Paul Henry: A Model for Integrating Christian Faith and Politics

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One Thursday morning more than ten years ago, one of the authors¹ was riding the elevator up from the basement of a Washington, D.C. congressional office building with our boss, U.S. Representative Paul B. Henry of Michigan. As the elevator climbed to the first floor, its doors opened and in stepped two other members of Congress. They both were acquaintances of Paul because they were all Republicans first elected to the House of Representatives in 1984. All three had just attended the weekly members-only prayer breakfast held every Thursday morning in a small meeting room in the U.S. Capitol building. As the two others entered the elevator, one of them said to Paul, "wasn't that an inspiring story that Bill (a representative who had given his Christian testimony at the prayer breakfast that morning) shared with us? I really admire his ability to tell his story," Paul allowed that, yes, Bill (not his real name) did provide a moving personal testimony and that he seemed to be a very vocal Christian. The other southern representative chimed in, "yes, and the great thing about Bill is that he never lets his faith get in the way of how he votes." Paul smiled weakly. At that point the elevator reached the fourth floor and the two other representatives hurried out to their offices. As the two of us continued the ride up, Paul joked, "well, you can sure tell that they're not Reformed."

Paul Henry's firm conviction was that politics and Christian faith were intimately intertwined, that politics uninformed by faith was without purpose and that faith without political action was incomplete. Faith influenced how Paul voted, as well as how he

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thought, spoke, and worked. He concluded his 1974 book, *Politics for Evangelicals*, with the words from Matthew 5:

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (124)

This article looks at the life and work of one person who certainly let his light shine in the darkness of the political world -- former U.S. Representative Paul B. Henry. Paul would probably be chary about an article that uses his own political career as the model for Christians in politics. He was a frequent and popular speaker, whether to adult Sunday School classes or academic conferences, on the relationship between Christianity and politics. But he was always cautious about explaining his own votes or political positions in that context, concerned that doing so could not avoid being, or appearing to be, self-serving. And he would be quick to point out that there are many thoughtful and sincere Christians with whom he shared his vocation but whose views differed from his own on many issues.

This article is not an impartial one. We are two of literally hundreds of persons uplifted by Paul Henry's personal character, educated by his political skills, and inspired by his example of how a serious Christian should understand and act in the political arena. We were both privileged to work on Paul's congressional staff and to know him as a mentor and friend. We also grew up in the same Reformed Christian tradition that influenced Paul, a tradition that has an especially positive attitude toward Christian political engagement.²

The first portion of this article is a narrative of Paul Henry's career, ending with a brief review of how he viewed some of the key issues of the day. The second portion of the article recites some of Paul's own reflections on the mixture of politics and Christian faith, and puts those reflections in a slightly larger context, both politically and religiously. We do so in the hope that readers of various faith traditions can better grasp Paul's personal journey in faith and politics, and also interpret that journey in new situations.

² For a very readable explication of Reformed and other Christian views on politics, see Skillen 1990.
Career

Paul Henry was a respected politician, recognized by secular commentators in his home state of Michigan and at the national level as both a skillful politician and a model public servant (Broder 1992; Cohen 1990). Paul viewed politics as an honorable profession. He liked to remind his students that the Greek philosopher Aristotle had written that politics -- the proper exercise of the political art -- is the highest of all human endeavors, the "master science."

Paul was also a Christian who took seriously the implications of his faith for his vocation. He was well-known in the evangelical community not only for his own record of accomplishment in politics and the leadership in helping fellow evangelicals understand their political responsibilities, but as the son of Dr. Carl F. H. Henry, one of the leaders of evangelical Christianity in this century. He was recognized not only in the Christian community, but in the wider political community, as "a deeply religious man who did not hide his evangelical beliefs" (Kaplan 1993).

Paul began his political career shortly after graduating from Wheaton College in Illinois and serving two years in the Peace Corps in Liberia and Ethiopia. During graduate school in political science at Duke University in the 1960s, Paul spent two periods of time as a congressional staff person working for Rep. John Anderson, then a Republican from Illinois. Years later, as a congressman himself, Paul advised many a young person seeking to work for Congress to "be willing to start at the bottom" by relating his own first job as congressional staff -- feeding a mimeograph machine for most of each day, copying Anderson's press releases and constituent newsletters. Paul's second time working as congressional staff, in 1968 - 69, was higher up. By then Rep. Anderson had been elected Chair of the House Republican Conference, the third-ranking leadership position for House Republicans. Paul served as Acting Staff Director for the Conference, named by Anderson to that post.\(^3\)

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\(^3\) Paul was sometimes asked why he didn’t follow in the footsteps of his father, to which Paul would jokingly recall the remark that has been attributed to Martin Luther, “send your good men to the ministry, send your best men to politics.”

\(^4\) In 1980, when John Anderson ran for President, Paul served on his campaign and directed his campaign in Michigan. Paul resigned from the campaign when Anderson announced that he would drop out of the Republican race and run as an independent.
In 1970, having obtained his Ph.D. in Political Science in Duke, Paul and his family moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan and Paul became professor of political science at Calvin College. He also became involved in local political and community activities, including the Republican Party and serving as an advisor and sometimes campaign manager for numerous political candidates. In 1974, the local Republican Party, as well as the national political scene, received a shock when, in the midst of Watergate, a Democrat was elected to take the local congressional seat long held by Gerald Ford, who had resigned to become Vice President. In the aftermath of that shock, Paul was asked and became chair of the Kent County Republican Party, and later served as chair of the 5th Congressional District Republican Party, which is centered in Kent County.

By then Paul's political skills and ambitions were widely known. He was refreshingly candid about his ambitions for office, believing that his God-given gifts and abilities would lead him in such a direction. In 1975, Michigan's Republican governor, William Milliken, appointed Paul to a seat on the Michigan State Board of Education. In 1978 Paul entered politics full time when he ran for and won an open seat in the Michigan State House of Representatives. In his first term he was elected by his colleagues as Assistant Republican Floor Leader and served four years in that leadership position, trying to push a Republican governor's agenda in a Democrat majority legislature. While in the Michigan House of Representatives, Paul was appointed to a statewide commission on prison reform, sparking an interest in criminal justice issues that continued throughout his career.

In 1982 Paul ran for and won a seat in the Michigan State Senate. Due to the recall a year later of two Democrat state senators and subsequent election of Republican replacements, in 1984, for one year and for the only time in his legislative career at the state or national level, Paul was able to serve in the majority party.

In the majority Paul chaired the Senate Committee on Education and Health. The position allowed him to push education reform in Michigan, including a proposal to improve the quality of science and math teaching in Michigan schools by making it easier for individuals with experience and training in those areas to move into teaching. He also took on a number of controversial health issues, such as giving the families of persons with emotional or mental illness greater authority and responsibility over their treatment. It was
characteristic throughout his career that even though he had a reputation as a pragmatic politician, he often took on issues that, while serious issues, seemed to have considerable political risk and little political benefit. Paul liked to see such issues raised and discussed, even if he knew that consensus was not possible. His style of leadership -- his openness to listening to others, his candor in expressing his reasons for disagreeing, and his evident thoughtfulness -- often gained him people's support for putting such issues on the legislative agenda despite their poor political payoff.

In 1984 Paul also sponsored an amendment to the Michigan constitution to protect the Michigan Land Trust Fund. The Fund had been set up by the state legislature in the mid-1970s to take revenues that the state received from oil and gas drilling on state-owned lands, to hold "in trust" for the sole purpose of purchasing additional public lands. Successive governors and legislatures, however, had frequently used Fund money for current spending. Paul had opposed such "raids," and when a number of environmental and sportsmen's organizations began exploring the possibility of protecting the Fund by proposing its protection as an amendment to the state constitution, Paul was an eager sponsor and legislative champion. The proposed constitutional amendment was passed by the state legislature and was overwhelmingly approved by Michigan voters in November 1984.

The Land Trust Fund was one of Paul's favorite legislative accomplishments. It brought together two strands of Paul's conservatism -- fiscal and environmental. In a Christianity Today interview in 1990, Paul put the connection this way:

I have fairly consistently taken the posture that as a conservative, I have something to say about environmental conservation. There is also an analogy with fiscal issues. When you exploit the environment you are simply building up "debt" that is passed on to the next generation... We ought to apply the same standards of stewardship to the environment and not waste it in such a way that it is denied to others in the next generation. In the modern economic order, we've become highly productive, but we have in some cases become equally wasteful. From a purely secular point of view, it is our wastefulness that will ultimately catch up with us...From a Christian perspective, in the beginning in the order of creation man, as the pinnacle of God's creation, was charged with stewardship of the garden. One of the effects of the Fall was that all aspects of the created order came under the Curse. But in the redemptive order, as early as the Mosaic code, there were injunctions to use and care for the land under the Biblical concepts of stewardship.
In the spring of 1984 the incumbent congressman from Michigan's Fifth District announced he would not seek re-election. Paul won the race to replace him, obtaining a majority in a multi-candidate Republican primary and receiving 62 percent of the vote in the fall general election. He won reelection in 1986, 1988, and 1990, each time receiving more than 70 percent of the vote in his district, usually a higher percentage than any other area candidate for any office. He was also strongly reelected in 1992, two weeks after he was diagnosed with a brain tumor. It was hoped that the surgery that took place before the election and which successfully removed most of the tumor would lead to recovery. Indeed for a while Paul did regain his strength, enough so that he was able to attend his swearing in at the beginning of the 103rd Congress in January 1993. Gradually, however he became weaker, and died while still holding office on July 31, 1993.

Paul Henry was a Republican, most often placed within in its moderate wing common in the Midwest and Northeast. But the "moderate" label did not capture Paul's own set of convictions. In the 1993 edition of the Almanac of American Politics the authors said of Paul, "[o]ver the years Henry developed a reputation as one who defies labels -- neither a rigid conservative, nor a moderate. He generally votes with his party (70 to 80 percent of the time) and he most often takes the party line in Education and Labor Committee sessions. Despite all of this, Henry has remained independent - minded, and he has broken ranks on some key issues when his principles dictated." (Barone and Ujifusa, 1993)

One such issue early in his congressional career was a vote in March 1985 that he cast against authorizing additional spending for the MX missile system, a major strategic weapons system sought by the Reagan Administration. The MX vote came amidst very heavy lobbying by both sides -- the President and those who were opposed to the continued arms build-up he had begun. While the public debate focused largely on the MX as a referendum on the arms race, Paul's principal concern was budgetary. He came to Congress deeply concerned about and opposed to continued deficit spending by the federal government, and felt that the only way to reach political agreement to bring such deficit spending under control would be through spending restraint across the board, in defense and in non-defense spending.
Later that year, on another very controversial issue, Paul voted for the Reagan Administration's request to fund the Nicaraguan "contras." Even while supporting the Reagan Administration's goals in Nicaragua of countering and containing its communist government, Paul became increasingly critical of the Administration's policy, which he viewed as focusing almost entirely on supporting the contras. In 1987 he announced that he would no longer support such aid unless it was accompanied by a "multinational" and "multilateral" policy that included serious diplomatic efforts by the United States and the involvement of the governments of the other Central American countries. In the aftermath of diplomatic efforts initiated in 1988 by the Reagan Administration that eventually ended the fighting and scheduled elections that replaced the communist government of Nicaragua, Paul received some credit from colleagues in Congress for having helped redirect Administration policy.

Paul had the academician's instinct for reevaluating rather than merely repeating prevailing arguments. His reputation as a policy moderate often came more out of disagreement with both sides of a debate than with an intention to simply "split the difference" between two previously staked-out positions. One such issue was funding for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). In 1989 a number of conservative organizations brought to light that the NEA had been the source of funding for several projects that were graphic in sexual content or irreverent with regard to Christian teaching or tradition. Paul shared the outrage that such projects had received government funding. But he disagreed with both sides of the ensuing political debate — NEA supporters who argued that Congress could not or should not impose any additional accountability on the NEA, and NEA opponents who sought to eliminate funding for the agency. In the end, language that he proposed was adopted into law, requiring that the NEA "take into consideration general standards of decency and respect for the diverse beliefs and values" when deciding whether a project has "artistic excellence and artistic merit" and is therefore eligible for funding.

For the most part, though, Paul's legislative career was spent less in the limelight, but, insofar as a minority party member is able, being a constructive participant in shaping legislation and in addressing issues on behalf of his constituents and the country. Political writer and journalist David Broder (1992) wrote about Paul's years in Congress that
Henry represents the other side -- the unpublicized side -- of politics and Congress. When people express their scorn for politicians and legislators, it tells me that we in the press have not done our jobs in depicting what the honorable men and women in those fields contribute through their service... Similar to every other Republican in the House, he chafed under the frustrations of seemingly permanent minority status, but he never became cynical. He has been a valuable, contributing member of the Education and Labor and Science, Space, and Technology Committees, and a voice of sanity and conscience in party councils at home and in Washington.

Among the issues and proposals on which Paul worked and achieved success was the first set of education accountability provisions in a federal education program. Prior to that, the federal government had distributed funds with extensive bookkeeping requirements to show that funds were not siphoned off into unapproved programs. But the federal government did not require schools receiving funds to show any educational gains by the students being served. Paul also introduced legislation to make it easier to use savings bonds for college education after a constituent wrote to him with that suggestion. The idea was later supported by the Bush Administration and enacted into law. And Paul introduced and had enacted the first disclosure requirements to ensure better accountability for college and university athletic programs.

Because of his background and interests in religion, issues involving church and state and the role of religious institutions in society gravitated to Paul. He worked to protect the distinctiveness of religious higher education and was instrumental in shaping child care legislation that allowed parents to receive vouchers that could be used at religious day care centers of the parents' choosing.

In the environmental area, he helped gain passage of the Michigan Wilderness bill, national legislation that had been stalled by lack of bipartisan congressional support. He also pushed for several years to enact a national "bottle bill" similar to one in place in Michigan and several other states, requiring a return deposit on soft drink and similar containers. In his work on the Science Committee he pushed for additional federal support for applied (as opposed to "pure") science, particularly to assist the country's manufacturers who were undergoing immense change and challenge from international competition. He was also among the first in Congress to raise concerns about the extent to
which federal funding for science research directed to America's colleges and universities was ignoring American students and supporting foreign students.

On budget issues, Paul was consistently conservative. In several years he opposed every appropriations bill because of the government's continued deficit spending in the 1980s and early 1990s. His belief in the sanctity of life was unshakeable, and he consistently voted against abortion. In 1992 he did vote, however, to allow fetal tissue research to go forward, which some right-to-life organizations opposed on the grounds that it would encourage abortion. Paul argued that the potential for restoring the wholeness and fullness of life that such research promised could not be so easily dismissed by those who were fully pro-life. He did not oppose the death penalty on principle, but was concerned about its uneven application and sometimes voted against it on those grounds. He voted for some gun control measures, including the "Brady bill" waiting period for handgun purchases.

Paul had a deep sense of the importance of personal and public integrity and honesty, and did not think one could be separated from the other. At the same time, he was, as the Grand Rapids Press (1993) observed "unpretentious, far more taken with the seriousness of his work than of his own importance in doing it. And his professionalism enabled him to separate policy differences with other people from his personal feelings toward them."

His personal conduct and character were apparent to those with whom he worked. Someone who lobbied Paul on environmental issues wrote, "Mr. Henry was a truly decent, honorable man. He was the kind of person you really looked forward to seeing. He was friendly and warm, and never seemed to forget a face. He was truly one of the 'good guys' one meets less often than we would like in government, the kind of person whose career is an example to young people." (Wojwode and Zichella 1993) His colleague, fellow Wheaton College graduate and now Speaker of the House, Dennis Hastert observed that Paul was "a stickler for what was right, for what was good, for what was decent, for what was fair... His example and all of the examples of how Paul lived his life, I think, certainly is the marker that any man, certainly any legislator, can lay out as a measure, as a measure that others following behind him can live up to, can follow, can try to emulate." (U.S. Congress 1993: 23, 24)
At the close of Paul's life, among the many who spoke or wrote of the "light" that Paul had shone was a former chairman of the Democratic Party in Paul's congressional district, who wrote the following:

Being of different political parties, we naturally did not always agree. But we laughed a lot, shared interests, and agreed that public service was an honorable calling. Paul died too young. He had decency and character, a wonderful sense of humor, and faith in reason which compelled respect. His loss is not so much of a particular point of view; it is of a person who had the power to lead by example. (Pinsky 1993)

**Convictions**

Paul amplified on his view of politics and on the relationship between Christian faith and politics in his 1974 book, *Politics for Evangelicals*, and in a number of later speeches and articles. In his book Paul encouraged evangelical Christians to get involved in politics at a time when evangelical Christian involvement in American politics and government was sorely lacking. He wrote:

The Christian community must learn to recognize that civic involvement is in itself a legitimate form of Christian service. To deny this is to suggest a truncated Christianity which arbitrarily separates the sacred from the secular. Such a viewpoint refuses to acknowledge that Christian calling and commitment pertain to all of one's life, not just what goes on inside the church walls. (122)

The political life was a legitimate calling for a Christian, and one that Paul himself felt strongly and acknowledged openly. The sense of calling and vocation, a hallmark of Reformed theology, argues that God is actively involved in all activities in this world, and that Christians need to be "salt and light" in a wide range of professions far outside traditional religious occupations.  

Most of Paul's life in politics was as an elected U.S. representative, trying to represent in Washington, D.C. the more than 600,000 residents of his western Michigan congressional district. A legislator has an especially difficult job, for he or she represents a specific geographical location with a unique constellation of interests. This geographic representation is balanced in a representative's job with reasonable loyalty to a political

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5 The concept of "call" runs counter to currently popular ideas such as term limits and part-time citizen legislatures. If political service can be seen as a calling, it is inconsistent to argue those holding it should be forcibly removed after attaining a certain number of years in service.
party label, a necessity in running for office and in attaining influence in the legislature where most rewards and punishments are meted out by partisan considerations. Finally, the constituency and party loyalties must combine with a representative's personal convictions and unique set of gifts and limitations.

Paul told constituents looking for a shorthand explanation of how he determined his position on issues that "[w]hen I vote on a piece of legislation I am guided by more than what is 'politically correct.' I take into consideration the following criteria as the basis for my voting patterns: my conscience, my country, my district, and my party. There are times those criteria have been at odds -- and it is especially in those occasions I need and covet your prayers. I ask that you pray not only that I have the wisdom to know what is right, but also the courage to do it."\(^6\)

Paul believed that while Christians brought a unique perspective to political issues, they did not bring "the one right answer." He expressed at least part of that perspective in a letter to a constituent who was critical of a vote that he had cast, writing "I may not always be right -- but I do try not to deliberately mislead my constituents, and to remain open to correction, knowing that ultimately I am subject to higher judgement and accountability than that of the electorate."\(^7\)

Paul was aware of the common opinion that politics is unusually corrupt. But Paul worked hard to make a distinction between true corruption -- which needed to be rooted out -- and the inherent problems of sin, limited knowledge, and the nature of government and politics -- which needed to be dealt with in this fallen world. He wrote on the nature of politics and moral ambiguity of political issues thusly:

[I] have suggested that all political activity is involved in the struggle between good and evil. But at the same time, in the world of politics, it is always extremely difficult to say with certainty what is good and what is bad. Politics is surrounded by problems of moral ambiguity. (72)

He viewed both partisan conflict and provisional compromise as essential elements of politics, including in that his own involvement in politics. Again, in Politics for Evangelicals, Paul wrote

\(^6\) Personal correspondence file 1982, Paul Henry Archives.

\(^7\) Ibid.
Conflict stemming from self-interest must therefore be seen to lie at the heart of politics. Were there no conflict, there would be no need for politics... Because politics is a never-ending cycle of conflict seeking consensus, moralists of all stripes become quickly frustrated. They seek absolute answers of eternal significance as opposed to the calculated compromises of politics... But the ability to accept compromise is the mark of political maturity. It is the very stuff out of which politics is made. (67, 70)

With the increased political activism of evangelicals in the late 1970s and 1980s, Paul became more concerned about how some Christians were getting involved than that they be involved. In a 1985 interview with Christianity Today, Paul cautioned that "[t]he real danger at this point in the evangelical community is not the mistaken notion that Christians ought not be involved -- we're coming through that. Now the danger lies in how we're being involved and whether we're listening and following, as it were, the promptings of the Spirit, or simply manipulating religious symbols."

Paul's view of politics as a noble profession together with his humbling acknowledgement of a "higher judgment and accountability" led to a distinct and admirable style of politics. Indeed, it was his style of politics more than his work on any particular issue or issues that Paul's "light" was most evident. Paul tried to constantly hold in tension the needs for involvement and humility. An excerpt from an article written for the Just Life Educational Fund (1988:13) may be his best statement in this regard:

We are called to seek justice, to let our lights shine, to be the salt of the earth. Involvement in the political process is one of many ways in which the Christian community can be faithful to the redemptive power of the gospel... Our democratic institutions afford us the opportunity to effect change and promote wholeness within our society and between the nations. To forsake this opportunity is to bear responsibility for the consequences of our inaction, as well as to leave the public sector solely in the hands of those who may not be sensitive to Christian values...

At the same time, we must remember the prophetic injunction to walk humbly with our God. Just as surely as the Scriptures make plain that we are to seek justice, we cannot simply reduce the Christian message to some sort of religious party platform from which incontrovertible political specifics can be drawn. The Bible and the teachings of the Christian community point to broad principles which we dare not neglect in our Christian witness to society. But we must guard against the temptation to exploit those principles on behalf of particular applications when other equally plausible affirmations of the Christian conscience can be drawn from them. We must avoid the temptation to manipulate or exploit Christian conscience
on behalf of hidden agendas, thereby using God's name rather than being used by God...

Above all, Christian conduct in the public order ought to be marked by sensitivity toward those outside the Christian community who may disagree with us at the most fundamental level, as well as sensitivity to those within the Christian community who may disagree with us at the practical level. Remember the words of St. Paul: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." We must never forget that Christian virtue does not stop at the water's edge of the political process.

Along with reminding evangelical Christians of their responsibilities to act as Christians in the political process, Paul also advised them to understand and appreciate the role of politics in human society. It was a subject he addressed in a 1989 speech at Pepperdine University, entitled "Morality vs. Moralism: In Defense of Politics."

The question of politics is not the elimination of the reality of evil in the human condition which reflects itself in politics, but in seeking practical means whereby to contain it. The problem is not new. The struggle to address it is not new. And the officials who wield power are qualitatively neither better nor worse than previous generations. A bit of humility in the face of history and the human condition will do much to inject realism into the current political debate -- a humility which moves us closer to genuine moral critique of the political process and away from political moralism.

The Judeo-Christian worldview has consistently fought the modernist heresy that men are essentially shaped by their environment, and that better laws ipso facto make better men. But at the behavioral level, I have found things quite different. Preachers in the pulpit decry the heresy that mankind is inherently good and perfectible. But when they enter the political arena they are tempted to pitch the battle in terms of men versus angels, and refuse to admit that all political actors -- including themselves -- are still affected by the human condition...

The ancient prophet exhorts us to seek justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God. Somehow we have all been tempted to lose sight of the last of those injunctions -- that of humility. The religious community is not particularly different from the secular community in the temptations to speak in political absolutes and certitude. But anyone who claims to speak in the name of God runs the risk of using God's name in vain as opposed to speaking in humility, admitting the fallenness and limitations of human nature to which our own religious teachings attest. When the religious community does this, it becomes secularized and loses the very salt whereby it can savor the political arena to which it seeks to speak.
Second, we must not lose sight of the legitimacy of politics. The religious community, as well as the secular community, has tended to romanticize and optimize its assessment as the nature of man. It has also tended to romanticize and optimize its assessment as to what the political process itself involves.

Politics involves resolving conflicts between competing demands within society. Not just competing demands in the abstract, but the competing demands as to how society's goods are going to be allocated -- allocated in such a way that there are always winners and losers. Altogether too often, religious communities fall into the trap of endorsing one set of values and demands without recognizing the legitimacy of competing sets of values and demands. Political justice involves allocations on behalf of both rich and poor, black and white, producer and consumer. Politics involves mediating the differences between competing demands -- and such mediation seldom involves situations where political virtue is exclusively on just one side of the equation.

Christianity does not condemn the advocacy of interest, per se. Rather it tells us to elevate our neighbor's interest to a degree of intensity with which we are prone to defend our own. Dismay for interest group politics or special interests reflects a lack of understanding pertaining to the inherent nature of the political process itself... Too often religious groups enter the political arena with inherent disdain not only for the political process but in opposition to the concept of politics itself. And once again, it reflects a yielding to temptation to secularize the eschaton in the name of the Kingdom of God.

Conclusion

We have little to add to the testimony of Paul's life in politics and his reflections upon the critical issues involved. We would only make a few points that may have some broader application to Christians contemplating the intersection of their faith with active involvement in or reflection on political life.

The first point is the legitimacy of a Christian calling into politics. Paul Henry's life showed that a Christian could be involved and effective in politics at the most intense levels and still maintain integrity and perspective. Christians are persons of principle, and holding fast to principle is an essential characteristic of integrity in life and politics. Yet in politics, as in the rest of life, our reason and logic are clouded by sin. We must be careful not to be too confident in the ultimate truth of our conclusions. The nature of politics is incremental change: we move forward, at best, one step at a time. The essential character
of a Christian in politics is the willingness to work constantly for progress towards the truths and policies he or she believes in, while simultaneously acknowledging that even the most firmly-held beliefs may be subject to correction and modification.

A second, related, principle is the uniqueness of a Christian calling into politics, for each particular person in each particular office. Pursuing a God-given calling fulfills and deepens one's gifts and personality; it does not create a "cookie-cutter" politician who votes and acts in a particular way. Paul was a Republican, mostly because its more limited view of government's role fit better with his view about limiting government because of human sin. But it was also important to Paul that Michigan's Republican Party had respectable records on the environment and civil rights, issues of prime concern. Paul had a gregarious nature, a brilliant mind, an informal grace, and a creative and self-deprecating sense of humor. Paul's outgoing nature and superior intellectual capacity made him a particular type of politician who conducted himself in a particular way in his western Michigan district and in Washington, D.C. Paul carried out a highly visible and energetic district schedule and an intellectually sophisticated legislative program focused on the details of issues naturally within his committees' jurisdictions and personal expertise.

He was a natural "representative," thriving in the role of listening to and balancing the varied interests of the persons he represented and articulating those interests in the legislature. Paul may have acted quite differently had he been a governor or judge: more likely, he was wise enough to see that his personality converged with the requirements of the representational offices that he held. Other Christians, with other gifts and in other positions, might define their jobs quite differently and still faithfully carry them out.

A third principle that we find is the need for Christian humility caused by the moral ambiguity that surrounds politics. Politics is both complex and intense. Combine these facts with the falleness of human motivations and the frailties of the intellect, and political action should make any Christian highly reticent to claim ultimate authority for a particular issue position or style. Rather, political and spiritual realities demand great humility by all political actors, especially by Christians whose theology so clearly identifies and points out the consequences of these limits.

A fourth principle of Christian action is the balance between conviction and cooperation. One must be willing to go against the grain of the dominant set of issues and
positions on them. Christians are born to a new life in Christ, and should more easily discard the values and answers of the dominant secular culture, including the political culture. As such, Christians are freer than others to critically examine the needs of society and the limits and possibilities of politics to match them in new and more productive ways. At the same time, democratic politics is a "team sport." It requires working with others to achieve specific, limited, and incremental goals, both immediately and over the longer term. It is built on relationships with those in power, and with those who seek power, for such power is necessary to bring about the public changes Christians in politics seek.

Fifth, we believe that Christians operating in politics should be the exemplars of civility. Too much of politics is overheated rhetoric and ad hominem attack. Christians with a full understanding of politics, and of the precarious state of their own souls, should be the last ones to engage in such tactics despite the obvious temptations to do so. At Paul’s 1993 memorial service, Bob Michel, then the Republican Leader in the House, said

One word comes to mind when I think of Paul’s contribution to our public life, and the word is ‘civility.’ We Americans, unfortunately, have developed a rich political vocabulary for the ugly side of public life. How often we hear it is not enough to get mad, we have to get even, play hard ball. But civility seems to have no similar public vocabulary. So we might ask, what is this quiet but vital public virtue that was at the heart of Paul Henry’s life? I define it this way, and I think Paul would have agreed:

Civility means knowing that raising the level of your voice doesn’t raise the level of discussion. It means recognizing that listening is a very good way of communicating.

Civility means realizing that peaks of uncommon progress can be reached by paths of common courtesy.

Civility means being tough without being mean, and being principled without being fanatic.

Civility means believing in the power of reason to influence public debate, and the power of the spirit to transform private lives.

Civility is the public embodiment of the golden rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

By those standards, Paul Henry was the embodiment of civility. (U.S. Congress 1993: 73-74)
Paul Henry's call for us to understand the role and nature of politics and to reflect Christian character in our political action is pretty basic, perhaps quite "plain vanilla" to some. Get involved in politics; understand, respect, and play by the rules of politics; and act like a Christian while doing so. As Paul's own life and career reflected, it is possible to be a faithful witness both to a transcendent God and to the task of politics. At a time when some leaders of Christian groups urge withdrawal from politics, his guidelines for action seem as needed as ever.

The task of integrating faith and politics is difficult, but not impossible. Vaclav Havel, the Czech playwright and political leader, in his _Summer Meditations_ (1992: 11, 12) wrote:

> To sum up: if your heart is in the right place and you have good taste, not only will you pass muster in politics, you are destined for it. If you are modest and do not lust after power, not only are you suited to politics, you absolutely belong there... It is not true that a person of principle does not belong in politics; it is enough for his principles to be leavened with patience, deliberation, a sense of proportion, and an understanding of others. It is not true that only the unfeeling cynic, the vain, the brash, and the vulgar can succeed in politics; such people, it is true, are drawn to politics, but, in the end, decorum and good taste will always count for more. My experience and observations confirm that politics as the practice of morality is possible. I do not deny, however, that it is not always easy to go that route, nor have I ever claimed that it was.

It is this special difficulty that Paul may have been thinking of when he wrote near the end of his own book these words:

The Christian who enters politics must do so with the aim of achieving public justice. He does this by subjecting his own personal ambitions and desires to the scrutiny of God's revelation in the scriptures. And as God gives the grace to do so, he learns to make the needs of his neighbor his own. In so doing, his search for justice becomes an act of sacrificial love. (123)

This surely describes Paul Henry. He literally spent his adult life pursuing the faithful integration of Christianity and politics in practice, and in theory. We know that there are others, and pray that the future brings many more.
References


The Paul B. Henry Institute for the Study of Christianity and Politics was created in 1997 to continue the work of integrating Christian faith and politics advanced by its namesake, educator and public servant Paul B. Henry.

Paul Henry was a leader of Christian vision and action. After earning his undergraduate degree at Wheaton College and his Ph.D. at Duke University, Henry taught political science at Calvin College from 1970 to 1978.

While at Calvin, Henry served as a member of the Michigan Board of Education. Leaving Calvin in 1978 to pursue public office full-time, Henry was elected to the Michigan State House and, later, State Senate. He was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in November 1984, where he served until his untimely death in July 1993.

Henry was known as a person of conviction, credibility and courage. His book *Politics for Evangelicals* provides a blueprint for his own involvement in public service. His academic and political careers were characterized by a constant search for justice, providing powerful evidence that politicians can be principled and effective.

**MISSION**

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. Despite the importance of Christianity and politics and the growing public discussion of their effects on each other, there is much room for improving the study of how these two fields interact. The rise of religiously based political movements in the United States, the continuing legal controversy on the proper role of church and state, and the manifest religious basis for many international political regimes and movements, show that the interplay between religious faith and political practice is increasing, not diminishing. With these developments, the thoughtful study of Christianity and politics presents exciting opportunities.

The Henry Institute fosters the study of Christianity and politics by providing resources for scholarship, structuring opportunities to disseminate scholarly work, seeking avenues to communicate and promote such efforts to the larger public, as well as motivating and training future scholars and practitioners to engage these areas. The Institute is particularly dedicated to creating a new generation of scholars and public servants who are engaged, active and aware of the importance of the interplay between these two fields of inquiry.

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