

## Communion with God as Word-Centered Piety: Exploring the Pastoral Concern and Thought of Matthew Henry (1662-1714)\*

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Matthew Henry is most well known for his six-volume *Bible Commentary*,<sup>1</sup> especially in contemporary Evangelical circles. His *Bible Commentary* is still read by many pastors for sermon preparation. Although this *Bible Commentary* is the representative of his life's work, Henry wrote other various works on Christian faith, life, and ministry. However, there has been no major study or critical engagement on Henry's thought except for brief descriptions in dictionaries or in the introductions of republished works by Henry.<sup>2</sup> These secondary works

\* This article is based on the author's dissertation: "Communion With God: Liturgical Resources in the Theology and Practice of Matthew Henry's English Presbyterian Worship" (PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2010).

1. Henry finished his commentaries for Genesis up to Acts before his death. The remaining parts of the New Testament were completed by several ministers based on Henry's Exposition notes. On the specific assistance of these ministers, see John Williams, *Memoirs of the Life, Character, and Writings of the Rev. Matthew Henry (Life of Matthew Henry)* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1828), 308.

2. James Hamilton London, "Biographical Sketch of the Rev. Matthew Henry," in Matthew Henry, *Daily Communion with God; Christianity No Sect; The Sabbath; The Promises of God; The Worth of The Soul* (London: Thomas Nelson, N. D), 4-50; Allan Harman "Introduction," to *Family Religion: Principles for Raising a Godly Family*, 13-26; Ligon Duncan III, "Editor's Introduction" to *A Method for Prayer*, v-viii; James Packer, "Introduction," *The Pleasantness of a Religious Life* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 1998), 7-18; Hughes Old, "Matthew Henry," in *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters*, ed. Donald McKim (Downers Grove: IVP, 2007), 521-24; David Wykes, "Matthew Henry," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 582-84; A. W. Wainwright, "Matthew Henry," in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 495. For his preaching ministry, see Hughes Old, *The Reading and*

are enough for briefly describing Henry's life and thought but limited to fully figure out his thought on Christian faith and life. Also, considering his influence on Evangelical Christianity, it is very strange to know that there have been no academic debates or critical reflections on Henry's thought in the disciplines of Christian theology and history. So, I would like to lay a foundation for academic and critical engagement on Matthew Henry by spelling out his thought in more detail by examining and analyzing the writings beyond his *Bible Commentary*. In order to figure out Henry's thought on Christian faith and life, this paper premises that Henry was affected by his times and theological concerns: articulating godly life by emphasizing patterned relationship between God and humanity based on the Bible. So, by examining and analyzing his thought on Christian faith and life in his writings, this paper will argue that Henry could be a good historical model of Christian piety on communion with God in daily life based on the Bible.

### Henry's Thought: His Works, Themes, and Theological Method

Besides his *Bible Commentary*, for which Evangelical circles know him best, Henry wrote many other books and treatises. He cultivated godly life in himself and others through his writing and preaching ministry. This section will analyze Henry's works and articulate his thought and theological method by analyzing his own writings and sermons.

Henry wrote many works in his plain English style. Many of the works have been revised in modern English. Henry began to publish his works in 1689, two years after being ordained and beginning as a Presbyterian minister. The first publication was "The True Nature of Schism: A Persuasive to Christian Love and Charity (1689)," in which he argued that a schism does not necessarily mean being opposed to orthodox Christianity when defending the Nonconformist position. For the next five years while he concentrated his time and energy on ministry, Henry did not publish any work until 1694. After that he published works regarding piety and ministry. The two volumes of *The Complete*

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*Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 5: *Modernism, Pietism, and Awakening* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 24-33. See also Selwyn Gummer, *Bible Themes from Matthew Henry* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1953); Erik Routley, "Charles Wesley and Matthew Henry," *Congregational Quarterly* 33 (October 1955): 345-51; David Crump, "The Preaching of George Whitefield and His Use of Matthew Henry's Commentary," *Crux* 25 (September 1989): 19-28; most recently, Randall Pederson, ed. *Matthew Henry Daily Reading* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Heritage Imprint, 2009).

*Works of Matthew Henry*<sup>3</sup> include forty-four of his sermons, treatises, and tracts except for the funeral sermons and biographical writings.

Henry published these works mostly based on his sermons. When he officially began to publish his works in 1698,<sup>4</sup> he already had been preaching for ten years.<sup>5</sup> With special concerns, he revised his selected sermons and lectures that were delivered in Chester and other cities from these years. He also added his own brief introduction to the beginning of each work. While indicating the date of publication in the “to the Reader” section, he explained the reason of publication as well, giving a thesis for each work for readers to know what he intended in his published works. In brief, through his published works, Henry attempted to show his thoughts on various issues such as personal piety, ministry, the young generation, and so forth. Henry selected his works in order to show his thought on pietistic and ministerial issues.

Meanwhile, although he selected and published some of his sermons, Henry did not publish all his sermons, and few after him have taken on that task. So it is very difficult to access all of Henry’s sermons. Besides the published sermons in the *Completed Works*, there are not many manuscripts that readers can access. In 2002, Allan Harman edited and published Henry’s unpublished consecutive sermons that were delivered from December 20, 1691, to June 26, 1692, in his book *The Covenant of Grace*. Except for these works, we have only the titles comprising subjects and Scriptures of his sermons for twenty-five years. Tong, as a friend and biographer of Henry, “received [the subjects of sermons] as it was drawn up by [Henry] a little while before he left that place [Chester].”<sup>6</sup> Williams quoted Tong’s analysis of the subjects that Henry preached upon for twenty-five years.

Henry began a series of topical sermons in July 1687. After then, he followed a certain pattern of subject in his preaching. Based on Wil-

3. Matthew Henry, *The Complete Works of Matthew Henry*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997). *The Complete Works* was published in 1979 (1997) and included most of Henry’s works; several works are also published as monographs with an added brief introduction to Henry’s life and thought.

4. *Family Hymns* was published in 1694 with only a brief essay on psalms and revised in 1702 with large additions. Cf. Williams, *Life of Matthew Henry*, 224. Also, Henry began his publication of “The Exposition of the Old and New Testament” in November 1704. Cf. Williams, *Life of Matthew Henry*, 235.

5. John Williams analyzed the subjects and the Scriptures of Henry’s sermons from 1687 to 1698. See Williams, *Life of Matthew Henry*, 273-79.

6. William Tong, *Account of Life and Death of Mr. Matthew Henry, Minister of the Gospel of Chester, Who Died June 22, 1714 (Account of Life and Death of Matthew Henry)* (London: M. Lawrence, 1716), 101.

liams' analysis,<sup>7</sup> Henry's preaching topics at Chester for twenty-five years can be summarized in chronological order as follows:

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| July 1687 – September 1687 | A Sinful State   |
| October 1687 – July 1689   | Conversion   |
| August 1689 – January 1691 | A Well Ordered Conversation  |
| February 1691 – July 1692  | The Covenant of Grace (God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit in the Covenant) |
| August 1692 – April 1694   | Sanctification   |
| May 1694 – December 1695   | Worship (Ordinances, Opportunities, Of the Manners, Of the Mediator)     |
| January 1696 – April 1696  | Concerning Our Duty to Our Neighbors                                     |
| May 1696 – May 1698        | Reasonableness of Being Truly Religious                                  |
| June 1698 –December 1712   | A Body of Divinity <sup>8</sup>  |

In this general pattern of Henry's preaching on the Lord's Day, there are several characteristics of this scheme. Henry approached his preaching ministry thematically. He did not follow the rule of *Lectio Continua* in his preaching. *Lectio Continua* was applied to the expounding of the Scriptures, which was another part of the worship service. He arranged his sermon not as based on the Scriptures but on the subjects. The year of 1698 was crucial for Henry in that he officially began his publications with revising his sermons and lectures. In that year, Henry visited London for the first time since his settlement at Chester. A friend in London encouraged Henry to publish his sermon.<sup>9</sup> It can be assumed that Henry had a mind to have an affect on other Christians outside Chester through his published work on the synthesized topics. Third, it is certain that Henry was a very organized minister in terms of his preaching ministry. He did not insert any occasional topics into the subject of the normal Lord's Day worship except for the worship services of the sacraments. Moreover, he was very articulate in pursuing a subject by taking it for several months or even a year or longer.

7. Williams, *Life of Matthew Henry*, note F: 273-93; Tong, *Account of the Life and Death of Matthew Henry*, 163-210.

8. Henry began this subject and did not finish it until 1712. Williams, *Life of Matthew Henry*, 279.

9. Henry, *Complete Works*, 1:96; "It is published at the request of a very worthy friend who heard it preached in London last summer."

The main themes in Henry's works and sermons can be delineated by analyzing his sermon subjects. Henry pursued three important themes: connection between God and humanity, communion with God as a patterned relationship, and the domestic role of religion. The titles in the *Complete Works*, including monographs, present the themes in which Henry was interested. His sermon topics also show that he was concerned with practical aspects for the congregation at Chester.

Henry's sermon subjects begin from the assumption that there is a distance between God and human beings. Human beings are in a "sinful state" and cannot have an appropriate relationship with God. They are fallen and cannot be connected to God. Yet, they can recover their relationship with God by conversion. This conversion does not mean a static state; instead, it leads people into a more developed state by requiring of them "a well ordered conversation." This well-ordered conversation concerns personal piety, transformation of the heart by "God's grace."

Henry further developed from the point of conversion to a patterned relationship: a personal and intimate interaction between humanity and God. Henry treated "a well ordered conversation" under the subject of the covenant of God's grace, which means God's consolation for human beings.<sup>10</sup> Because of God's consolation, he instructed his congregation to put off the old man and put on the new as a subject of sanctification.<sup>11</sup> The remaining subjects addressed include worship as a vertical relationship between God and the human, ordinances as that which mediates worship, and horizontal (human) relationships such as one's "duty to neighbors," and the relationship between God and the human under "reasonableness of being truly religious."

Beginning in 1698, Henry systematized all the subjects of sermons he preached in a new order and structure. He did not change the subjects of preaching, but rearranged them in a new way. Based on his eleven years of preaching, he intended a more systematic approach to the close relationship between God and humans. Henry developed so called his systematic theology based on his preaching ministry. His systematic approach is similar to contemporary approaches to systematic theology. In the preaching subjects, he included God, God's Word and Works, Man, Jesus Christ and Redemption, Divine Law, Faith and Repentance,

10. Williams, *Life of Matthew Henry*, 275.

11. Henry selected twenty items that need to be changed: pride: humility; passion: meekness; covetousness: contentment; contention: peaceableness; murmuring: patience; melancholy: cheerfulness; vanity: seriousness; uncleanness: chastity; drunkenness: temperance; deceitfulness: honesty; hatred: love; hypocrisy: sincerity; bad discourse: good discourse; bad company: good company; security: watchfulness; slothfulness: diligence; folly: prudence; fear: hope; a life of sense: a life of faith; self: Jesus Christ. Williams, *Life of Matthew Henry*, 276-77.

Gospel Ordinances, Church, and Last Things. These themes resemble contemporary Evangelical systematic theology. Systematic doctrines, from Henry's perspective, are not just pedagogical subjects in theological education but real issues for the congregation's patterned relationship to God.

Henry thus emphasized the relationship between humanity and God through his preaching. His preaching subjects were deeply related to the *ordo* of human salvation. The human sinful condition needs to be reconciled to God for the appropriate relationship. By grace, humans can connect all of life to God, which promotes a patterned relationship between God and human without ignoring the relationship between humans and each other. He systematically articulated real ways of connecting the person and God.

On the theme of "Communion with God,"<sup>12</sup> Henry may have been influenced indirectly by John Owen (1616–1683), who was a dissenting Puritan theologian and friend of Philip Henry.<sup>13</sup> Although there is no record that Henry learned from Owen on the theme of communion of God, it is possible that Henry indirectly took the thought of Owen through his home schooling under his father, Philip Henry.<sup>14</sup> For instance, Owen wrote *Of the Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Each Person Distinctly, in Love, Grace, and Consolation* in 1657, and dealt with the communion with God by emphasizing the human's relationship with each person of the Triune God. Henry may have adopted the same wording of "communion with God." However, his emphasis was much more practical than Owen's. For Henry, communion with God basically meant a pattern of relationship between God and the person. Henry identifies communion with God like this: "I am willing to hope . . . that you are come with a pious design, to give glory to God, and to receive grace from him [God], and in both to keep up your communion with him [God]."<sup>15</sup> Henry's various published works reveal his thought on communion with God.

12. William Dyrness articulated a patterned relationship in terms of culture from a Reformed perspective. See William Dyrness, *The Earth Is God's* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1997). Also John Owen articulated the concept of communion with the Triune God as a representative thought of Puritan theology.

13. See Matthew Henry, *An Account of the Life and Death of Mr. Philip Henry, Minister of the Gospel, Near Whitchurch in Shropshire* (1712) (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 20.

14. Further work needs to be done in this area. I was not able to discern who Henry read extensively, and this would be an important area of further research.

15. Henry, *Complete Works*, 1:199.

Henry developed a method for prayer as a practical way of communion with God. Henry defined prayer as a core way of communion with God: “it is a piece of respect and homage so exactly consonant to the natural ideas which all men have of God, that it is certain those that live without prayer, live without God in the world.”<sup>16</sup> For Henry, the essence of prayer is not so much a petition or request but humble adoration of and thanksgiving to God.<sup>17</sup> When it comes to communion with God, Henry was convinced that “the scripture describes prayer to be our drawing near to God, lifting up our souls to him, pouring out our hearts before him.”<sup>18</sup> Moreover, this prayer as a way of communion with God is at the center of the Christian life.<sup>19</sup> With this conviction, Henry articulated a method of prayer that suggested the sufficiency of the Scriptures in furnishing us for the real practice of prayer. Henry organized his own method of prayer with Scripture expressions in six components: Adoration of God, Confession of Sin, Petition or Supplication, Thanksgiving for Mercies, Intercession, and Conclusion.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, he included fourteen examples of scriptural prayers for several occasions at the end of *A Method for Prayer*.

Furthermore, Henry articulated a realistic way of communion with God as a practical guideline. In his book entitled *Daily Communion with God* (1712),<sup>21</sup> he attempted to develop a way of experiencing God’s presence not only in the acts of ritual but also in common life. His goal was to cultivate godly life in ordinary people. His approach to the pres-

16. Henry, *Complete Works*, 2:1.

17. Henry’s thought on the essence of prayer was not different from that of Church of England. “The principal kinds of prayer are adoration, praise, and thanksgiving. . . .” See “An Outline of the Faith,” in *The Book of Common Prayer*, ed. Charles Guilbert (Kingsport: Kingsport Press, 1977), 856: Section of Prayer and Worship. The Puritan came out from the Church of England in order to reform her more strictly according to the Scriptures. So, even though there were struggles between the Puritans and the Church of England in terms of the manner of worship, the Puritan way of prayer was not totally separate from the prayer book of the Church of England (*Book of Common Prayer*). Cf. Paul Rust, *The First of the Puritans and the Book of Common Prayer* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing, 1949).

18. Henry, *Complete Works*, 2:1.

19. Henry, *Complete Works*, 2:1; “A golden thread of heart-prayer must run through the web of the whole Christian life; we must be frequently addressing ourselves to God in short and sudden ejaculations, by which we must keep up our communion with God in providences and common actions, as well as in ordinances and religious services. Thus prayer must be sparsim (a sprinkling of it) in every duty, and our eyes must be ever towards the Lord.”

20. Henry, *Complete Works*, 2:4-57, 68-70.

21. Henry, *Complete Works*, 1:198-247.

ence of God emphasizes much more time than space. He did not separate holy place from secular place in terms of the presence of God and experience of it. Wherever people stand, according to Henry, they must seek for the presence of God at any time. He clearly categorized every day into three time periods: beginning, spending, and ending. By beginning, spending, and ending every day with God, one can experience communion with God as a patterned relationship. For Henry, the most important thing in human life is to be united with Christ<sup>22</sup> by practicing communion every day.

On domestic religious matters, Henry focused on raising a godly family. Henry defined family as the center of religion: “Look upon houses as temples of God, places for worship, and all your possessions as dedicated things, to be used for God’s honor, and not to be alienated or profaned.”<sup>23</sup> Moreover, he assumed that “here [family religion] the reformation must begin.”<sup>24</sup> Henry published several works on family religion and stressed the role of family in Christian faith.

Specifically, “the families of Christians should be little churches . . . or wherever we have a house, God should have a church in it.”<sup>25</sup> Henry saw the nature of church in the family by saying that “Churches are societies, incorporated for the honor and service of God in Christ, devoted to God, and employed for him; so should our families be.”<sup>26</sup> The service and honor of God is at the center of a church in the house. Henry furthermore developed three things necessary for a house to be a church: doctrine, worship, and discipline.<sup>27</sup> And, according to Henry, family worship and discipline are based on family doctrine.

Family doctrine is comprised of two parts: reading the Scriptures as a family and catechizing children. Henry emphasized reading the Bible in family worship. This reading was very important for Henry in that

22. “See what need we have of the constant supplies of divine grace, and of a union with Christ, that by faith we may partake of the root and fatness of the good olive continually.” Henry, *Complete Works*, 1:245.

23. Henry, *Complete Works*, 1:250-51.

24. Henry, *Complete Works*, 1:248.

25. Henry, *Complete Works*, 1:249.

26. Henry, *Complete Works*, 1:249.

27. Henry applied the necessary conditions of church to family: “where the truths of Christ are professed and taught, the ordinances of Christ administered and observed, and due care taken to put the laws of Christ in execution among all who profess themselves his subjects, and this under the conduct and inspection of a gospel ministry; there is a church. And something answerable to this there must be in our families, to denominate them ‘little churches.’” Henry, *Complete Works*, 1:251.



it led to communion with God.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, Henry regarded catechism an essential way of raising children. In his “Sermon on the Catechizing of Youth,”<sup>29</sup> Henry explains the nature and principle of catechizing. He also organized *A Scripture Catechism*,<sup>30</sup> composed of 107 questions and answers based on the *Westminster Catechism*, and published “A Plain Catechism for Children,” composed of five parts, with a short catechism for the Lord’s Supper. Henry used the method of catechism as a way for parents to teach their children. This way of catechizing is very important in relation to public teaching at church:

Public catechizing will turn to little account without family catechizing. The labor of ministers in instructing youth and feeding the lambs of the flock therefore proves to many labor in vain, because masters of families do not their duty in preparing them for public instruction and examining their improvement by it. As mothers are children’s best nurses, so parents are, or should be, their best teachers.<sup>31</sup>

In this way, parents have a major role in children’s spiritual formation.

Henry also attempted to apply a method of connecting God and humanity to family. As in the connection between God and humans, Henry emphasized the human heart for the house itself. The most important point connecting God and humanity was the heart. The right method of having a church in the house is this: “first set up Christ upon the throne in your hearts, and then set up a church for Christ in your house.”<sup>32</sup> As masters of the family, parents who have Christ at their hearts can keep their authority through family worship. For Henry, this family worship was the most important “good work” that needs to be kept up for the family. Henry emphasized the place and importance of family worship in detail:

Would you have your family relations comfortable, your affairs successful, and give an evidence of your professed subjection to the gospel of Christ? Would you live in God’s favor, and die in his favor, and escape that curse which is entailed upon prayerless families? Let religion in the power of it have its due place, that is, the uppermost place in your houses.<sup>33</sup>

28. Henry, *Complete Works*, 1:252; “When you speak to God by prayer, be willing to hear him speak to you in his word, that there may be a complete communion with you and God.”

29. Henry, *Complete Works* 2:157-73.

30. Henry, *Complete Works*, 2:174-265.

31. Henry, *Complete Works*, 1:252-53.

32. Henry, *Complete Works*, 1:262.

33. Henry, *Complete Works*, 1:263.

Along with communion with God, Henry also emphasized the communion of people as a family. Henry asked people who have a church in their house to “be careful to adorn and beautify it in their conversation.”<sup>34</sup> Family worship means not only to pray, read the Scriptures, and sing the psalms, but also to “act under the commanding power and influence of it.”<sup>35</sup> Thus, in family worship, real life as a practice of the teaching of worship was very important. Henry also developed the communion of families as domestic churches by advocating that “religious families keep up friendship and fellowship with each other, and as they have opportunity, assist one another in doing good.”<sup>36</sup> For Henry, upholding one another between religious families is directly related to God’s glory:

Religious families should greet one another, visit one another, love one another, pray for one another, and as becomes households of faith, do all the good they can one to another, forasmuch as they all meet daily at the same throne of grace, and hope to meet shortly at the same throne of glory, to be no more, as they are now divided in Jacob, and scattered in Israel.<sup>37</sup>

In this way, Henry saw domestic religion at the core of the spiritual formation of each family in terms of constant communion with God.

As I probed in detail above, Henry developed his thought on communion with God as a patterned relationship in daily life mainly through articulating domestic religion. With this theme, he treated various issues in relation to cultivating personal piety. He developed this pious thought through his sermons and lectures. Henry’s published works are based on his sermons and lectures reveal two main characteristics: promoting acquaintance with the Bible and emphasizing the intellectual character of practical applicability.

Henry attempted to promote knowledge of the Bible through his sermons and works. During his twenty-five years of ministry, Henry sought a more thorough acquaintance with the Bible. Tong made this point by commenting how Henry “expected both pleasure and advantage in looking into every part of the Bible, and leading his hearers into a more thorough acquaintance with it.”<sup>38</sup> Henry was convinced that the history and doctrine of the Bible contain all the clues for the questions that people have. With this conviction, through his sermons, Henry organized the themes of the Bible into systematic categories such as

34. Henry, *Complete Works*, 1:265.

35. Henry, *Complete Works*, 1:265.

36. Henry, *Complete Works*, 1:267.

37. Henry, *Complete Works*, 1:267.

38. Williams, *Life of Matthew Henry*, 293.

God, the human, Christ, the Church, and the last things. Thus, familiarity with the Bible is basic to Henry's method for developing his thought. This method came from his father, Philip Henry. Harman pointed out Philip Henry's influence on Matthew in terms of the familiarity with the Bible:

Matthew must have been very aware himself of advise his father regularly gave to prospective pastors. Students who had gone through their studies at private academies wanted to spend some time with Philip Henry and his family before they entered into the ministry. When they came to stay, what he did was to impress on them the need above all else to be familiar with the text of the Bible. He reminded them of the maxim, *bonus textarius est bonus theologus*, 'the good textual student is a good theologian.'<sup>39</sup>

According to Old, "the biblical interpretations of Henry are remarkable for their high sense of the authority of Scripture."<sup>40</sup> Old evaluated Henry's method of interpretation of the Bible as the improving of the biblical imagery by pointing out that "Henry teaches us a great deal about the meaning of Scripture simply by a careful literary analysis of the text and a profound understanding of the literary forms of biblical language."<sup>41</sup> In this way, Henry regarded knowledge of the Bible as the key method in developing his thought about relating people with God.

Moreover, Henry stressed the intellectual character for applying the Scriptures to daily life. He did not attempt to simply develop a theoretical doctrine of the Bible. Instead, he strove to apply all the biblical doctrines to real life in a clear and simple way. In order to do so, Henry articulated the way of instructing with questions. Following his father, he used the edifying method of question and answer. For example, Henry continued to develop catechisms that were composed of questions and answers such as his *A Scripture Catechism* and "A Plain Catechism for Children." Moreover, Henry used a systematic and logical approach in developing his sermons and writings. His preaching was composed of two main parts: doctrine and application. In each sermon, Henry first explored the biblical doctrine on a specific topic and then concluded by suggesting very detailed practical applications for that doctrine. Henry expressed the applications in a pungent and emphatic way.

In the funeral sermon for Matthew Henry, Daniel Williams evaluated his manner of expressions: "his words were decent, though familiar, and his proverbial sentences were contrived to affect, and retain in the

39. Harman, *Family Religion*, 24.

40. Old, "Matthew Henry," 523.

41. Old, "Matthew Henry," 523.

memory some important truth.”<sup>42</sup> William Tong also found this quality in Henry: “In his preaching you had a very just and close way of thinking, with the most plain, proper, natural, and easy expression.”<sup>43</sup> He furthermore evaluated Henry’s preaching by pointing out that “there is generally something pungent and emphatic in what is put by way of question; it is a pointed way of speaking, that strikes the mind more directly; there is in it an immediate application and appeal to one’s reason and conscience.”<sup>44</sup>

Henry’s method of presenting the Gospel in a logical way presupposes that “there is an intellectual element in presenting the Gospel”<sup>45</sup> As Harman pointed out, Henry “followed the Puritans in stressing the intellectual character of ministry, both spoken and written.”<sup>46</sup> Henry learned this Puritan intellectual style through his tutors, Mr. William Turner and Mr. Thomas Doolittle. Mr. Turner “introduced Mr. Matthew Henry into the grammar learning”;<sup>47</sup> and Henry learned Reformed and Puritan theology through Mr. Doolittle’s Academy in Islington.<sup>48</sup> Under their influence, Henry developed his own style. Williams commented on his style: “It is to the credit of the works under review, that there is in them all an entire absence of garishness and puerility; they never pander to the odious impertinence of vain, and mere curious speculators; neither are there any meretricious ornaments; instruction is never made contemptible by empty declamation.”<sup>49</sup> In this way, clear and simple knowledge with an intellectual character constituted Henry’s method of connecting the Bible to real life.

#### Conclusion

This paper attempted to spell out the thought of Henry by examining his understanding and practice of Christian faith and life and by exploring his theological method of developing Christian faith based on his original works. Henry sought communion with God in daily life as a patterned relationship between God and humanity. With that conviction, Henry endeavored to articulate and develop communion with God in the domestic religion as the main context of spiritual formation. In

42. Daniel Williams, *Funeral Sermon Upon Occasion of the Death of the Reverend Mr. Matthew Henry* (London: W. Wilkins, 1714), 33.

43. William Tong, *Funeral Sermon Preached at Hackney on Occasion of the Much Lamented Death of the Reverend Mr. Matthew Henry* (London: J. Lawrence, 1714), 31.

44. Williams, *Life of Matthew Henry*, 293.

45. Harman, *Family Religion*, 24.

46. Harman, *Family Religion*, 24.

47. Tong, *Account of the Life and Death of Matthew Henry*, 4.

48. Williams, *Life of Matthew Henry*, 9-16.

49. Williams, *Life of Matthew Henry*, 249.

order to accomplish his vision of human life as communion with God in the ordinary life, Henry developed his own method of connecting the Scriptures to daily life, which is an appropriate and even relevant resource for contemporary Evangelical spiritual formation.

The themes and method of Henry on Christian faith and life have theological implications for our contemporary Evangelical Christians. Most of all, Henry articulated the integration of the Word and life as foundational to Evangelical principles of spiritual formation. According to Evangelical tradition, the Word is the authentic foundation and guide of all human life. Henry argued that human beings in ordinary life should commune with the Triune God according to the teaching of the Bible. Moreover, Henry emphasized the communal aspect of spiritual formation. For Henry, the family was at the core of spiritual formation. Historically, the persecution under the Act of Uniformity ironically made domestic practice of relationship with God the most important pattern of spiritual formation. By emphasizing domestic context of relationship with God, Henry intended to value the communal aspect of spiritual formation.

However, the themes and theological method of Henry on Christian faith and life should not be the only model that may be applied to contemporary Evangelical Christians. His understanding and practice of Christian life was a contextual application for his own personal life and the congregational situation. At the same time, contemporary Evangelical Christians have encountered some strong influences on their spiritual formation from other cultures and contexts different from those of Henry. Therefore, contemporary Evangelical Christians may benefit by implementing the principle of life from Henry, but should be flexible in adjusting his teaching in order to appropriately develop Evangelical principle of communion with God in our current context.<sup>50</sup>

50. For this contemporary contextualized application of Henry's teaching, more academic and critical evaluations should be worked out in the areas of Christian theology, history, and pastoral ministry.