoming even worse than it is already. It is this common or preserving grace on which we depend when we try to leaven the civil law that we share with our unbelieving neighbors who so outnumber us in the public square.

From Scripture and tradition we know a great deal about the vocation to evangelize, but not much about the vocation to sustain; a great deal about the grace that saves, but not much about the grace that preserves; a great deal about shedding light, but not much about strewing salt. That is too bad, because it is the sustainers, not the evangelists, whom I address tonight, and whom the Paul B. Henry Institute hopes to encourage: Some of

you as political scientists and philosophers, some as policy advocates, and, so long as conscience permits, some even as holders of public office.

The most systematic Christian effort to explore common grace is the doctrine of general moral revelation, and the most complex expression of the doctrine of general moral revelation is the tradition of natural law: the tradition which holds that certain moral principles are not only right for all, but at some level even known to all, independently of the Bible. Historically, Catholic thinkers have been enthusiastic about natural law. By contrast, Reformed thinkers have been ambivalent. On the one hand is the Reformed thinker Calvin himself who affirmed it: as he says in the final chapter of the *Institutes*, “It is a fact that the law of God which we call the moral law is nothing less than a testimony of the natural law and of that conscience which God has engraved upon the minds of men.” But on the other hand are equally reformed thinkers like Cornelius Van Til, who denied, derided, and discouraged the whole natural law tradition.

On closer examination, though, what Van Til rejected was not natural law itself but what he considered unbiblical elements in its traditional formulation—and what Calvin accepted was not the traditional formulation itself but what he considered its truly biblical elements. For instance, Van Til was determined to deny that moral obligation could flow from human nature as though God had nothing to do with it—but Calvin was equally determined to uphold the notion that moral obligation is impressed upon human nature and that God has everything to do with it.

So let us reconsider the biblical basis for a truly Christian doctrine of natural law. Doing so will yield three benefits. First, it will arm us to bear witness in

Rome, “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). Second, it will enable us to draw discerningly from the natural law tradition, neither repeating what has already been done nor accepting what was done incorrectly. Third, it will show us the basis on which those of us who are Evangelical or Reformed can cooperate with our Catholic brothers in opposing the common foe. Surprisingly, the Bible doesn’t make the claim that God’s basic moral requirements are revealed nowhere else but in itself. In fact it tells of at least five other ways in which God by his common or preserving grace has made them known. Because of this universal instruction, this general moral revelation, no human being can honestly claim to be ignorant of the natural law.

First is the witness of conscience. In Romans 2, Paul says that even the pagans know God’s basic moral law because it is “written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness.” Their sins come not from genuine moral ignorance but from stubbornness or denial, for they “hold the truth [down] in unrighteousness” (Romans 1:18, KJV)—they “suppress it by their wickedness” (NIV).

Second is the witness of Godward longing. Acts 17 records that the Athenians built an altar to a god they couldn’t name. They knew their gods could never save; they had an intuition of a Holy One who could, a god “in whom we live and breathe and have our being” and who is somehow our Father.

Third is the witness of God’s handiwork. Paul and David say creation cries out about its eternal, glorious, powerful and merciful Creator (Psalm 19:1-6, Psalm 104, Acts 14:17, Romans 1:20).

Not only do the heavens proclaim the glory of God: so do our very forms. "For you created my inmost being," says David; "you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps. 139:13-14a).



Fourth is the witness of the harvest. As Scripture repeatedly assures us, every sin is linked with consequences; whatever we sow, we reap (Prov. 1:31, Jer. 17:10, Hosea 10:12). People may play dumb about these consequences, as our people still play dumb about the harvest of the sexual revolution, but there is a difference between playing dumb and being in genuine ignorance.

Fifth, is the witness of our design. God makes some of His intentions plain just through the way He made us—He stamps them on the "blueprint," the plan of our physical and emotional design. So it is that unconverted Gentiles, who have neither waited at the foot of Sinai nor sat at the feet of Jesus, are still accountable to God.

Now if all of this is true, then modern ethics is going about matters backwards. It assumes that the problem of human sin is mainly cognitive—that it has to do with the state of our knowledge. In other words, it holds that we really don't know what's right and wrong and that we are trying to find

out. Actually the problem is volitional—it has to do with the state of our will. In other words, by and large we do know what's right and wrong but wish we didn't, and we are trying to keep ourselves in ignorance so that we can do as we please.

Do you see the implications? Most defenses of moral evil reflect self-deception rather than real intellectual difficulties. Our main task is to remove the mask from such self-deceptions and bring to the surface what people really know.

You see that denial presents a paradox. The natural law is really known, and yet it is really suppressed. Sometimes people think that suppressed moral knowledge is the same as weakened moral knowledge with weakened power over behavior. On the contrary, pressing down one's conscience doesn't make it weak any more than pressing down a wildcat makes it docile. It only makes it violent.

The power of conscience to revenge itself is one of the reasons that when a culture turns aside from the narrow path it so swiftly gets worse and worse. The reason it plummets so quickly lies not in the weakness of conscience but in its strength, not in its shapelessness but in its shape. We aren't gently wafted into the abyss as our inhibitions grow hazy and dim; rather we propel ourselves into it as the held-down conscience buckles. The propulsive force is even greater in a culture like our own, for people here have more to hold down than in some places. After all, our country once had a Christian culture. Consequently, the people of our generation must hold down not only the present knowledge of general revelation but also the troubling memory of special revelation.

I charge you, then, friends and associates of the Paul B. Henry Institute for the Study of Christianity and Politics to find the ways to stir up that present knowledge and arouse that troubling memory.

We know that the knowledge and memory can be stirred and aroused in private conversation. A young man proclaimed to a colleague that morality is relative, that we don't even know that murder is really wrong. My colleague asked him, "Are you at this moment in any real doubt about murder being wrong for everyone?" After a long uncomfortable silence the young man realized that he wasn't.

And we know that the knowledge and memory can be stirred and aroused in the classroom. A student confessed to me one day that my lecture about Aristotle had frightened him, and I saw that he was trembling. All the old pagan's talk about virtue had made him realize, he said, that he had not led a virtuous life. How interesting that God could use such an instrument to bring the conviction of sin.

The charge I set before you is to find out how to stir the same knowledge and memory in the public square. I set it before you because it pertains to your calling, your vocation. You are called to a political science that assumes the moral law which no one else dares to avouch, and asks the questions which no one else dares to ask. You are called to a public apologetics that connects the dots of our nation's fragmented moral consciousness, and reminds people of what they know already. You are called to a civic rhetoric that dissipates smoke-screens and disperses self-deceptions.

There is no such political science, public apologetics, or civic rhetoric today.

I charge you to find them. There is no one else to do it.

I charge you to be sustainers of this perishing world.

I charge you to be strewers of preserving salt.

I charge you to be apostles of common grace.

I charge you to prepare, by these lesser means, the way for the greater grace that saves: to make straight a highway for the King, whose hem our scholarship is not fit to touch.

Simon Delivers Annual Henry Lecture

Former U.S. Senator Paul Simon of Illinois delivered the second annual Paul B. Henry Lecture to an overflow audience at Calvin's Gezon Auditorium on April 27, 1998.

The Paul B. Henry Institute sponsors the Henry Lecture each spring. The Lecture brings a prominent Christian current or former political practitioner to Calvin College for a public lecture on the interplay of religion and politics. The Simon lecture is the second Henry Lecture. The first was delivered by former U.S. Senator Mark Hatfield in 1997.

Senator Simon, now teaching at Southern Illinois University and director of its Public Policy Institute, is a veteran of more than forty years in politics, winning a seat in the Illinois legislature in 1954 and retiring from the U.S. Senate in 1997. Serving in both the U.S. House and Senate, and running briefly for the presidency in 1988, Simon was known for his diligent legislative work on education issues, disability policy, and foreign affairs.

A practicing Lutheran and the son of a minister, Simon delivered a personal address with many illustrations reflecting his own understanding about the interplay between faith and politics. The mixture is a potent one, Simon said, and it offers the possibility to be a great "force for savagery, or a powerful

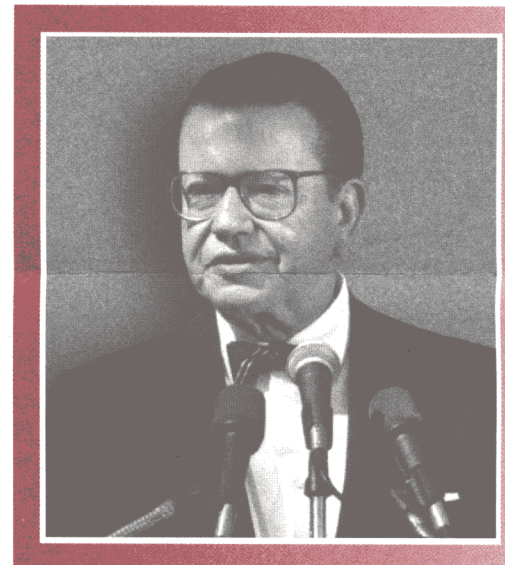
force for healing" in the political arena. The dark side of faith is evident when religious people do nothing, as was often the case in Hitler's Germany, or when religion is used to justify hate and savagery. Alternatively, religious faith makes a positive contribution when it reminds political actors to respect the views of others, that all human and non-human creation has importance, and that humility and gratitude are the appropriate Christian attitudes in all walks of life, including politics.

Simon called upon his audience to tackle three especially urgent issues: poverty in America, poverty abroad, and campaign finance reform. Noting that the United States has an embarrassingly high poverty rate for a developed nation, and that poverty and hunger in some developing nations are unimaginable to middle-class Americans, Simon challenged the audience to see that biblical injunctions to care for the poor require a strong government response.

The Senator drew on his own campaign experience in commenting on campaign finance reform. "The financially articulate have inordinate access to policy makers. The public image is that public office is for sale. That's not quite accurate. But access to public office is for sale. Anyone in politics who

says he or she is unaffected is not being candid." In fact, a major reason for Simon's retirement from office in 1997 was the time and intellectual discomfort of raising the several millions of dollars necessary to run for re-election.

Senator Simon's personal and honest message was rooted in a fundamental optimism about the positive contribution that the interplay between Christianity and politics can make in American public life. This hopeful message from a distinguished public official was warmly received by the audience.



Data Archive on Religion and Public Life Inaugurated

One facet of the Henry Institute's mission is to serve as a data center for scholars, journalists, and others engaged in the study of Christianity and public life. To that end, the Henry Institute has, over the past year, launched this effort through an initial purchase of sixty-five data files covering surveys from 1946 to the present. These data files have been created as SPSS files

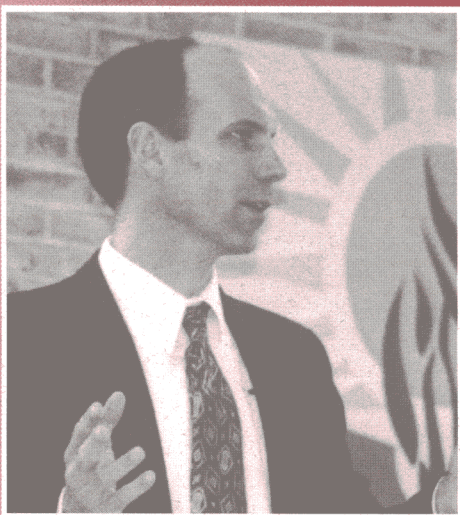
and are now available at the Henry Institute for use and analysis.

Examples of such files include the Gallup survey of Religious Life in America (November 1965), the Evangelical Voters Survey of 1983, the CBS and New York Times Religion Survey of 1985, the Unchurched American Surveys of 1978 and 1988, the Survey of Anti-Semitism in the

United States of 1964, the Survey on Anti-Semitism and Prejudice in America of 1992, and the ABC News Religion Survey of 1997. For both a complete listing as well as updates with regard to additions to this data archive, see the Henry Institute website.

Finke on the Future of American Religion

On March 12, Roger Finke, Associate Professor of Sociology at Purdue University, came to the Henry Institute to speak on the past and future of the faith tradition mix in the United States. Finke, co-author of *The Churching of America, 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in our Religious Economy*, entitled his



provocative talk "Forward to the Past: Predictions for the Future of American Religion," delivered to an appreciative audience in the Meeter Center Lecture Hall.

Borrowing several concepts from market economics, Finke reviewed historical trends in the religious activity of Americans, noting the ups and downs of general church attendance and the size and growth of denominational bodies. Over its more than 200-year history, America has experienced cyclical variations in various measures of religious growth and decline. For example, church attendance during the Revolutionary War was actually quite low, but in latter decades overall rates of church attendance grew dramatically. Growth was especially strong among the upstart Methodist and Baptist groups. After the Civil War, the larger Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed traditions, and sects such as Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and certain Holiness sects gained a disproportionate shares of new adherents.

Whereas many scholars attribute

church membership surges to an increase in demand for religion, Finke offered an alternative, "supply side," explanation for growth, both in general religious practice and in particular faiths. Essentially, all churches grow when there is a "free market" for religion and aggressive entrepreneurial churches grow the most. In the United States, church growth took off in the early 1800s as religious "deregulation," through official separation of church and state at the national and state levels, took hold. Separation created a free market for faiths large and small, new and old, giving denominations or sects interested in gaining converts the freedom to do so.

Growth-oriented churches took on the characteristics of entrepreneurial businesses. They adopted particular characteristics that encouraged growth—decentralized authority, lay leadership that empowered local representatives, missions centered around the practical needs of local members, high feelings of personal commitment, and a few simple doctrinal standards easily understood and transmitted to others. These traits were common to all growing churches, and distinguished them from established churches with stable or declining memberships.

Over time upstarts became larger and, to preserve themselves, organizationally

more complex and rigid. Internal disputes rose and had to be resolved, in the process lengthening and complicating the body of doctrines. Large denominations also gained political and social influence, and soon sought to conserve their status through institutional means rather than size alone. In short, the old upstarts became the new establishment, while in their place new upstarts emerged using the same growth strategies of the previous generation.

An historical cycle is created. Finke argued further that many characteristics of today's growing churches parallel characteristics of other upstarts far earlier in American history. Thus, church growth in the future will be concentrated among denominations and movements that rely on lay leadership, intimate fellowship, and clear and simple membership standards, as it always has. The only possible change in this scenario is if general "market conditions" for churches change with changed government policy. Finke noted that new threats to churches are emerging, including adverse court rulings on religious exemptions from zoning laws, historical preservation laws, and other matters. If government intervenes more in the religious marketplace, then more established churches with political and social authority are likely to fare better than upstarts.

Upcoming Events

Friday & Saturday, October 16-17, 1998

"Religion, Social Capital, and Democratic Life"
hosted by the Henry Institute on the Calvin College campus.

Thursday, November 12, 1998

"Why Not in America? Jonathan Edwards and Abraham Kuyper and the Millennial Promise of the New World."

Lecture by John Bolt of Calvin Theological Seminary, cosponsored with the H. Henry Meeter Center at Calvin College.

Monday, March 8, 1999

"Religious Institutions and the Contemporary Health Care Delivery System" Lecture by Clarke Cochran, Texas Tech University.

Monday, March 22, 1999

"Aging, Distributive Justice, and Governmental Policy" Conference hosted by the Henry Institute on the Calvin College campus.

Thursday – Sunday, June 17-20, 1999

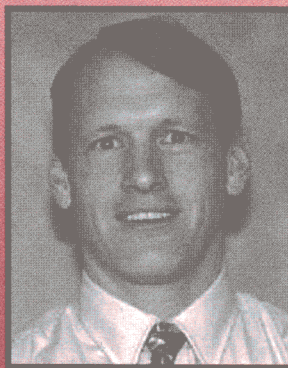
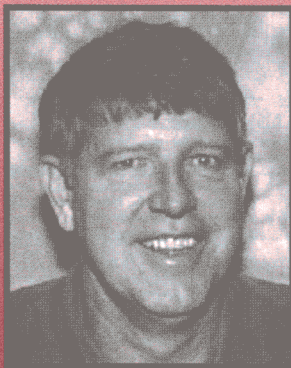
Christians in Political Science Second National Conference hosted by the Henry Institute.

Faculty Notes

Corwin Smidt

Executive Director and Paul B. Henry Chair, coauthored *The Bully Pulpit: The Politics of Protestant Clergy*, just published by Kansas University Press.

Smidt was also busy presenting professional papers on religion and social capital, religious faith and voting behavior, and the political attitudes of evangelical college students at various professional meetings in the United States, the Netherlands, and Israel.



Doug Koopman

Program Director, had his 1996 book, *Hostile Takeover: The House Republican Party, 1980-1995*, named by *Choice* as an outstanding new book in American politics.

Koopman also presented papers and addresses on the Call to Renewal movement and the U.S. Congress. He has also been busy getting the Henry Institute on the Internet. Check out our website through the web address provided elsewhere in this newsletter.

Henry Website

For more information on the Henry Institute and timely updates on our activities, be sure to see our website at <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/pols/henry>

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