

Culture, Community and Commitments: Stanley J. Grenz on theological method

by Archie J. Spencer

A brief survey of the current literature on the boundaries of Evangelical theology reveals an immediate disparity from one boundary marker to the next. There was a time in Evangelicalism when one could traverse the boundaries and keep within a fairly well defined latitude. Differences between boundary markers were certainly noticeable but there was also a considerable degree of agreement as to where certain key boundary markers should lie. This does not seem to be the case today. Indeed, there are those who think that the present disparity between traditional and neo/reformed Evangelicalism threatens to dissolve what former consensus there was.¹ These disparate boundary markers within the movement seem to be matched by corresponding assessments ranging from the dissolution of Evangelical theology (traditionalist), to a renaissance (reformists).² Within these extremes others are seeking a place to make a stand and offer new suggestions for conceiving the boundaries of Evangelical thought, so that the coalition can continue under the same banner. Stanley Grenz can be singled out as a moderating voice between the extremes and as such must be considered an important proponent of a mediating theology in Evangelicalism. *This article is a critical, but in some regards appreciative, response to the emerging theology and proposed theological method of Stanley J. Grenz. It is appreciative of the way that Grenz is helping Evangelical's face the fact that they must be more engaging of the broader theological discussions regarding method if it is to avoid becoming hopelessly irrelevant, both within and without Evangelicalism. At the same time it is critical of the apparent ambiguity in his proposals for a revised theological method and its resulting theology.*

¹ R. E. Olson, "The Future of Evangelical Theology", *Christianity Today*, 42:2 (February 9, 1998), 40.

² On the conservative side we hear the rumblings of evangelical dissolution from T. R. Phillips and D. L. Okholm, "The Nature of Confession: Evangelicals and Postliberals," in *The Nature of Confession: Evangelicals and Post Liberals in Conversation*, ed. T. R. Phillips and D. L. Okholm (Downers Grove, Ill: Intervarsity; 1996), 9. One can see the same assessment in John Armstrong, ed. *The Compromised Church: The Present Evangelical Crisis*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 1998) in which David Wells complains that "the character of contemporary evangelicalism is changing because of its unwitting entanglement with a culture that, in its postmodern configuration, has the power to eviscerate the doctrinal substance of that faith." "Introduction : The Word in the World", 22.

The article reflects on the prior work of Grenz but employs his most recent book, Beyond Foundationalism, co-authored with John R. Frank and published with Fortress Press in 2001. In the final analysis the author takes a cautious approach to Grenz's proposals due to the fact that there seems to be an ambiguous understanding of postmodern culture, an uncritical acceptance of a social Trinitarian basis for community and a somewhat conflicted understanding of foundations for theology, understood as '(post)foundationalism.' Few would argue with his influence and yet not much scholarly ink has been spilt in consideration of his case for a redefinition of the boundaries. It is my hope that this brief assessment will contribute to a more thorough evaluation of what Grenz is proposing as new boundaries for evangelical theology. This is not to suggest that I am wholeheartedly one of his followers, but he has raised significant questions regarding how theology should be done, such that Evangelicals must pay attention to where he wants to take them. Three questions in particular stand out in Grenz's theology. 1. In what way are we to understand the relationship between theology and culture? 2. How exactly should one ground a communal approach to theology in response to the present cultural impulse in that direction? 3. What kinds of commitments, if any, should such a culturally engaged, communally grounded theology make? These three questions are bound together in Grenz's writings and the way he attempts to answer them could have tremendous consequences for the kind of evangelical theology he hopes to produce.

Grenz has raised the centrality of these questions in a number of places throughout his career.³ Recently, however, these questions have been given a more methodological answer in two related books: *Renewing the Center* and the co-authored *Beyond Foundationalism*.⁴ Of these two, the later represents the most important and comprehensive statement regarding the boundaries of evangelical theology offered by

³ See especially, Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996); *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadmoor and Holman, 1994).

⁴ Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post Theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000); Stanley J. Grenz, John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001). It is to this work that this response is primarily directed. Both of these are an outworking of his earlier *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP, 1992).

Grenz to date.⁵ On the basis of this book one must rephrase these questions and ask Grenz, first, for clarification as to how he conceives the relationship between theology and postmodern culture and whether his engagement and definition of that culture runs the risk of acquiescence to such a degree that culture sets the agenda for theology? In a similar manner, one must ask Grenz whether the grounding of a communal theology in a socially conceived doctrine of the Trinity does not run the risk of reducing God to a predicate of our social experience? Yet again we must ask Grenz what kind(s) of commitments he is requiring us to make in his apparent mediating position between foundationalism and nonfoundationalism, which I think he wants to call (post)foundationalism. In sum, what many Evangelicals want to have is clarity on these issues because there is, according to some, an apparent ambiguity that accompanies Grenz's own answers. Let us take each question in turn so I can demonstrate the ambiguity they perceive.

Culture

The question of the relationship between culture and theology is as old as the discipline of theology and the existence of human culture itself, so I do not propose to attempt an answer to it here. Nor would it be fair, in a book on theological method, to expect a final answer to such a perplexing problem from Grenz. However, this question is often raised in our time with a backward glance to the Enlightenment and especially F. D. E. Schleiermacher.⁶ Since Schleiermacher theology has had to contend with how it will set its agenda in the face of the prevailing culture. There is no question that modern theology began with acquiescence to the dominant Enlightenment culture to such a degree that it has never been able to get past it and has always had to account for it in its worldview.

⁵ Though John Franke has made a significant contribution to this latest work, he himself admits that the work is the fleshing out of suggestions made in Grenz's earlier work. For our purpose we will often assume Franke's work when we refer to Grenz. There is no question that *Beyond Foundationalism* is largely indebted to Grenz's theology. The three areas under review here are concerns that have been expressed by Grenz in many of his early works. This is not to understate the significant contributions that Professor Franke is making to the current discussion.

⁶ The classic text of this discussion in modern times is F. D. E. Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, tr. J. Oman (New York: Harper & Row, 1958).

For Evangelicals the question has been and will continue to be, to what degree should theology take its cue from culture, if at all? Grenz considers this question to be crucial in regard to the present ‘prevailing’ postmodern culture. In his *Primer on Postmodernism*, Grenz writes, ‘[t]he shift from the familiar territory of modernity to the uncharted terrain of postmodernity has grave implications for those who seek to live as Christ’s disciples in the new context. We must think through the ramifications of the phenomenal changes occurring in western society for our understanding of the Christian faith and our presentation of the gospel to the next generation.’⁷ The place to begin, according to Grenz, is with taking seriously the postmodern critique of the Enlightenment rationalist project with a view to offering a viable Christian-postmodern worldview as an alternative. This will involve ‘standing our ground’ in rejecting the postmodern denial of any metanarrative that purports to give shape and meaning to human existence.⁸ But this metanarrative, if it is to appeal to the present culture, must lie beyond ‘the pale of reason’ and be located in the ‘event’ of the incarnation as ‘the truth of and for all humankind.’⁹ Theology in this sense is the ‘articulation of the cognitive mosaic of the Christian faith’, which consists of the ‘interlocking doctrines that together comprise the specifically Christian way of viewing the world.’¹⁰ At the same time, says Grenz, there is no incompatibility between holding on to a meaning giving metanarrative and the rejection of ‘the modern mind and its underlying Enlightenment epistemology.’ The problem for Evangelicals lies in the ‘often uncritically accepted’ modern view that knowledge ‘is certain and that the criterion for certainty rests with our human rational capabilities.’¹¹ Grenz refers to this as a ‘foundationalist’ stance that is more indebted to modernity than to the Scriptures.

Evangelical theology, if it is true to the biblical witness, will reject all forms of foundationalism (liberal and conservative) and eschew any claims to the present apprehension of objective knowledge. It would appear that Evangelical theologians do

⁷ S. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 161-2.

⁸ This idea is, of course, a very non-postmodern one and a difficult point to reconcile with Grenz’s desire to do a thoroughly postmodern theology. Jean-Francois Lyotard defines postmodernism as “the suspicion of all metanarratives” in his famous, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, tr. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), xxiii-xxv.

⁹ S. Grenz, *Primer on Postmodernism*, 164.

¹⁰ S. Grenz, J. Frank, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 51.

¹¹ S. Grenz, *Primer on Postmodernism*, 165.

no better service to the church than Schleiermacher if they follow the foundationalism of Charles Hodge and others.¹² The postmodern critique requires of us the fashioning of a theology that can ‘equip the church to articulate and embody the gospel in the context of that culture.’¹³ In short, ‘the postmodern situation requires that we embody the gospel in a manner that is post-individualistic, post-rationalistic, post-dualistic, and post-noeticentric.’¹⁴

According to Grenz the postmodern worldview rejects the individual in favor of the community. Faith is, for the postmodern – and for the Christian – highly social, thus our theology must address the human person ‘within the context of communities in which people are embedded.’¹⁵ Furthermore, Christian theology must, if it hopes to engage the postmodern world, be a post-rationalistic gospel that no longer focuses on propositions as the central content of faith. Instead ‘it takes seriously a dynamic understanding of the role of the intellectual dimension of human experience and our attempts to make sense of life.’¹⁶ Thus all theological statements are ‘hypotheses to be tested.’¹⁷ In terms similar to Pannenberg’s, ‘the question of truth must be answered in the process of theological reflection and reconstruction’ through a dynamic movement that can never arrive at certitude, but has an eschatological orientation.¹⁸

At the same time ‘a postmodern articulation of the gospel’ will also be post-dualistic, drawing encouragement from the postmodern critique of Enlightenment dualism. We must not separate mind from matter but become increasingly interested in a holistic perception of humanity. But we must go beyond the individualistic understanding of wholeness and see the human as a being in relation to the other. To do otherwise is to lapse into subjectivism which arises ‘only when we mistakenly place the individual ahead of the community.’¹⁹

¹² Grenz implicates a number of “conservative” evangelicals who follow such a modernist “foundationalism” including C. F. H. Henry, Bruce Demarest, Wayne Gruden, David Wells and others. See his *Renewing the Center*, 151-166.

¹³ S. Grenz, *Primer on Postmodernism*, 167.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*,

¹⁵ *Ibid.*,

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 171.

¹⁷ S. Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 197.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*,

¹⁹ S. Grenz, J. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 68.

Finally, if Christian theology is going to engage postmodern culture effectively it must be sophiocentric rather than 'noeticentric'. The aim of a good postmodern theology is not to impart knowledge for its own sake but knowledge for wisdom's sake. Knowledge is good only when it facilitates a good result – specifically, when it fosters 'wisdom (or spirituality) in the knower.'²⁰ Beliefs are only important insofar as they 'shape conduct'. This is important because, for the postmodern, belief structures are either validated or invalidated by their congruency with one's actions.

In these ways Christian theology is called to revise its doctrines to reflect these postmodern concerns. Such a theology cannot be foundationalist in either the liberal or fundamentalist/conservative sense. But it must be, in some sense, a metanarrative, expressed in terms of a 'framework that is basic'. It is basic only as a 'second order discourse' so that 'the theologian's task ... is not to work from an interpretive framework to a theological construct.' Instead

The theological enterprise consists in setting forth in a systematic manner a properly Christian interpretive framework as informed by the Bible for the sake of the church's mission in the contemporary context. By its very nature, the systematic articulation of the Christian interpretive framework takes the form of an integrated statement of Christian doctrine. This leads inevitably to the kind of coherentist theological method Pannenberg has pioneered.²¹

According to Grenz, such a 'coherentist' model must not be seen as a foundationalist enterprise, but as 'a cognitive mosaic' of Christian doctrine that demonstrates the 'explicative power of the Christian faith.'²²

By now the perceived ambiguities in this approach should be emerging. The first is Grenz's seemingly one-sided interpretation of what postmodern culture is. Millard Erickson has already raised this issue with Grenz in his *Postmodernizing the Faith* where he suggests that his description of postmodernism suffers from an 'over simplification.'²³

²⁰ S. Grenz, *Primer on Postmodernism*, 173.

²¹ S. Grenz, J. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 68.

²² *Ibid.*,

²³ Millard Erickson, *Postmodernizing the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998). Erickson goes on to conclude that "there is an apparent tension in Grenz's thought, in which having rejected the usual evangelical doctrine in a particular area, he then says, in effect, 'but of course, I also hold to ...' (the doctrine under discussion). It is therefore often difficult to determine precisely what he does hold on a

Postmodernism is exceedingly complex and runs the gamut from extreme individualist nihilism to a modest individualist/communitarian eccentricism.

It would also seem that this lacuna in Grenz's theology is not corrected in *Beyond Foundationalism* and indeed is complicated by his inclusion of proponents of postliberal nonfoundationalism and proponents of 'middle knowledge' in the general stream of 'postmodernist' critiques of the Enlightenment. George Lindbeck would certainly object to being called a postmodernist in this sense, as would Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff.²⁴ This unwillingness to account for the radical elements in his characterization of postmodernity can lead to an ambiguity in his proposal in that one is never sure if, in apparently taking a position in middle knowledge, Grenz considers himself a true postmodern or a theologian attempting to answer the concerns of postmodernity on the question of truth and meaning. In the end, though he does not intend it, he comes very close to sounding like a 'postmodern foundationalist' for whom the first task of theology is to identify the cultural questions that must be addressed, 'and then to translate the gospel into a currently understandable conceptuality.'²⁵ This runs the risk of falling into the method that Lindbeck characterizes as 'modern foundationalism'. Such a method could also risk subjecting the agenda of theology to the predominate culture. This was precisely the same mistake that theology made in response to the Enlightenment. It is the concern to separate theology from the overriding influences of culture that distinguishes the efforts of some postliberals and so-called 'soft rationalists' alike. I am convinced that Grenz himself wants this mediating position of 'soft rationalism' (or 'chastened rationalism' as he calls it), but this is not always clear, and that is the problem. Is Grenz attempting, in Erickson's words, to integrate his thought

given doctrinal issue. Perhaps the ambiguity or ambivalence will be resolved more clearly in the future." 101. One would have expected such a clarification in *Beyond Foundationalism*, but in fact this 'evangelical retractatio' continues throughout his writings.

²⁴ S. Grenz & J. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 20. Here, Grenz is relying on Nancy Murphy's distinction between "the primarily deconstructive bent of continental forms of postmodernism and the more constructive concerns of Anglo-American postmodern thinkers." See, *Anglo-American Postmodernity: Philosophical Perspectives on Science, Religion and Ethics* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1977). Grenz goes on to include proponents of Reformed epistemology and Postliberalism. I would contest the inclusion of such groups in the general postmodern stream. While they share in the postmodern rejection of Enlightenment rationalism, they also unconditionally retain some of the modernist achievements.

²⁵ George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984) 78.

with postmodernism, ‘while ignoring or arbitrarily rejecting some of the more extreme elements which appear to conflict’ with his ideology?²⁶

Interestingly, some of the most useful answers to the question of how Christianity should respond to postmodernism are coming from postliberals and, most recently, from the ‘Radical Orthodox’ theologians. Postliberal theologians like John B. Webster follow Karl Barth’s dictum in answering the question of how Christianity should proceed in relation to the predominant culture. The question for Christian theology in relation to postmodernity is not ‘what may still be said by Christian theology in the postmodern condition, for there is no simple condition.’²⁷ As Barth once said, ‘the possibility of speech about God can be founded on nothing less than God’s own speaking.’²⁸ This being the case, it means that Christian theology in postmodern times must, as Barth put it, ‘continue as if nothing had happened.’²⁹ We are not suggesting that theology should ignore or disengage from culture but rather, that theology should proceed on a quite different basis. Postmodernity must not ‘be allowed to become itself an eschatological term, as if the advent of postmodernity were the new age, such that the church and its theology now find themselves in an entirely altered situation, which requires them to rethink the fabric of Christian culture.’³⁰

Webster identifies two reasons why such epochal claims are deficient. ‘Historically, their weakness is that, far from enabling reflective awareness of our present situation and tasks, they are often little more than (rather specious) philosophical-cum-lately proposals masquerading as historical-cultural analysis.’ Theologically, their weakness is that ‘they promote an account of the church and its theological responsibilities which is largely un-chastened by the discipline of the Gospel.’³¹

Over against this epochal thinking, in which the church and theology are merely ‘bit-players in a larger cultural drama’, the church, and therefore theology are given the

²⁶ Millard Erickson, *Truth or Consequences* (Downers Grove, Ill: Intervarsity Press, 2001) 232. He refers to Grenz’s *Primer on Postmodernism*.

²⁷ John B. Webster, “Eschatology, Anthropology and Postmodernity,” in *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, vol. 2:1 (March 2000), 16

²⁸ Karl Barth, *Theological Existence Today, A Plea for Theological Freedom* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1933), 9.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁰ J. B. Webster, “Eschatology, Anthropology and Postmodernity”, 15.

³¹ *Ibid.*,

task, by the grace of God, of discerning ‘the situation of humanity faithfully and truthfully and therefore to see the human situation now as that stretch of human history which lies between the first and second advent of Jesus.’³² Whatever else we may say about the church and theology in relation to culture, this must be understood as the space in which it operates. ‘That space and not any cultural space, postmodern or otherwise, is determinative of what Christianity theology may and must be.’³³ In other words, ‘Christian theology is responsible in its context but not in any straight forward way responsible to its context. For context is not fate.’³⁴

Similar rumblings about the postmodern claim on theology and culture can be heard from another group that Grenz appeals to as part of the general postmodern critique of modernity. That is the ‘Radical Orthodoxy’ of John Milbank and, I would add, Graham Ward. What Milbank calls for in terms of a theological engagement of culture is not merely an appropriation of the postmodern critique of presence, transcendence, or the rationalist/foundationalist establishment of such, but rather a ‘theological critique’ of secular reason which moves beyond both modernism and postmodernism into a ‘counter modern articulation of a specific ontologic.’³⁵ Interestingly, such a Christian ‘ontologic’ is not to be found in the postmodern critique of the Western metaphysical tradition but in the premodern, Augustinian identification of the Platonic good with the Christian God. ‘The Neo-platonic Christian infinitization of the absolute, the Christian equation of goodness, truth and beauty with *being*, combined with the introduction of the relational, productive and responsive into the Godhead, all give rise to an ontological scenario which is no longer exactly Greek.’³⁶ It was a mistake, therefore, for Nietzsche to identify Platonism with Christianity and consequently, for Heidegger to equate metaphysics with onto-theology.³⁷ In proceeding this way Milbank accepts the postmodern critique of the Enlightenment but only insofar as modernity was a misrepresentation of the best onto-theology of the Christian tradition. Postmodernism itself must be subjected to the same critique that it subjects modernity to.

³² Ibid.,

³³ Ibid.,

³⁴ Ibid.,

³⁵ J. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1990), 295f.

³⁶ Ibid., 295-296.

³⁷ Ibid., 294.

Graham Ward goes on to do this, suggesting that ‘the nonfoundationalism and non-realism of much postmodern thinking are developments from Cartesian self-reflectivity and self-assertion. They are consequences of the absolute I.’³⁸ Furthermore, he suggests, ‘postmodernism’s posthumanism – even with its rejection of a unified self – pursues the modern notion of freedom in terms of consumer choice.’³⁹ Precisely here is where postmodernism collapses in upon itself. Theology cannot confirm the logics of postmodernity, ‘because postmodernism is the ultimate triumph of secularism, hence its marketable appeal and its strong affiliations with late capitalism.’⁴⁰

Much more could and should be said about these critiques of postmodern culture but space does not permit it here. What is clear from what has been said is that theology must engage postmodernism critically, not just in order to seek points of continuity. Certainly it must respond to this cultural reality, and here we must agree with Grenz. But this response must be recognized as a theological response *in* culture and not a responsibility of theology *to* culture. This is what I think Grenz wants to say but he does not seem to come across that way.

The difficulties which Grenz’s call for a thoroughly postmodern theology poses can be further illustrated in regard to how he conceives the communal nature of theology and the kind of theological commitment this communal theology is attempting to espouse with the word ‘(post)foundationalism’. Once again it is an ambiguous description of, and relationship to postmodernism that seems to be problematic here. One can remain basically affirmative of a call for communal theology and at least open to discussing the implications of ‘(post)foundationalist’ commitments. However, as these are offered in *Beyond Foundationalism*, they seem to entail significant theological risks for Evangelicalism that must be clarified before proceeding to work out a theology in this vein.

³⁸ G. Ward, “Barth, Modernity and Postmodernity,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. J. B. Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 291f. Ward makes a similar point in his earlier work titled, *Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 250-1.

³⁹ *Ibid.*,

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 290.

Community

In his *Primer...* Grenz offers the following analysis with regard to the postmodern condition as it relates to community.

In our postmodern world, we can no longer follow the lead of modernity and position the individual at center stage. Instead, we must remind ourselves that our faith is highly social. The fact that God is the social Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – gives us some indication that the divine purpose for creation is directed toward the individual-in-relationship. Our gospel must address the human person within the context of communities in which people are embedded.⁴¹

This statement would seem, on the surface, to be one with which most of us can readily agree and commend to the scholarly community as a way of doing theology. Grenz has made an admirable first attempt at establishing such a theology in his *Theology for the Community of God*, but there he also brings into sharper focus the precise nature of the Trinitarian grounding of such a theology, and is somewhat troubling. He writes:

Insofar as God is the ultimate model and standard for humankind, the essential nature of God forms the paradigm for the life of the Christian and of the Christian community (Matt. 10:39). At the heart of the Christian's understanding of God is the declaration that God is triune – Father, Son and Spirit. This means that in his eternal essence the one God is a social reality, the social Trinity. Because God is the social Trinity, a plurality in unity, the ideal for humankind does not focus on solitary persons, but on persons-in-community. *God intends that we reflect his nature in our lives.*⁴²

For Grenz, this social understanding of the Trinity, as the ground for Christian community, is capable of being connected with the postmodern concern expressed among those engaged in the 'social communitarian' debate.⁴³ Thus, the Christian faith is uniquely positioned to respond to this concern with a holistic, communally oriented faith.

Once again, no one should deny either the centrality of community or the need to ground such an approach to theology in the doctrine of the Trinity. The questions which

⁴¹ S. Grenz, *Primer on Postmodernism*, 168.

⁴² S. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 98.

⁴³ Grenz includes Arthur J. Dyke, Gerry C. Herd, Robert A. Nisbet, Robert N. Bellah and Peter Berger, to name a few.

Grenz's *procedure* raises here, however, are manifold. For instance, there is a question as to whether the Christian concern for community and the so-called postmodern concern are at all the same? There is a further question as to whether there is the potential for a loss of individual identity before God? Another question has to do with whether, and if so to what degree, social theories as opposed to a biblical ecclesiology have influenced Grenz's own attempt at a communal theology? All of these questions, however, must be subordinated to the overriding question as to whether the way in which Grenz grounds the conception of the community in a social understanding of the Trinity runs the risk of reducing God to a predicate of human social experience? The answer to all these other questions will depend on the answer to this fundamental question.

In his *Theology For the Community* Grenz begins with the assertion that 'the doctrine of the Trinity is the product of a lengthy process arising from the experience of the people of faith.'⁴⁴ From there he proceeds to trace the development of the doctrine from the New Testament through the Cappadocian Fathers to its modern expressions in Karl Barth, Karl Rahner, Jürgen Moltmann and especially Wolfhart Pannenberg.⁴⁵ The latter three are the key players in the contemporary debate. According to Grenz Rahner's rule of identity, (the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity), is axiomatic and reaches its full potential in Moltmann and Pannenberg's social understanding of the Trinity. Pannenberg's view, 'ranks among the most highly developed statements of the doctrine.'⁴⁶ Grenz repeats this social Trinitarian grounding of community in a much sharper way in his *Renewing the Center* stating, 'because God is community – the fellowship of three persons – the creation of humankind in the divine image must be related to humans in relationship as well. *God's own character can only be mirrored by humans who love after the manner of the perfect love lying at the heart of the triune God. Only as we live in fellowship can we show forth what God is like.*'⁴⁷ (Emphasis mine)

⁴⁴ S. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 70.

⁴⁵ Though Karl Barth is primarily responsible for putting the doctrine of the Trinity back on the front burner of theology, it was Karl Rahner who, in taking Barth's emphasis on the economic trinity further than Barth wanted it to go, set the tone for the present debate. Cf. Karl Barth, *CD I/1*, tr. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1936). Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. J. Donceel (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970).

⁴⁶ S. Grenz, *Theology for the Community*, 84. He repeats this in *Beyond Foundationalism*, 191.

⁴⁷ *Renewing the Center*, 213.

The same social understanding of the Trinity is then taken up in the methodological discussion in *Beyond Foundationalism*, and made the standard by which any communal theology will be measured. Though Grenz stresses the Christological nature of his understanding of the Trinity, it is the fact of our creation in the image of God as relational beings that form the true center of his Trinitarian grounding of community. He quotes with approval the Trinitarian theology of theologians for whom this relational understanding often serves different purposes.

What is most problematic about this appropriation of a social understanding of the Trinity is the lack of a critical analysis of the difficulties that any analogous explanation of the Trinity poses for theology. It is interesting to watch theologians of all persuasions endorse Rahner's rule so uncritically, while failing to take into account the reasons why Barth refused to go so far as completely identifying the economic and immanent Trinity in his denial of the '*vestigia trinitatis*'. It was precisely because such language ran the risk of reducing God to a predicate of our language and experience. This is no less the case in regard to the contemporary emphasis on a social understanding of the Trinity. There is no question that the movement is from the community's *experience* of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit to the establishment of this rule of identity between God's action *ad extra* and God's life *in se*.

The question is whether an evangelical communal theology should proceed, uncritically, along these lines? Has Grenz been critical enough about this way of speaking about the Trinity? Karl Barth refused to speak in terms of complete identity between God *ad extra* and God *ad intra* precisely because he understood that revelation was both an unveiling and a veiling. To offer any '*vestigia trinitatis*' other than that supplied in the event of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ was, in the long run, to supplant or supplement revelation with a 'second root' of the Trinity.⁴⁸ Barth's concern was to ensure 'responsible speech about God'. For Barth the problem of '*vestigia trinitatis*' was not that they were meaningless, but that one could not say for sure what the lines of identity between creation, including human subjective experience, and God were. This is a hermeneutic problem that presents us with the limitations of language. All such descriptions of God cannot have the status of identity but are attempts to search

⁴⁸ Karl Barth, *CD I/1*, tr. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1965), 383-399.

for a language that expresses ‘the mystery of God, which is known to them by revelation.’⁴⁹ In supplying such analogies, we run the risk of moving from the interpretation of revelation to ‘illustration’, that is, the identification of the thing in itself with something else. It is the problem of interpretation ‘which is saying *the same thing* in other words’, versus illustration, ‘which is saying the same thing *in other words*’. In any employment of analogy in theology the emphasis must fall on interpretation as a sameness which brings revelation to speech. That is, ‘that the doctrine of the Trinity must be God’s own self interpretation in which God commandeers language.’⁵⁰ In short, it is responsible speech about God that, in its emphasis on sameness, recognizes the limitations of language in carrying forward the self-interpretation of God such that we cannot claim identity, in Rahner’s sense of the word, between God in his revelation as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and the inner life of God. We can speak of *correspondence*, insofar as the content is identical, but such an approach still requires responsible speech in regard to the Trinity that does not presume to have exhausted or conditioned the inner life of God in terms of the event of revelation.

What this means for a communally grounded theology is that its point of reference will be the Christologically centered revelation of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Experience, individual or social, can only be derived from this revelation in a secondary sense and not in a primary one. ‘The doctrine of the Trinity, according to Barth, should rather prevent the Being of God from being understood as a human construction. In that it teaches us that God as “Father, Son and Holy Spirit ... is, so to speak, ours in advance, it will call our attention to the fact that God, as the God already ours in advance, is completely his own, that he who ‘posits himself’ in the hiddenness of his God head is his own origin”.’⁵¹

For Barth the analogical approach to the Trinity also led naturally to nominalism because it represented a creaturely attempt to interpret God *in se* by creaturely means. The error often encountered by such a move is the reversal of God’s being *ad intra* and his being *ad extra* because of such an abstract view of God’s being *ad extra*. Once again,

⁴⁹ Ibid., 340.

⁵⁰ Eberhard Jüngel, *The Doctrine of the Trinity: God’s Being is in Becoming* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967), 14.

⁵¹ Ibid., 25.

this fails to affirm that God is fully revealed and yet fully concealed in his self-disclosure. This is a fact often overlooked by the theologians who promote a social analogy of the Trinity in order to support a more general theology of relationality and community. As Paul Molnar recently pointed out, those theologians ‘either collapse the immanent Trinity into God’s actions of creation, reconciliation, and redemption; or they adopt analogies for God’s existence *in se* arbitrarily because they assume that God *in se*, who is transcendent, can thus never actually be known.’⁵² This leads to Rahner’s conclusion that God cannot exist *in se* but that creation, reconciliation and redemption ‘all take place as part of a single being of God *ad extra*.’⁵³ Such a view ties God’s being inextricably to his creation and compromises his freedom to be over it, and to be for it.

This can be seen in the most recent offerings of a social understanding of the Trinity.⁵⁴ For many of these theologians God depends upon his creation for his own being and action. Such a pantheistic viewpoint compromises God’s independence from creation. If all we are doing is employing social understanding of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity to be relevant, then we run the risk of reducing God to a predicate of our human experience. We do so because we feel God must somehow be identical to and/or inextricably bound up with creation. This is no different than the anthropocentric theology espoused by liberals since Schleiermacher. Modernity is permitted to reenter

⁵² Paul D. Molnar, *Karl Barth and the Theology of the Lords Supper: A Systematic Investigation* (New York: Peter Lang Press, 1996), 236-7. Interestingly, Molnar makes a criticism of Pannenberg in an earlier article that could well apply to Grenz. He suggests there that Pannenberg’s doctrine of revelation “incorporates our philosophical knowledge into revelation in such a way that God becomes dependent upon the processes of history” See P. D. Molnar, “Some Problems With Pannenberg’s Solution to ‘Barth’s Faith Subjectivism’,” *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol. 48, 318.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 239.

⁵⁴ Two examples stand out. Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and the Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper & Collins, 1991). At one point she states, “the life of God is not something that belongs to God alone. *Trinitarian life is also our life*. As soon as we free ourselves from thinking that there are two levels of the Trinity, one *ad intra*, the other *ad extra*, then we see that there is one life of the triune God, a life in which we have been graciously included as partners.” 228f. LaCugna’s thesis is reiterated with approval in Grenz’ more recent book on anthropology under the title, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2001) On p. 57 he suggests that LaCugna “rightly summarizes the methodological principle that arises from the [Rahnerian] renewal of Trinitarian theology. ... What she notes regarding the method needed to approach the doctrine of the Trinity is equally applicable to Christian theologians who set before themselves the task of responding to the question of the nature of the self”. This is the guiding thought for the next 200 plus pages of his anthropology. The other example is Ted Peters, *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life* (Philadelphia: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993). Peters believes that “God’s way of being in relationship with us is God’s personhood.” 126.

theology cloaked in the garb of a crucial Christian doctrine redesigned to appeal to postmodernism.

Coming back to the question of how an evangelical communal theology should be grounded we affirm that it must be grounded Christologically. But, this is not a Christ who is himself a product of the community's experience. Rather, he is Christ the Lord, the Revealer, who has revealed to us God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit acting in creation, reconciliation and redemption. One's ecclesiology must proceed from this basis and be relational only in the sense that God has chosen to be for us in Christ. The election of Christ is our election in Christ. This is true relationality. The church is the church on the basis of this fact, whether or not our communal experience confirms it. This is what it means to be part of the kingdom of God.⁵⁵

Once again we see the problems inherent in doing a theology that is seen to be responsible to culture rather than in culture. To single out community as an overriding concern for postmoderns and then adjust one's ecclesiology and doctrine of God to appeal to this is not what theology is called to do. The fact is that even among communitarians, not all of whom I would consider postmodern, there is no consensus as to what constitutes this contemporary desire for community. In the long run, Christians and postmoderns are likely to disagree not only on what constitutes a community but also on why community is desirable. One of the most prominent French postmoderns, Jacques Derrida, once referred to the word 'community' as 'a word I never much liked, because of its connotation of participation, indeed fusion, identification: I see in it as many threats as promises.'⁵⁶ *Perichoresis* is not likely to appeal to him or other postmoderns like him. I rather suspect that no secular desire for community will ever overcome the secular fear of the loss of individual identity. To be sure we will always have those calling for community around shared concerns, but the ecclesial community is called together by a person, not just on the basis of a shared experience.

⁵⁵ Millard J. Erickson, *Truth or Consequences*, notes that the concept of the kingdom of God, despite the postmodern rejection of the term, is crucial to any Christian ecclesiology. He states that, in the postmodern rejection of this concept, "what is at stake is not the precise term ... but the concept of God's authority, his right to create and determine what is to occur, his right to decide the fortunes and destiny of humans." 291.

⁵⁶ Jacques Derrida, "Post Scriptum," in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, ed. H. Coward and T. Foshay, (NY: State University of New York Press, 1992) 293.

Let us be clear that we need to consider Grenz's call for a communal orientation in theology an important impulse. It was this that makes his work attractive for today. However, such a communal theology must be grounded in a clear, as opposed to ambiguous, orientation to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and the gathering of the community of faith found in the Scriptures. I suggest that if we clearly articulate a Christological understanding of the Church as the kingdom of God called together in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, then theology may point out the solution to the desire for community we sense in the broader culture but it will do so on its own terms or not at all. Such a community must not be seen as one option among many but rather, *the option*. It is a community whose 'Scripture' is not just a localized story, understood as a 'metanarrative', but is a witness to the truth telling, meaning giving, ever present revelation of Christ through the Spirit, which can serve as a basis for human life. This leads us quite naturally to the question of what kind of commitments Grenz is calling for in his (post)foundational theology.

Commitments – (Post)foundationalism Between Foundationalism and Non-foundationalism

The primary question raised by Grenz and Franke in *Beyond Foundationalism* is; how must theology proceed in the face of a culture that no longer holds to any concept of a totalizing, meaning giving foundation? This problem, according to them, is bequeathed to theology by the thorough-going critique of modern foundationalism by postmodernism. Given the fact that this critique has gained the status of a cultural force, Evangelicals should tap into what it shares with this critique and express our own theology in a way that is relevant to that culture. As we have seen, however, the ambiguous way in which Grenz has construed this cultural phenomenon seems to have left his Evangelical theology open to foundationalist conceptions, which runs counter to his intentions. This can be seen in his call for a communal theology grounded in a social understanding of the Trinity. It is a trend that is continued in his discussion with regard to the foundations for theology, which is the real subject matter of this latest book. Because of his posture towards the prevailing culture and his adoption of certain aspects of current social theorizing and theologizing, his discussion of foundations is marked by what one would call a tentative, highly qualified, endorsement of some sort of

(post)foundationalism. In doing so Grenz tries to mediate the gap between the hard rationalism of foundationalism and the complete relativism of nonfoundationalism. He often refers to this position in Pannenberg's terms as a kind of 'coherentist theological method.'⁵⁷ He claims that his method of coherence avoids the pitfalls of foundationalism on either the liberal or conservative side. While this coherence model must be spoken of as, in some sense 'foundational theology', we should 'more properly speak of theology as the articulation of the cognitive mosaic of the Christian faith.'⁵⁸ Such a cognitive mosaic, he concludes,

Consists of the interlocking doctrines that together comprise the specifically Christian way of viewing the world. This worldview is truly theological and specifically Christian because it involves an understanding of the entire universe and of ourselves in connection with the God of the Bible and the biblical narrative of God bringing creation to its divinely destined goal. Not only does the theological task entail explicating this doctrinal mosaic, but, as Pannenberg has argued, it also includes demonstrating the explicative power of the Christian faith.⁵⁹

The task for theology today is, according to this account, the 'reconstruction' of a worldview and not a 'deconstruction'. This coherentist approach is aided by a 'communitarian approach' that allows for localized communal metanarratives that give shape and meaning to our religious experience. But therein lies 'a potentially devastating' problem for the Christian faith. 'How can we seek truth in a multicultural world in which various communities offer diverse theological paradigms?'⁶⁰ Can we speak about 'objective' Christian truth at all in such a context? Certainly we cannot do so from the pure anti-realist principles of George Lindbeck, though his program has served Grenz and Franke well to this point. We do, according to Grenz, gain some help from the social linguistic identification of the 'world-constructing role of society in general.'⁶¹ It is a fact that, to quote Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, 'language objectivates the shared experiences and makes them available to all within the linguistic community, thus

⁵⁷ S. Grenz, J. L. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 51.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*,

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*,

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*,

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 52.

becoming both the basis and the instrument of the collective stock of knowledge.’⁶² Grenz concludes with Berger and Luckmann that, despite the probability of an objective reality beyond our ‘linguistic constructs’, human reality is a ‘socially constructed reality’.

Regardless of the postmodern critique, Christians can claim a ‘certain objectivity’ for their worldview because, ‘seen through the lens of the Gospel, this objectivity is the objectivity of the world as God wills it to be. Because what God wills is not a present but a future reality (e.g. Is. 65:17-19; Rev. 21:5). The ‘objectivity of the world’ about which we can truly speak is an objectivity of a future, eschatological world.’⁶³ This eschatological will of God is far more objective and real than the present world, which is passing away. Thus, the worldview we are constructing is really a worldview constructed by the Holy Spirit who, employing the biblical narrative, ‘brings us to view all reality in accordance with God’s program of molding creation in conformity with the divine eternal purpose through Jesus Christ ... so that as the community of Christ we might inhabit a world that truly reflects God’s purposes for creation.’⁶⁴

But how do we substantiate the primacy of such a worldview without falling into some form of foundationalism. We do so by relying on a ‘wedding of communitarian and pragmatist insights’ that aims at a ‘well ordered society’. We can offer a theological worldview which ‘focused as it is on God as the Trinity of persons and on humankind as the *imago dei*, sets forth a helpful vision of the nature of the kind of community that all religious belief systems in their own way and according to their own understanding seek to foster.’⁶⁵ This is the best basis for the human desire for a relational life. The triune life of God as a ‘plurality in unity’ speaks to the basic human desire to be ‘persons in communion’. The conclusion Grenz and Franke draw from this, vis-à-vis the task of theology, is crucial to their whole enterprise. They write:

The task of systematic theology is to show how the Christian mosaic of beliefs offers a transcendent vision of the glorious eschatological community that God wills for God’s own creation and how this vision provides *a coherent foundation* for life-in-

⁶² Ibid., 53. Grenz refers to Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Constitution of Reality: A Treatise on the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor Books, 1967), and Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969).

⁶³ Ibid.,

⁶⁴ Ibid., 54.

⁶⁵ Ibid.,

relationship in this penultimate age, life that ought to be visible in the community of Christ as the sign of the age to come. Implicit in the construction of a coherent presentation of the Christian vision is a claim to “validity”, *a claim that, however, does not look to a universally accessible present reality*, for confirmation but anticipates the eschatological completion of the universally directed program of the God of the Bible. The task of a helpful theological method, in turn, is to set forth a program for the shaping of a theology that can carry out the theological vocation in a manner that is solidly biblical and truly Christian and that takes seriously the postmodern situation.⁶⁶ (Emphasis mine)

Here once again we can see the ‘postmodern’ ambiguity of Grenz in relation to the kinds of commitments he is asking us to make in this (post)foundationalist, (or is it nonfoundationalist?), ‘coherent foundation’. Grenz and Franke seem to think that their socio-linguistic, pragmatic reconstruction of Pannenberg’s eschatological coherence model has succeeded in avoiding the ‘foundationalism’ of conservatives and liberals while at the same time providing a ‘foundation’. Can this be done? Is it possible to justify a Christian worldview to postmoderns on the basis of an eschatological provisionality? What would happen if other religions, notably Islam, began to appeal to postmodern culture in eschatological terms. Would that not put us back on the same basis as other religious worldviews? Is the reliance on Pannenberg’s concept of the provisionality of truth, the soft rationalist approach to knowledge and the postliberal social linguistic conception of community itself a coherent model or does it contain its own contradictions? Grenz seems to move back and forth in relation to these positions in the hopes of a broad appeal to any that eschew hard rationalism or foundationalism. One wonders, however, whether such a synthesis is achievable. The community of faith can have no other ‘world view’ than that given in the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ as attested to in the Scriptures. The world-view suggested here seems only another hybrid of other competing world-views. Has Grenz made a mistake in categorizing all of these approaches as postmodern simply because they share the postmodern critique of the Enlightenment? Postliberals call themselves ‘postliberal’ partly because they do share this critique, but would balk at the idea that to do so is entirely a ‘postmodern’ venture.

⁶⁶ Ibid.,

The Enlightenment was criticized from within from the same perspective long before the advent of ‘postmodernism’. Postliberals see themselves as correcting this tradition through creative retrieval of the Christian tradition, not jettisoning modernity and its achievements wholesale.

It is all too easy for postliberals, postmoderns and so called (post)foundationalist theorists of a mediating position to claim emancipation from any form of foundationalism. They are on shaky ground if they assume too readily that they have ‘neatly extricated’ themselves ‘from the entanglements of the past.’⁶⁷ As Leron Schultz recently noted, ‘the postmodern concern with hermeneutics drives us to a constant interrogation of our epistemological assumptions. However, the modernist concerns about issues of human knowledge (*epistemē*) are not simply negated or left behind: rather they are taken up into a new critique and reconstruction.’⁶⁸ Accordingly, Schultz refers to postmodernity as a ‘to and from’ movement in relation to modernity. The impression one gets from Grenz, who wants to employ Pannenberg here, is that postmodernity has signaled the end of modernity and the divesting of theology of its remaining effects. This, in my estimation, is difficult to sustain.

It is also questionable whether Pannenberg himself can be described as a theologian doing theology after modernity. There is much in Pannenberg’s theology that places him well within the modern tradition. To be sure, Grenz has not accepted Pannenberg’s position uncritically, as his review of Pannenberg’s *Systematic Theology* makes clear.⁶⁹ But, both Grenz and Schultz seem to bypass the full extent of Pannenberg’s indebtedness to modernity, especially that form of modernity represented by Hegel.⁷⁰ It is questionable whether such a ‘postfoundationalist’ position can really

⁶⁷ John B. Webster, “Theology after Liberalism,” in *Theology after Liberalism*, ed. J. B. Webster and G. P. Schnier (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 52. Webster makes a valid point in suggesting that “the term postmodern has now become almost inseparably wedded to the theologies of deconstruction.” He prefers the consistent use of the term “postliberal” in doing theology “after modernity,” 52-53.

⁶⁸ Leron Schultz, *The Post Foundationalist Task of Theology: Wolfhart Pannenberg and the New Theological Rationality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1999), 242.

⁶⁹ Stanley J. Grenz, “The Irrelevancy of Theology: Pannenberg and the Quest for Truth,” in *Calvin Theological Journal* 27, (1992), 307-311; *Reason for Hope: The Systematic Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); “Pannenberg and Evangelical theology: Sympathy and Caution,” in *Christian Scholars Review* 20:3 (1991) 272-285.

⁷⁰ Leron Schultz, *The Postfoundationalist Task*, 2f. Schultz raises and then dismisses the criticisms of Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, William Placher, Grenz and others as a failure to understand “all the nuances of his complex method,” 11.

appeal to postmodern culture given its ‘foundationalist’ leanings. Holding a position between the nonfoundationalism of postliberalism and the foundationalism of ‘modernist’ conservative Evangelicalism leads Grenz and company to an ambiguous theology that must be constantly worked out by means of a ‘paralegoumena’⁷¹ in which the endless methodological ‘throat clearing’, however legitimate, will make most postmoderns turn away in frustration.⁷²

In his most recent response to the challenge of postmodernism, Millard Erickson has characterized this ‘coherence model’ as a ‘form of foundationalism’.⁷³ Many who employ it are unwilling to admit this. Of all the postmoderns who decry any form of foundationalism, only Derrida is willing to admit that his style of argumentation appears to be foundationalist.⁷⁴ Erickson goes on to make a suggestion that has considerable merit and could form one of the poles of this ongoing discussion, especially in relation to Grenz’s approach. Erickson writes, ‘I would propose that on a pre-reflective level, or in actual practice, virtually all sane persons function with what I would term a “primitive correspondence” view of truth. By this I mean an understanding of truth as a quality of statements that correctly represent the “state of affairs” being referred to. This is true, in actual practice of postmodernists as well as modernists.’⁷⁵ He then proceeds to demonstrate this, quite effectively, in the works of William James, Jacques Derrida and Stanley Fish, among others. In all of these writers ‘truth is thought of as the way things are, in the sense that all are trying to describe the “state of affairs” as they see it.’⁷⁶ We are quite willing to theorize subjectively until a state of affairs has real objective implications for our human existence. Erickson wants to contend for an understanding of truth that is neither modern nor postmodern but ‘postpostmodern’.⁷⁷ While I am not sure

⁷¹ Ibid., 251.

⁷² Ibid., 252.

⁷³ Ibid., 253f.

⁷⁴ Millard Erickson, *Truth or Consequences ...*, 233 supplies the following, very striking admission from Derrida’s *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978). Derrida writes, “This circle is unique. It describes the form of the relation between the history of metaphysics and the deconstruction of the history of metaphysics. We have no language – no syntax and no lexicon – which is foreign to this history; we can pronounce not a single deconstructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest.” 280-81.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 234.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 236. He mentions Dallas Willard’s reference to the fact that “even the most subjective and relative postmodernists become strangely objective when such issues as faculty benefits are at stake”.

⁷⁷ Ibid.,

I like the unwieldy term I am intrigued by the suggestion of a ‘primitive correspondence view of truth.’ One wonders whether the discussion should now be taken in that direction, keeping in mind the need to approach theology with a ‘chastened rationalism.’ However we proceed from here, Grenz and Franke’s proposals have to be taken account of and hopefully clarified. But, we also need to move beyond this ‘methodological throat clearing’ and do theology *in* this postmodern culture in such a way that the substance of theology is being heard.

Conclusion

Let me say in conclusion that, despite the critical nature of this article, there are many positive features in Grenz’s theology that deserve a fair hearing within evangelicalism. My intention is not to be ‘dismissive at length’, but to seek more dialogue, and hopefully, some clarification from Grenz and his colleagues who have taken up the ‘(post)foundationalist’ cause in the hopes of renewing the center of Evangelical theology.

His engagement of the sources from both Europe and America, across the disciplines of Theology, Sociology and Philosophy is superlative and refreshing within the evangelical context. As such he is forcing us to be more circumspect about the extramural discussions in theology outside of the Evangelical ‘boundaries’. His proposal for a theology that engages postmodernism cannot be faulted for its thoroughness and seriousness. He is a theologian to be reckoned with on this score, both within and outside of Evangelicalism.

However having said that, this article is asking for clarification on the issues of culture, community and commitments precisely because there is ambiguity throughout Grenz’s approach to these issues. This is partly due to a one-sided understanding of ‘postmodern culture’. It is also due to the fact that, in his characterization of conservative Evangelicals as modern rational foundationalists, he feels the need to appeal to all who stand opposed to this position, so that evangelicalism can find a new way forward. He seems quite optimistic that younger evangelical theologians will jump onto this methodological bandwagon and begin marking new boundaries for evangelical theology. Certainly his proposals are intriguing and he surely has the interest of some. But before

one can follow him to far, it is appropriate to ask for a clarification as to what is meant by theology's engagement with postmodernism, the Trinitarian grounding of communal theology, and the nature of this nonfoundational, (post)foundationalist, 'coherent foundation'. Since his is a method in process we will await further developments, both methodologically and materially, in terms of theological content, with anticipation.

Archie J. Spencer
Associated Canadian Theological Schools
Trinity Western University
Langley, BC
V2Y 1Y1