

**Postmodernism and Evangelical Theological Methodology
with Particular Reference to Stanley J. Grenz.**

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Steven Denis Knowles

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Abstract

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Central to this thesis are the various ways in which postmodern discourse has influenced Christian theological methodology. In particular, it is concerned with the response of evangelical theology, which is particularly interesting because, it is argued, it has become shackled to Enlightenment thought. The result of this reliance on modernism has led to some uncritical assumptions regarding theological methodology. As a consequence evangelical theological methodology has been neglected until relatively recently. There is now a growing desire among evangelical theologians to rethink theological methodology.

The principal theological focus of this work is Stanley J. Grenz, an American Baptist theologian who, more than many of his peers, has taken postmodern thought seriously and, accordingly, developed and adapted his theological methodology. How successful his attempt has been in staying within what many understand to be the boundaries of evangelical theology will be discussed in the thesis. It is certainly the case that many scholars consider his work to accommodate postmodernism too easily and uncritically.

In Part One, three principal themes within postmodern thought that have had a direct impact on evangelical theology will be examined: the demise of the metanarrative; deconstruction; and the de-centred self. In Part Two, the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein and George Lindbeck will be discussed, not only because both have had an influence on contemporary theology, but, more significantly for this thesis, they have been important for Grenz. Part Three is a detailed examination of the work of Grenz which focusses specifically on the development of his thought in *Beyond Foundationalism*. An assessment of whether Grenz can be faithful to a broadly evangelical theological methodology will be made. It is argued that, whilst creative and constructive, in the final analysis, his project fails. Finally, Part Four offers some suggestions as to how Grenz's thought might be employed. In this concluding part, the ideas of Grenz are developed in dialogue with John Searle, J. L. Austin, Alister MacIntyre, Alvin Plantinga, and critical realism.

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Introduction

The last thirty years have seen a gradual change in the intellectual climate. The so-called certainty associated with the ideals of the Enlightenment has steadily receded. We now inhabit a world that is considered by many to be postmodern. The ideas associated with postmodernism vary a great deal. Indeed, so much do these ideas differ that it makes the task of describing the phenomenon very difficult. Nevertheless, the influence of the ideas associated with postmodernism is very widespread. Architecture, politics, literature and theology are just some of the areas they have permeated.¹

What is of central significance for this thesis is the way in which postmodern thought has influenced theological developments, and, in particular, it is evangelical theology that is the focus of our concern here. Why evangelical theology? Evangelical theology is particularly interesting because not only has it been influenced by Enlightenment thought, but to a great extent it has become shackled to it.² The result of such a reliance on modernist tendencies has led to an almost unquestioning approach to the way theological methodology has been done. As a consequence evangelical theological methodology, in the main, has been neglected. This has been recognised by several prominent thinkers. For example, Alister McGrath wrote in 2000 that “there is widespread agreement within the evangelical theological community that evangelicals have not paid adequate attention to the issue of theological method, despite the fact that they have a generally high regard for it.”³ Hence, in the light of the postmodern critique and the recognition that the subsequent fall-out has implications for evangelical theology, there is a growing desire among evangelical theologians to become involved in the debate and to rethink theological methodology.⁴

¹ See David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992)

² McGrath argues that this is certainly the case. See his, *A Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism* (Leicester: Apollos, 1996), 163-183. See also G. Williams, ‘Was Evangelicalism Created by the Enlightenment?’ in *Tyndale Bulletin* 53 (2003), 283-312. For a detailed analysis of the genesis of evangelicalism, see David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730’s to the 1980’s* (London: Routledge, 2000).

³ McGrath, ‘Evangelical Theological Method: The State of the Art’, in John D. Stackhouse Jr., *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 15.

⁴ *Evangelical Futures* (ed.) John D. Stackhouse, *The Challenge of Postmodernism* (ed.) David S. Dockery 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001) and *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn* (ed.) Myron B. Penner (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005) are just a few examples of the growing literature that attempts to engage with postmodernism from an evangelical perspective.

The principal focus of this work is Stanley J. Grenz, an American Baptist theologian who, more than many of his peers, has taken postmodern thought seriously and, accordingly, in turn developed and adapted his theological methodology. How successful his attempt has been in staying within what many understand to be the boundaries of evangelical theology will be discussed in the thesis. It is certainly the case that many scholars consider his work to be too accommodating toward postmodernism,⁵ whereas others are more sympathetic.⁶

Relatively little has been written about Grenz's work on theological methodology. In 2006, a whole issue of the *Princeton Theological Review*⁷ was dedicated to him following his sudden death of a brain haemorrhage in March 2005. The volume included, understandably, responses that clearly were of an appreciative nature. However, from a different perspective, the most significant negative analysis of Grenz's project available is a collection of essays entitled *Reclaiming the Center* (2004) written by a group of conservative evangelicals.⁸ Although some insightful points are made, particularly regarding his understanding of foundationalism,⁹ the contributors are generally too dismissive of Grenz's work. Elements of what they highlight will be discussed at some length in section three. With regard to any full-length treatment of any aspect of Grenz's work, this thesis represents the first. As such, it fills an important gap in both the study of contemporary evangelical theology and the study of theological method, focussing as it does on the epistemic challenges within his work. That is to say, this is not an evaluation of all of Grenz's work, but rather a critique of his thought concerning theological methodology and postmodernism, with a particular emphasis on the epistemological issues raised.

Broadly speaking, the thesis is divided into four sections. The first deals with elements of postmodern thought, which, it is argued, are among the most serious threats to Enlightenment-influenced evangelical theology. They are the 'metanarrative' and its demise, 'deconstruction' and the 'postmodern de-centred-self'.

⁵ See *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004) for a variety of conservative evangelical reactions to Grenz's work.

⁶ Roger Olsen, John Franke and James Smith are sympathetic to Grenz's theological ideas.

⁷ *Princeton Theological Review* 34 (Spring 2006). Contributors to this issue include Roger Olsen, John Franke and Ed Miller.

⁸ The title is a pun on Grenz's own volume, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000). The title reflects, to a large degree, the regard the contributors have for Grenz's work.

⁹ See J. P. Moreland and Garrett DeWeese, 'The Premature Report of Foundationalism's Demise' in *Reclaiming the Center*, 81-107.

The metanarrative is highlighted for two significant reasons. Firstly, it is intrinsically associated with Lyotard's seminal statement that postmodernism represents incredulity toward metanarratives and consequently is included in much debate with regard to universal 'truth' claims.¹⁰ Secondly, what Lyotard defines as a metanarrative is often misunderstood by evangelical commentators on postmodernism. It will be argued here that the demise of the metanarrative is ultimately irrelevant to theological methodology because the biblical story does not constitute such a metanarrative. Secondly, deconstructionism will be examined, with reference to the work of Jacques Derrida, the father of the movement. Deconstruction questions all that we take for granted about language and human experience. Thus, meaning becomes subjectified. Because everything is open to interpretation, including the Bible, no one authority is seen to be more legitimate than others. The knock-on effect for evangelical Christianity and indeed, Christianity in general, would appear to be grave. It will be argued here that a communitarian understanding of how knowledge is developed and nurtured best accounts, on the one hand, for the variety of interpretation on offer and, on the other hand, guards against complete subjectivism. Thirdly, a radical element of postmodern thought is the emergence of the de-centred self. This is, in the main, a reaction against the autonomous self produced by rationalist tendencies. This de-centered self is sometimes characterised as an 'ersatz' being that flits from one personality to another, depending upon the cultural environment. It is argued here that, as Grenz also attempts to show, a communitarian approach best deals with these two ends of the spectrum.

The second section of this thesis examines the work of two very important scholars, who, as we shall see, have had an influence on the work of Grenz, namely Ludwig Wittgenstein and George Lindbeck. Wittgenstein's influence upon philosophy in general has been enormous. In particular, it is his ideas about the way language should be understood that are of utmost importance for our purposes. Wittgenstein attempted to show that language operated within 'language-games', which had their own rules which dictated how language in a particular context should be understood. No longer should language be understood as correspondence to reality which could be transposed across cultures. On the contrary, language had its meaning according to its

¹⁰ See Gary Browning, *Lyotard and the End of Grand Narratives* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 2000). See also R. Albert Mohler, Jr., 'The Integrity of the Evangelical Tradition and the Challenge of the Postmodern Paradigm' in David S. Dockery (ed.), *The Challenge of Postmodernism* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 53-74.

context and time. For many, this understanding was 'postmodern' before postmodernism had a place on the intellectual map.

George Lindbeck was deeply influenced by Wittgenstein and, in his seminal work *The Nature of Doctrine* (1984), worked out a theological prolegomenon that employed some of his ideas. In particular, Lindbeck referred to religious doctrine as second-order, which was simply the grammar that ruled how talk about God could be done.

The third section examines the development of Grenz's thought in the area of theological methodology and, in particular, epistemology. It culminates with an extended critique of the book he co-authored with John Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*. This volume is the most detailed unpacking of Grenz's ideas on how theological methodology should be done. Although credited to both authors, it is clear from an examination of Grenz's earlier work that the meat of the ideas originated from the mind of Grenz. The nonfoundationalist methodology that Grenz and Franke promote is critically examined in this section, with a judgement that their approach cannot be considered 'evangelical' in the traditional sense.

The final section takes some of the arguments made by Grenz in his methodological proposals, and suggests ways of adapting them in order to retain a recognisably evangelical theological methodology that effectively engages with the challenges of postmodernism. Here a form of critical realism will be posited as the best way to straddle the spectrum between foundationalism and nonfoundationalism. Furthermore, ideas from the work of the sociologist John Searle will be adapted and incorporated, along with Alastair MacIntyre's communitarian approach to tradition. Speech act philosophy will be suggested as an excellent way of understanding the Bible in postmodern times. In keeping with two of the major influences on Grenz's thought, some of Lindbeck's ideas will be employed along with a 'soft' Wittgensteinian use of language games.

Postmodernism

The term postmodernity is used to describe the differing strands, themes and ideas (not all interrelated) that have developed as a form of critique and reaction to modernity. It is a descriptor or locator for the *zeitgeist*. Such reaction has been stimulated, in general terms, by a loss of faith in the progressivist and speculative discourses characteristic of the Enlightenment program. This stultifying legacy (according to most postmodern theorists),¹ that majored upon the authoritarian nature of reason, with its inflexible, fixed and totalizing agenda, is giving way to ideas from the postmodern vantage point which, in contrast, include fragmentation, diversity, instability, ephemerality, otherness and discontinuity.

Little has escaped the scrutiny of postmodern theorists. Ethics, art, politics, communications, history, media, theology, literature and education have all been subjected to analysis. The purpose of this section is simply to identify some of the main ideas of this nebulous intellectual movement in order to be able to trace its implications for evangelical theology.

At this point, it is worth noting that generally, *postmodernism* refers to the intellectual and cultural development of that which comes under the label postmodern. A good example of the intellectual change that will be discussed below is the debate over foundationalism. Postmodernist theorists such as Michel Foucault² and Jacques Derrida³ have attacked foundationalist epistemologies that understand knowledge to be built on objective grounds and have written extensively against such positions. On the other hand, the term *postmodernity* refers to current socio-cultural contexts. For example, a particularly conspicuous change in today's world is the way information is

¹ Laurence Cahoon notes, "Philosophical opinion regarding the postmodern family is deeply divided. For some, postmodernism connotes the final escape from the stultifying legacy of modern European theology, metaphysics, authoritarianism, colonialism, patriarchy, racism and domination. To others it represents the attempt by disgruntled left-wing intellectuals to destroy Western civilization." See *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 1.

² See his *Archeology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 2002); *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* trans. Richard Howard (London: Routledge, 2002) and *Religion and Culture* (ed.) Jeremy Carrette (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999) as good examples of his thought.

³ See Derrida's *Writing and Difference* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978); *Speech and Phenomena and other essays on Husserl's 'Theory of Signs'* (Northwestern: Northwestern University Press, 1973) and *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri C. Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976).

disseminated. Communication and information technologies (CIT's),⁴ especially the internet and e-mail, are having a huge impact on the way data is distributed and assimilated. CIT's are having such a massive effect on the social, political and economic climate to such an extent that some commentators have referred to the emergence of a 'post-industrial' world or a new 'information society'.⁵ However, the point is that, as David Lyon rightly states, "postmodernism cannot be understood without postmodernity."⁶ The social cannot be totally separated from the cultural, and vice versa. An appreciation of the close links between the two will become apparent in what follows.

To attempt with any precision a definition of postmodernism is notoriously difficult. David Harvey notes, "No one exactly agrees as to what is meant by the term, except, perhaps, that 'postmodernism' represents some kind of reaction to, or departure from, 'modernism'."⁷ Indeed, arguably, the attempt to define it is antithetical to that which is deemed postmodern. There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, it is due in part to the ambiguous nature of the term. Does it refer to a break with modernity (Foucault)? Does it show a continuous link with modernity (Lyotard)? Perhaps it refers to a stage within a degenerative modernity (Habermas), or does the prefix 'post' simply question the influence of modernity as we know it (Lyon)? The whole situation is made even more difficult when one considers that there is a certain amount of confusion as to what modernity itself actually refers to.⁸ Furthermore, it is important to remember that postmodernity cannot be explained as if it was one process, state or attitude: it is not. Many postmodernists would reject the idea because, for them, no one thing or idea is monolithic. All is open to further fragmentation and interpretation.

Secondly, some postmodern theorists refuse to be tagged with the term 'postmodern'. A good example of this is John Caputo's comments with regards to Derrida. "Derrida steadfastly avoids the word postmodern."⁹ Furthermore, "Derrida would describe

⁴ CIT's is David Lyon's expression. See *Postmodernity* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999), 3.

⁵ See Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Postindustrial Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1973). Bell is recognised as being the first commentator to call the proliferation of computer technologies and its effect on the world as the 'information society'.

⁶ Lyon, *Postmodernity*, 10.

⁷ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 7.

⁸ See Hans Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern* (London: Routledge, 1996), for a good introduction to this issue.

⁹ John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, *God, the Gift and the Postmodern* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 2.

himself not as a postmodern, but as a man of the Enlightenment, albeit of a new Enlightenment, one that is enlightened about the Enlightenment and resists letting the spirit of the Enlightenment freeze over dogma.”¹⁰ Moreover, many ideas and theories within what is broadly identifiable as postmodern often conflict. Zygmunt Bauman, for example, argues that, “incoherence is the most distinctive among the attributes of postmodernity.”¹¹ A helpful analogy describing the postmodern is that employed by Laurence Cahoone, who refers to the different ideas as members of a dysfunctional family.¹² There are differences of interpretation and method but they have similarities that identify them as belonging to the postmodern family.

Key Postmodern Traits

The literary critic Terry Eagleton attempts to describe some of the features that are broadly described under the rubric of postmodernity in the following way:

Post-modernism signals the death of such ‘meta-narratives’ whose secretly terroristic function was to ground and legitimate the illusion of a ‘universal’ human history. We are now in the process of awakening from the nightmare of modernity, with its manipulative reason and fetish of the totality, into the laid-back pluralism of the post-modern, that heterogeneous range of lifestyles and language games which has renounced the nostalgic urge to legitimate itself.... Science and philosophy must jettison their grandiose metaphysical claims and view themselves more modestly as just another set of narratives.¹³

This paragraph offers an insight into some of the key features of what is an amorphous and rather disjunctive collection of ideas, and points to useful motifs from which to begin unpacking some of the main points for the purpose of our discussion. Having said that, postmodern thought does not liberate to the extent that Eagleton seems to imply, nor is it as ‘laid-back’ as he suggests. As we shall see, for some the postmodern phenomenon brings only a vacuous chaos in place of the so-called certainties of modernism.

The strands that are highlighted below have been selected because they have had not only a significant influence on the current intellectual climate, but also an impact on

¹⁰ Ibid., 2.

¹¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 2000), 5.

¹² Cahoone, *From Modernism to Postmodernism*, 1.

evangelical theology, both directly and indirectly. That is to say, they have caused theologians to react both negatively and positively to such ideas. Many evangelical scholars have understood postmodern developments to be antithetical to the Christian religion.¹⁴ As we shall see, these developments do require a re-evaluation of theological methodology, and more importantly, a close reading of the ideas that have emerged from some postmodern theorists. Unfortunately, within evangelical academia there have been numerous misreadings and misunderstandings of important ideas that have resulted in an almost paranoid reaction to anything connected with postmodernism.¹⁵ What follows is an overview of some of these postmodern traits with pointers to some problems that may be encountered with them when approached from an evangelical theological perspective.

The Demise of the Metanarrative

Starting with the concept of ‘metanarrative’, Jean-François Lyotard famously relates it to postmodernism as follows:

Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives.¹⁶

Here, from the outset, Lyotard sets the tone for his critical onslaught upon what he sees to be the biggest problem with the modernist worldview. What follows is a repudiation of what he understands a metanarrative to be. Furthermore, the metanarrative stands as possibly the most abhorrent form of universal imprisonment that has emerged out of the modern epoch according to most postmodern theorists.¹⁷ Lyotard believes a metanarrative to be a term that “designates any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse ...making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative,

¹³ Terry Eagleton “Awakening From Modernity” *Times Literary Supplement* 20 February, 1987.

¹⁴ For example, see D. Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000) and Millard Erickson’s, *Postmodernizing the Faith: Evangelical Responses to the Challenges of Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998).

¹⁵ Examples are, Middleton and Walsh’s misunderstanding of Lyotard’s metanarratives, as we shall see below. Grenz is also guilty of this in his *Primer on Postmodernism*. D. A. Carson is guilty of misunderstanding Derrida. See his *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005).

¹⁶ Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), xxiv. Typically understated, Lyotard writes regarding the postmodern condition that “The text that follows is an occasional one. It is a report on knowledge in the most highly developed societies and was presented to the Conseil des Universitiés of the government of Quebec...”. See *The Postmodern Condition*, xxv.

¹⁷ See for example Eagleton’s *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Oxford: Blackwells, 1996).

such as the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth.”¹⁸

What Lyotard refers to, in general terms, is the Enlightenment idea that science acts as the great emancipator of humanity because of its ability to legitimise itself through the discovery of knowledge. This is extremely important to understand from the outset. Lyotard’s aversion to metanarratives is not based on their scope—how big a story—but on the nature of their claims. As Merold Westphal has noted, if the problem was because of their size they would be referred to as ‘meganarratives.’¹⁹ Gary Browning notes that “Lyotard picks out science and the justification of scientific knowledge as emblematic of a legitimating absolutist *modern* self-image.”²⁰ The basis of this legitimisation is grounded in two mythic metanarratives: the supremacy of reason (political) and the Hegelian idea of the unity of all knowledge (philosophical).²¹ These two metanarratives (emancipation and speculation) formed the basis from which science could confidently make its claims. However, for Lyotard, this approach is no longer tenable. The project of legitimating knowledge by means of a set of extra-contextual criteria is something that must now be abandoned. Indeed, the focus on the end of metanarratives is at the heart of Lyotard’s account of modernity and postmodernity. The proliferation of scientific disciplines within ‘science’ itself means unity can no longer be assumed within this broad spectrum and consequently no overall authority is possible. Scientists are therefore forced within their own respective communities to assert their own disciplinary boundaries. This has the knock-on effect of demolishing appeals to a central legitimating authority. Furthermore, science no longer has the ability to lead humanity into liberation by means of absolute knowledge. “The grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation.”²²

¹⁸ Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, xxiii.

¹⁹ Merold Westphal, *Overcoming Onto-theology: Toward a Postmodern Christian Faith* (New York: Fordhan University Press, 2001), xii.

²⁰ Gary Browning, *Lyotard and the end of Grand Narratives* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 2000), 27.

²¹ Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 31.

²² *Ibid.*, 37.

It is, however, these two metanarratives (myths) that give legitimation to other narratives. The meaning of other narratives is established with reference to these two grand narratives and they receive their legitimation according to how far they correspond to them. In turn, these smaller narratives are united through the progress of science into the unified historical setting in which the grand narratives generate. However, since World War II, there has been a loss of faith in such 'grand-narratives'. The so-called progress produced as a result of scientific gains in knowledge has left a bitter taste in the mouths of many, particularly those who have suffered as a result of what are arguably the fruits of science and technological progress (e.g. the holocaust, the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima,²³ and more recently the attack on the World Trade Center).

Having argued that metanarratives are no longer tenable, postmodernists have focussed on the particular, and have reacted strongly to the idea that a narrative is able to control, in a universal way, aspects of humanity. To accept that some propositions can be said to be true in all places and at all times is an anathema to postmodern theorists. Indeed for Lyotard, postmodernism is all about abandoning and disregarding the modernist tendency to legitimate knowledge by the appeal to epistemological foundations.

J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, two evangelical theologians engaging with postmodern thought, take these ideas further, when they argue that there are, broadly speaking, two problems with metanarratives from a postmodern perspective.²⁴ Firstly, the problem is epistemological (epistemology being a key concern of Lyotard's). That is to say, if a narrative is posited that claims to have universal insight into the world order, then it claims more than it can possibly know. This is because, they argue, all knowledge is socially constructed. Reality is a construction of someone's or a group's understanding of what that reality is.²⁵ Instead, what must take the place of metanarratives are micronarratives, or local narratives. These local narratives operate on a community level (similar to the example given above of the scientific communities), and do not attempt to legitimate themselves through any reference to a

²³ Ibid., 37.

²⁴ J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth is Stranger than it used to be* (London: SPCK, 1995), 70.

metanarrative. For many postmodern theorists, there is no narrative, no matter how exhaustive, that can possibly include everybody's reality and experiences. Secondly, there is an ethical objection to metanarratives. For Walsh and Middleton, although they admit Lyotard does not say this,²⁶ metanarratives are oppressive in their "false claims to 'totality'".²⁷ Any claims to moral universality are little more than "the legitimation of the vested interests of those who have the power and authority to make such universal pronouncements."²⁸ This is reminiscent of Foucault's approach. However, Middleton and Walsh, together with other evangelical theologians, including Grenz,²⁹ incorrectly interpret Lyotard's understanding of what constitutes a metanarrative. They confuse Lyotard's understanding of metanarratives as referring to their scope and not to what they appeal. Hence, they conclude that the Bible is a metanarrative, and mistakenly look for ways to intergrate their understanding of what they perceive metanarratives to be with postmodern thought. Although there is much to commend in their work, this is a fundamental problem. It misinterprets Lyotard's understanding and in doing so completely misses the nature of what a metanarrative is, and consequently misinforms those who look to their work as a guide for evangelical Christians. More will be said on this issue later.

Returning to Lyotard's work, according to him (commentating specifically on science and influenced by Ludwig Wittgenstein), what there is instead is a plethora of 'language games'.³⁰ "What we have here is a process of delegitimation fuelled by the demand for legitimation itself."³¹ Furthermore, this "represents...an internal erosion of the legitimacy of knowledge."³² The lines and boundaries that once separated the various disciplines of science are now blurred and overlap. This has given way to a "flat network of areas of enquiry, the respective areas of which are in constant flux."³³ As this fragmentation increases so then the variety of language games is apparent. Regarding the concept of language, Wittgenstein argued that "Our language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and

²⁵ Ibid., 70.

²⁶ Ibid, 214 n. 19.

²⁷ Ibid., 71.

²⁸ Ibid., 71.

²⁹ Brian Ingraffia is also guilty of this. See his *Postmodern Theory and Biblical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

³⁰ See section on Ludwig Wittgenstein for an explication of language games.

³¹ Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 39.

³² Ibid., 39.

of houses with new additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses.”³⁴ Lyotard argues that new languages can be added such as machine languages, new systems of musical notation and the language of the genetic code.³⁵ There is no universal meta-language that has ultimate authority. Lyotard argues that because there can be no legitimation on a ‘grand’ scale, speculative, or what he calls humanistic philosophy has to relinquish its legitimation duties.³⁶ There can be no longer a commitment to generalising perspectives and discourses. As with Wittgenstein, what Lyotard is actually advocating is that philosophy is limited only in its ability to determine possible solutions to epistemological problems.

Another problem that arises in relation to the metanarrative becomes clear when the question asked as to why is a particular understanding of reality considered right, and why does it have authority? The adoption of a particular construction of reality marginalises other claims about, or interpretations of, reality. Consequently, a power relationship is established in which one understanding is prioritised and another is oppressed and suppressed. Why should metanarratives take priority with their totalizing claims when they are founded on such false grounds, legitimated only for a means to an end? Quite conclusively the metanarrative is the source of many problems. There are metanarratives that have emerged from the Enlightenment hubris such as Marxist political theory. One can look also to the story of colonialism for an insight into how Western ideas can take a universal perspective and become totalising. Whatever metanarrative is posited, as Eagleton comments above, a dark suspicion many postmodernist theorists have is that it is a terroristic device that has oppressed many with its universalising of a particular, local version. This claim certainly has good grounds. For example, the Crusades or the Communist regime under Stalin, are good sources of evidence to see the force of this argument.

³³ Ibid., 39.

³⁴ Wittgenstein cited in Lyotard, 40. Browning writes, “Lyotard conceives of language as necessarily involving an indeterminate plurality of language games. He follows Wittgenstein in recognising language as being inexorably social in that addressors and addressees are implied in any linguistic operation.” See his *Lyotard and the End of Grand Narratives*, 25.

³⁵ Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 41.

³⁶ Ibid., 41.

Foucault is an example of a theorist who has fought against the oppression of 'metanarratives',³⁷ which, he claims, crush the voice of the minority through repression. What postmodern thought has certainly (and very popularly) done is to fight the corner for 'difference' and 'otherness'. This obviously has great merits. For many postmodern theorists such narratives are based on fictive premises that only reveal vested interests when deconstructed (Baudrillard, Foucault). Foucault is particularly interested in the relationship between knowledge and power. He argued that the obsession with first principles in Western society led to a 'will to knowledge', that put the vested interests of either the individual working for themselves, an institution or the State as the motive for interpreting a particular understanding or discourse (clearly the influence of Nietzsche). Therefore when talking about how power operates in contemporary society, he argues

that the real political task in a society such as ours is to criticise the working institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticise them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight them.³⁸

Therefore, the appeal to 'objective truth' or knowledge is untenable because it is intrinsically bound up in the 'will to knowledge' relationship, which only produces *versions* of the truth. Foucault's analysis of mental institutions, hospitals, and the prison environment seeks to demonstrate the power relationships inherent within them. He concludes that no metanarratives can explain how the role of power functions within these institutions. Understanding has to rely on localised theories.

Lyotard develops this line of thought to some extent, in that he argues that not only do metanarratives fail to provide understanding, and not only are they oppressive, but people do not believe the grand stories with their transcendent claims anymore.³⁹ The cacophony of voices that emits from the various metanarratives shows quite clearly that these stories are not functioning as they ought to. Many of them represent sub-cultures of different origin, lifestyles or other ethnic groupings. Moreover, many of

³⁷ 'Meta', 'master' and 'grand' refer to the same concept.

³⁸ Foucault cited in Paul Rabinow (ed.) *The Foucault Reader* (London: Penguin Books, 1984), 6.

³⁹ Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 37.

these metanarratives impose upon many groups of people a voice that does not truly represent them, à la Eagleton's analysis. The sense of otherness, of identity is obliterated by the overarching voice of metanarratives over their own identity. What right do these narratives have in representing those that have not been consulted or even acknowledged? They have none. Hence, a delegitimation of global systems of thought is underway. Objective reality is discredited as a myth. Universal narratives are replaced by local narratives.

Eagleton has gone some way in undermining the postmodern position. He suggests that there are two basic activities that keep the human race going. The first is to do with material reproduction and the second concerns sexual reproduction.⁴⁰ Eagleton offers these two as evidence that, contrary to what some postmodernists would like to suggest, it is a fallacy to suppose that the concept of the metanarrative exists only as one single all encompassing metanarrative or a multiplicity of micro-narratives. This is not in the so-called non-binary nature of postmodern thinking that some theorists like to proclaim. This all or nothingness does not really befit a phenomenon that purports to advance a heterogeneous, fragmented pluralistic view. In short, a question that needs to be asked is why cannot some form of metanarrative(s) exist alongside micronarratives? Surely this plurality would be in keeping with a postmodern view. Furthermore, to add to the complexity, many postmodern theorists do not seem to be able to identify when a micronarrative becomes a metanarrative, that is when it ceases to be local.

It has even been suggested by critics that postmodernism is itself a metanarrative.⁴¹ However, such criticisms fail to understand the points being made. Postmodern theorists, in order to communicate their ideas, have to use those tools that are available to them. In this case, they have to communicate in a world that is still influenced and controlled in many ways by the modern mind set. Hence, when postmodernists attempt to explain their views and ideas with reference to a new era (e.g. postmodernity), and the collapse of the modern age, immediately they can be, and are, accused of

⁴⁰ Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, 110.

⁴¹ Stephen Best and Douglas Kellner write, "Does not the very concept of postmodernity or of a postmodern condition presuppose a master narrative, a totalizing perspective, which envisions the transition from a previous stage of society to a new one." See their *Postmodern Theory*, 171.

formulating a new metanarrative. This seems too hasty a judgement. Although, on the surface, to argue for the collapse of modernity and the ushering in of a new intellectual phenomenon seems to be positing a new metanarrative, it seems quite clear that it isn't. When some of the component parts and traits of postmodern thought are examined more closely, it is clear that the heterogeneity of postmodern thought is a reaction against such a notion. Indeed, even to attempt to describe and pin down postmodernism could be described as a typically modern thing to do.

Interestingly, Walsh and Middleton argue for a Christian metanarrative that is non-violent and antitotalizing,⁴² and are, therefore, able to deflect the general objections that postmodernists tend to make against them. However, as argued above, this is to misunderstand Lyotard's own definition of what a metanarrative actually is. It is emphasised that it is not the scope of a metanarrative that is the problem but how it stakes its claims. In the final section it will be argued that the Christian faith, based as it is on the Bible, is not to be understood as a metanarrative in the Lyotardian sense. Rather, because the appeal for legitimation is to the God of the biblical narrative, through faith (i.e. not to any human confidence in the scientific enterprise), it avoids such accusations.

Deconstruction

As we have briefly seen, postmodern theorists have drunk deeply at the well of literary/critical theory. However, it is particularly 'deconstructionism' that will command our attention here. For many scholars, deconstruction is often perceived as the dominant philosophical context of postmodernism.⁴³ In particular we will focus on the complex work of Derrida,⁴⁴ who is commonly acknowledged to be the 'father' of deconstruction.

Derrida himself acknowledges that Nietzsche, Freud, Husserl and Heidegger are the

⁴² Middleton and Walsh, *Truth is Stranger than it used to be*, 87-107.

⁴³ Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 102.

⁴⁴ Commenting upon Derrida's style, Geoffrey Bennington writes, "...the philosophically most striking thing about Derrida's work is probably that it is *not* philosophy in any straight forward sense, but its permanent traversal, excess or outflanking. Derrida has not so much re-defined philosophy (the traditional task of philosophy) as rendered it permanently in -definite." See his *Interpreting Derrida* (London: Routledge, 2000), 7.

four main influences on his thought.⁴⁵ Indeed, it was the philosophy of Husserl that provided the focus for his first book. It is, however, his book *Of Grammatology* (1967), which is perhaps his best known work and which provides much of the basis of his thought on deconstruction. In this volume Derrida attacks the modern (Western philosophical) concept of logocentrism. In defining what logocentrism is, Guyatri Spivak, the translator of *Of Grammatology*, usefully comments that it refers to “the belief that the first and last things are the Logos, the Word, the Divine Mind, the infinite understanding of God, an infinitely creative subjectivity, and, closer to our time, the self-presence of full self-consciousness.”⁴⁶ In other words, it refers to the traditional western understanding since the days of Plato and Aristotle that meaning is only grasped in its relationship with a fixed point or reference of reality, referred to commonly as a *presence*. Derrida ruthlessly and rigorously sets about critiquing the notion that language represents the world as it actually is. This ‘realist’ understanding of language is no longer tenable for Derrida.

When philosophical positions that are based on a metaphysics of presence defend their positions on the basis of this *presence*, they invariably and often unconsciously lead to a given that is dependent on, or a derivative of, something else. Jonathan Culler cites a very good illustration that shows the difficulty of relying on such a *metaphysics of presence*.⁴⁷ He considers the flight of an arrow and suggests the arrow produces a paradox. At any given moment the arrow is at a particular spot. In fact it is always in a certain spot and never in motion, although we would insist the arrow is in motion from start to finish. Yet its motion means that it is absent at any one moment of presence. The presence of motion is conceivable “only insofar as every instant is marked with traces of the past and future. Motion can be present...only if the present instant is not something given but a product of the relations between past and future.”⁴⁸ Anything that is at once present in a certain or given instant is at the same time divided within itself, inhabited with the possibility of absence. This example, serves as a good insight into what Derrida is attempting in his deconstruction.

⁴⁵ See J. Derrida in R. Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 109. Also Guyatri C. Spivak in “Translators Preface”, in Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore & London: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), 40-41.

⁴⁶ Spivak, “Translators Preface” in Jacques Derrida *Of Grammatology*, xviii.

⁴⁷ Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1982), 94.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 94.

Essentially, what he is endeavouring to do, in a very complex fashion, is to pull the rug from under the feet of philosophy by finding paradoxes or contradictions within it. His first assault is upon logocentrism, which is entirely unacceptable to him. He writes,

The “rationality” – but perhaps that word should be abandoned for reasons that will appear at the end of this sentence -- which governs a writing thus enlarged and radicalised, no longer issues from a logos. Further, it inaugurates the destruction, not the demolition but the de-sedimentation, the de-construction, of all the significations that have their source in that of the logos. Particularly the signification of *truth*. All the metaphysical determinations of truth, and even the one beyond metaphysical ontotheology that Heidegger reminds us of, are more or less immediately inseparable from the instance of the logos, or of a reason thought within the lineage of the logos, in whatever sense it is understood.⁴⁹

The notion that there is a logos that is transcendent of knowledge, an organising pattern that exists outside of language, must be jettisoned. This type of appeal to ‘reason’ is no more than a foundationalist approach to epistemology. Language has no fixed meaning that is connected in any way to an external, fixed reality.

Furthermore, Derrida argues that closely related to this misplaced belief in logocentrism is phonocentrism, the idea that speech is more fundamental or basic than writing. In a sense it is easy to see why this might be so. Speech is self-immediate to the speaker or subject. Indeed, writing follows oral speech in the development of children. One learns how to talk before one can write or make sense of writing. This line of thought dates back to Plato who argued that writing is secondary to speaking.⁵⁰ In this tradition speech stands for immediacy – the possibility of reaching the ‘truth’. As Culler notes, “Speech is seen as in direct contact with meaning: words issue from the speaker as the spontaneous and nearly transparent signs of his present thought, which the attendant listener hopes to grasp.”⁵¹ In typically complex style, Derrida notes,

The system of ‘hearing (understanding) – oneself-speak’ through the phonic substance – which

⁴⁹ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 10.

⁵⁰ See N. P. White, *Plato on Knowledge and Reality* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976).

⁵¹ Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 100.

presents itself as the nonexterior, nonmundane, therefore nonempirical or noncontingent *signifier* – has necessarily dominated the history of the world during an entire epoch, and has even produced the idea of the world, the idea of world-origin, that arises from the difference between the worldly and the non-worldly...⁵²

The western philosophical tradition, in general, asserts that writing separates the author and the reader, writing is seen as a distinct disadvantage because it is secondary. Speech, on the other hand, is seen as primary because its contact with the source is immediate. What, however, Derrida does is reverse these roles and gives primacy to writing over speech. He does this by demonstrating (with reference to Plato, Rousseau, Husserl and Condillac) that if writing is understood in the traditional way then speech is already a form or type of writing.⁵³ Writing can affect speech. Indeed, again drawing on the influence of Saussure,⁵⁴ Derrida argues that writing can disguise and usurp speech.⁵⁵ This then leads to the understanding that the relationship between the two is far more complex than first thought. What Derrida actually does is turn Saussure's understanding of the priority of speech over writing on its head. Ironically it is Saussure's own arguments that lead Derrida to this conclusion. As Culler succinctly puts it, "Speech is to be understood as a form of writing, an instance of the basic linguistic mechanism manifested in writing."⁵⁶

Derrida uses the term 'writing' to refer to all communicative systems other than vocal. Indeed, for Derrida, this is something that is now becoming more and more widely acknowledged. He writes, "By a slow movement whose necessity is hardly perceptible, everything that for at least some twenty centuries tended and finally succeeded in being gathered under the name of language is beginning to let itself be transferred to, or at least summarised under, the name of writing."⁵⁷ Indeed, it's very common to speak of almost everything as 'text'.

In developing his argument for the role of writing, Derrida attacks Saussure's thesis for continuing the western tradition of giving speech priority over writing. Saussure

⁵² Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 7-8.

⁵³ Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 102.

⁵⁴ See Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* (London: Owen, 1960).

⁵⁵ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 51-55.

⁵⁶ Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 101.

⁵⁷ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 6.

only recognises the latter in no more than a narrow and derivative function.⁵⁸

However,

What Saussure saw without seeing, knew without being able to take into account, following in that the entire metaphysical tradition, is that a certain model of writing was necessarily but provisionally imposed as instrument and technique of representation of a system of language.⁵⁹

Because of the philosophical limitations of his day, Saussure was unable to unfold the idea that every sign refers to a sign and the “sign of a sign signifies writing”.⁶⁰ It is logocentrism, so Derrida argues, which is the culprit and cause of Saussure and many of his successors not being able to break out of such a narrow and confining tradition.⁶¹ But if Saussure failed to capitalise on his findings then, according to Derrida, Charles Peirce came far closer. Derrida writes, “Peirce goes very far in the direction that I have called the de-construction of the transcendental signified, which, at one time or another, would place a reassuring end to the reference from sign to sign.”⁶² Furthermore, Peirce “considers the indefiniteness of reference as the criterion that allows us to recognise that we are indeed dealing with a system of signs.”⁶³ Here, Derrida argues that the transcendental signified, the thing in itself that is at the centre of logocentrism, is itself a sign. Again to quote Derrida, “The so-called ‘thing itself’ is always a *representamen* shielded from the simplicity of intuitive evidence. The *representamen* functions only by giving rise to an *interpretant* that itself becomes a sign and so on to infinity.”⁶⁴

Derrida radicalises two of the three principles Saussure expounds in his own semiotic theory and exploits them to full effect. Firstly, Derrida takes ‘the arbitrary nature of the sign’. In a nutshell Saussure here refers to the fact that it is arbitrary that in English there is one word for love, whilst in the Greek there are several, or in English one word *cheap* is employed but in French two words are used, *bon marche*.⁶⁵ These represent abstract distinctions and are not imposed by the nature of the world: “they

⁵⁸ Ibid., 30.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 43.

⁶⁰ Derrida cited in Thiselton *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 105.

⁶¹ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 43.

⁶² Ibid., 49.

⁶³ Ibid., 49.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 49.

⁶⁵ See Thiselton’s *New Horizons* for other examples, 84-85.

are not linguistic realities”,⁶⁶ they are simply arbitrary in nature. Secondly, these signs are part of a linguistic system from which they generate their meanings by the similarities or differences (this is a key word that Derrida radicalises) to other elements within the system. Famously, Saussure uses the illustration of a chess game to illustrate the differential nature of language.⁶⁷ In a game of chess it is the present position of the pieces that is important. How the pieces arrive at their present position is of no interest and no special insight would be gained. Each piece in a game and its value is what matters. Meaning is generated by how a particular sign relates to the variety of signs that surround it.

Derrida also makes significant use of Saussure’s key term, ‘difference’. Derrida cleverly changes ‘difference’ to *differance*. *Differance* has two meanings. The first means to differ. This is straightforward in that it means simply to differ from other signs or things. The difference comes from showing how something is distinct or varies from something else. This is a direct appeal to Saussure’s observation that a sign derives its meaning from its relationship to other signs around it. Secondly, the other meaning is to defer. In this deferral sense Derrida is referring to the endless play of signifiers which give way to or defer to the next signifier. *Differance* provisionally refers “to differing, both as spacing/temporalizing and as the movement that structures every dissociation.”⁶⁸ Furthermore, as Thiselton points out, Derrida cannot help but notice that the *a* in *differance*, in contrast to the *e* in difference can obviously be written or read but cannot be detected as a phonological entity.⁶⁹ “The temporal and spatial differentiations, however, are themselves products of prior differentiations, and in turn give rise to others.”⁷⁰ What we have then is difference giving way to *differance* in an endless play of what Derrida refers to as *traces*. Spivak writes that for “trace one can substitute ‘arche-writing’ (archi-écriture), or differance...”⁷¹ Having a double meaning, ‘trace’ generally refers to the marks and tracks that writing makes which consequently allow it to move forward. As Thiselton succinctly puts it, texts “are traces in the sense of being products of previous traces, and tracks in the sense of

⁶⁶ Ferdinand de Saussure cited in Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 85.

⁶⁷ See his *Course in General Linguistics* for his unpacking of this.

⁶⁸ Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl’s Theory of Signs* (Evanston: North Western University Press, 1973), 130.

⁶⁹ Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 105.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁷¹ Spivak, “Translators Preface” in Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, xiv.

moving ‘on the way to’ other traces.”⁷² If, as noted above, Saussure employs the illustration of a chessboard and its pieces to show how language works, then Derrida uses the metaphor of the ‘bottomless chessboard’: “there is no underlying ground to support it, and play has no meaning beyond itself.”⁷³ This highlights one of Derrida’s better known quotes, “*Il n’y a pas de hors-texte*”,⁷⁴ (‘there is nothing outside the text’).

Derrida moves on (equipped with the ability to deconstruct the transcendental signified) to develop Heidegger’s notion of erasure. In simple terms this refers to the crossing out of a word and leaving the word legible but deleted. This serves two purposes. Firstly, it shows the sign clearly as a presence in the text and secondly it shows its inarticulability. For Heidegger, it is the erasure of the inarticulable presence of Being.⁷⁵ Heidegger argues that Being must be understood in all three dimensions of temporality – past, present and future.⁷⁶ If Being is understood in such a way then we will realise that it can be absent as well as present. Heidegger is letting the word play a very fleeting role in his text before taking it away and moving on. Derrida adapts this device whilst acknowledging that Heidegger is the originator and authority of this methodological tool.⁷⁷ However, Derrida’s use of erasure differs from Heidegger. *Sous rature* (under erasure)⁷⁸ for Derrida refers to his use of trace as “the mark of the absence of a presence, an always already present, of the lack at the origin that is the condition of thought and experience.”⁷⁹ (Think of the illustration of the arrow that travels and is present yet absent.) For Heidegger erasure is only used for signs that stand near the metaphysical abyss, whereas Derrida uses this device with any sign.

Derrida often complains of being misunderstood, and this is probably a valid complaint considering the complex nature of his thought. His intention, he claims, is not to eradicate the possibility of objective truth, but to find those elements within a particular position that are contradictory and deconstruct them in order to show a

⁷²Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 108.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁷⁴ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 158.

⁷⁵ Spivak “Translators Preface” in Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, xvii.

⁷⁶ See *Being and Time* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962) for his unpacking of this.

⁷⁷ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 18.

⁷⁸ See Spivak for a discussion of this term in “Translators Preface” in Derrida’s, *Of Grammatology*, xvii.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, xvii..

different perspective that is equally valid. This form of Derridean deconstruction has many implications when dealing with texts, particularly biblical texts. Christopher Butler succinctly highlights four of the main problems.⁸⁰ Firstly, Derrida attempts to abolish anything in the world that is external to the text.⁸¹ Secondly, all texts are self-contradicting and incomplete. Thirdly, there is the problem of establishing a criterion of interpretation without the subjectivity of the critic interfering. Finally, if Derrida is correct in his findings, all interpretation is condemned to indeterminacy.

The Postmodern (de-centred) Self

The nineteenth century produced a great surge in the belief of progress. Through reason and observation the power to self-improve was endless.⁸² Out of some of these Enlightenment principles developed a modernist approach that led the way in presenting the self as autonomous. This trust, especially in science, produced what is sometimes referred to as the *grand narrative* of modernism. Kenneth Gergen writes, “It is a story told by Western culture to itself about its journey through time, a story that makes this journey both intelligible and gratifying. The grand narrative is one of continuous upward movement—improvement, conquest, achievement—toward some goal.”⁸³ With such a belief and understanding humanity saw vast and unlimited possibilities. The publication of Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859)⁸⁴ is one example of the scientific narrative of progress, which captivated the imagination and conviction of many. Humanity can achieve almost anything it puts its rational mind to. Middleton and Walsh put it well when they describe this particular understanding of selfhood. “Humans are independent, self-reliant, self-centring and self-integrating rational subjects. This is a fundamentally heroic understanding of human subjectivity. We are who we are by overcoming all that binds or inhibits us and by determining for ourselves who we will be.”⁸⁵ The self (centred) has supreme confidence and self-

⁸⁰ Christopher Butler, *Interpretation, Deconstruction and Ideology*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

⁸¹ See Alex Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism: A Marxist Critique* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990) for a brief but direct critique of post-structuralism. In particular Callinicos lists the three areas of rationality, resistance and the subject as stumbling blocks in Derrida’s and other post-structuralist thought.

⁸² For a detailed analysis of the influence of Enlightenment thought on the formation of the modern self see Charles Taylor’s *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 393-418.

⁸³ Kenneth J. Gergen, *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 30.

⁸⁴ Charles Darwin, *Origin of the Species* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁸⁵ Middleton and Walsh, *Truth is stranger than it used to be*, 47.

assuredness. Humankind is *Homo autonomus*. Middleton and Walsh write, “It is not an overstatement to say that the whole modernist project depends on this view of human selfhood. Without an independently rational self there would be no reason to trust the results and achievements of modern science. If the self were not an autonomous subject then the realist world of modernity would have no one to master it technologically.”⁸⁶

However, it needs to be briefly stated, at this juncture, that this seemingly one-dimensional understanding of the modern self is somewhat simplistic. The rational self, although very influential and important, is not the only example of modern selfhood. Indeed, some sociologists argue that a fragmentation of the self existed before the so-called postmodern self emerged.⁸⁷ Linda Woodhead argues that there are four construals of modern selfhood that need consideration: the bestowed self, the rational self, the boundless self and the effective self.⁸⁸ So it is not just the postmodern self that is considered to be fragmented but also the modern. Consequently, this should be taken into consideration when reviewing those whose work treats the modern self in such a homogeneous way. This is particularly the case in some evangelical scholarship, with Middleton and Walsh as a good example.

Furthermore, there are good grounds for acknowledging that the postmodern self has strands that cannot be considered as fragmented as was first believed. A case in point is the evangelical charismatic movement with its emphasis on building strong Christian communities that also encourage respect of the individual and self. Trevor Hart comments on the danger of this: “The typical post-modern denial of anything called ‘human nature’ or of commensurable spheres of common human experience thus paralyses every attempt at imaginative self-transcendence and leaves us trapped within the isolation of our own ways of seeing and doing things.”⁸⁹ It is important to bear these points in mind when unpacking what appear to be rather one-sided versions of the fragmented self.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 48.

⁸⁷ See, for example, the work of Anthony Giddens in *The Consequences of Modernity and Modernity and Self Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Also Taylor’s *The Sources of the Self*.

⁸⁸ See Woodhead’s, ‘Theology and the Fragmentation of the Self’ in *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 1:1 (March 1999), 53-72.

⁸⁹ Trevor Hart, ‘Migrants Between Nominatives: Ethical Imagination and a Hermeneutics of Lived Experience’, in *Theology in Scotland* 6: 2 (Autumn, 1999), 88.

This concept of the 'self' has been intensely scrutinised under the postmodern microscope. Gone now is the anthropological assuredness of the modernist mind. The modern myth that the individual has unlimited possibilities has been all but discredited. The concept of the autonomous 'self' as a rational subject that, if it so desires, can achieve anything is losing credibility. The 'self' is simply a product of the sociological climate. Moreover, it is an invention of the Western world. Because of its particular origin, which limits its capacity to make genuine universal criteria, the modern self is a social construct that must now be deconstructed.⁹⁰ The dismantling of the modern, rational self is unavoidable in a postmodern world. Indeed, as we have briefly seen, what some theorists would now argue is that language or discourse is independent of humanity. What we have in this case is a "system of language that *preexists* the individual; it is 'always there,' available for social usage. Thus, anything said about the world of the 'self' should, in principle, be placed in quotations."⁹¹ "*Homo autonomous* is reconstituted as *Homo linguisticus*."⁹² For many (not just postmodern theorists) the demise of the autonomous human subject is a huge release. Indeed, evangelicals like Middleton and Walsh can confidently say good riddance to such a culturally outdated idea.⁹³

In contrast to the modernist self however, the postmodern self, as Thiselton writes, "faces life and society with suspicion rather than trust."⁹⁴ Furthermore, quoting N. Denzin, he writes, "In the wake of the collapse of traditional values or universal criteria, the 'postmodern self' becomes 'the self who embodies the multiple contradictions of post-modernism, while experiencing itself through the everyday performances of gender, class, and racially-linked social identities'".⁹⁵ The trust that was present within the optimistic confines of the rational modern self is no longer evident. If the modernist concept of the self bred confidence, the postmodern concept

⁹⁰ Gergen writes that "both the romantic and the modern beliefs about the self are falling into disuse, and the social arrangements that they support are eroding. This is largely a result of the forces of social saturation. Emerging technologies saturate us with the voices of humankind—both harmonious and alien." See his *Saturated Self*, 6.

⁹¹ Gergen, *The Saturated Self*, 81.

⁹² Middleton and Walsh, *Truth is Stranger than it used to be*, 51.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁹⁴ Thiselton, *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 11-12. Thiselton's understanding of the fragmentation thesis comes under attack from Woodhead, who argues that he offers a very uncritical view of it, which results in a flawed understanding and failure to appreciate that some strands of the postmodern self actually offer stable identities. See 'Theology and the Fragmentation of the Self', 68-70.

⁹⁵ Thiselton, *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self*, 11.

of a de-centred self breeds destabilisation.⁹⁶ The postmodern self now seeks fulfilment in the plethora of life choices that are available. We are left in a permanent flux of relativity.⁹⁷ In many cases, (though not all, as has been noted above) postmodern anthropology seems now to go to the other extreme. Instead of certainty and purpose, there is now play; for determinacy there is indeterminacy; fixed ideas are replaced by process; the heterogeneous properties of the postmodern self come to the fore. The notion of a de-centred self results in a self that is not anchored to anything. It is a self that floats upon the waters of postmodernity like a fragment of driftwood, on tides of momentary desires and needs, and tossed about by the latest whims, fads and fascinations. Who you are depends on where you are, who you are with, what you are doing and the time that you are doing it. This fragmentation of the self produces a chameleon-like self, and a very insecure chameleon at that.

A major influence upon this is the consumerist culture, which affects almost every sphere of life. Indeed, everything in life becomes an item for consumption; something that can be taken or simply left or abandoned. As Bauman claims, “consumer conduct moves steadily into the position of, simultaneously, the cognitive and moral focus of life.”⁹⁸ This consumerist culture is supported and promoted by new technologies and the media. We are nurtured on a diet of adverts every fifteen minutes on the television or commercial radio. One only has to surf the internet and visit sites that not only offer the cheapest deals, but also do so in a way that is gratifying, giving a sense of satisfaction. Huge shopping centres such as the Trafford Centre near Manchester try to make shopping a holistic experience. In places such as these you pay not so much for the product but everything else that goes to make the complete shopping experience. “Consumerism has become central to the social and cultural life of the technologically advanced societies in the later twentieth century.”⁹⁹ Furthermore, writes Robert Bocock, “Consumerism now affects the ways in which people build up, maintain, a sense of who they are, of who they wish to be.”¹⁰⁰ Barry Smart adds that “in such circumstances it is the pursuit of pleasure through the consumption of commodities

⁹⁶ See Woodhead for a different understanding, ‘Theology and the Fragmentation of the Self’.

⁹⁷ Lyon, *Postmodernity*, 71.

⁹⁸ Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, 49. Bauman argues that consumerism is central to postmodern society. Consumerism is the driving force behind and the focus for the changing shape of today’s society.

⁹⁹ Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 74.

¹⁰⁰ Richard Bocock cited in David Lyon, *Ibid.*, 74.

and services that has become a necessity, rather than self denial or the deferring of gratification.”¹⁰¹ This results in values and beliefs being commodified. Consequently, relativity comes to the fore and with it uncertainty is born. Everything is reduced to exchange values, thereby almost wiping out anything known to have lasting value.

Having said that, consumerism is not just about purely material gains for its own sake. It is not simply about satisfying material needs (although that is certainly a major factor). Consumer culture also helps form social boundaries, relationships and identities. It is true to say, however, that these relationships and social circles generally group those who are compatible in a consumerist sense. ‘Keeping up with the Jones’s’ is only possible if you can match their consumption output. If the modernist ethos majored on the production of industrialism and the work-centred society, then consumerist culture, with its postmodern traits, focuses on the end product and the consumption thereof.¹⁰²

The ramifications for such a consumerist approach to life are far reaching. In particular moral accountability can become almost non-existent. The moral, or even amoral, stance that one can take can only be measured on an individual level. The old foundationalist approach to understanding and constructing moral frameworks, being no longer tenable, results in a pick and mix approach to what ethical framework suits you. This choice of framework lasts (in theory) for as long as the consumer is satisfied with it. The beauty of the consumerist approach means that as soon as the consumer feels that a particular framework no longer works then it can be jettisoned or perhaps modified (postmodified!) for another. The epitome of a postmodern approach is to be able to construct a particular framework that can be articulated in today’s consumerist climate. This, for some, proves to be a helpful antidote to the self-confident and assured claims of modernity’s universal outlook.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Barry Smart, *Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1993).

¹⁰² See Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*. Interview with Bauman, 205-228. Bauman argues strongly for a reversal of the traditional view of society from being production orientated to consumption orientated. See also Alan Storkey, ‘Postmodernism is Consumption’ in *Christ and Consumerism: A Critical Analysis of the Spirit of the Age* (eds.) Craig Bartholomew and Thorsten Moritz (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000), 100-117. Storkey offers a succinct overview of the development of consumerism culture.

¹⁰³ Middleton and Walsh, *Truth is Stranger than it used to be*, 59.

This almost hedonistic thirst for consumerism, which is a defining feature of postmodernism, has contributed in no small way to what Gergen refers to as the 'saturated self'.¹⁰⁴ The 'saturated self' is the state humanity (Western) has reached with the proliferation and development of the technologies of 'social saturation'. Gergen cites developments which are technologies of saturation, such as rail, postal services, the car, the telephone and media in all its forms, as contributing to the demise of the modern view of the self toward the postmodern. This is leading to the erasure of the individual self as traditionally understood.¹⁰⁵ Relationships, as a consequence of the fragmentation of the self, also become fragmented. The choice overload with which these new technological advances have privileged people can, however, result in identity crisis for some. Furthermore, in what seems to be a rather contradictory state of affairs, as traditional relationships are exchanged for postmodern, partial and multiple relationships, we are exposed to more relationships of a modern and committed type than ever before. This is due to the media. It is possible to turn on the television and channel hop for half an hour and experience, in many forms and presentations, traditional and modern relationships.

Gergen coins the phrase 'ersatz being', when referring to the ability of the postmodern self to turn to and enter immediately into identities or relationships of various different forms.¹⁰⁶ He writes, "In ersatz being, the traditional forms are sustained; in the postmodern world, however, such forms may be ripped out of customary contexts and played out wherever time and circumstance permit."¹⁰⁷ The self becomes so overrun by the plethora of consumerist choice that it results in no self at all, or at least a self that is hardly recognisable as a definable self. Indeed, as the postmodern self develops it takes on the characteristics of its social surroundings. These surroundings are often vastly diverse and contribute to the fragmentation and de-centring of the postmodern self. This schizophrenic existence is what Gergen refers to as 'multiphrenia.'¹⁰⁸ Instead of the old modernist type of certainty there now lies before us a multiplicity of choices to

¹⁰⁴ Gergen, *The Saturated Self*, 1-17.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 49-53. The technologies of social saturation, for Gergen, have greatly accelerated the disposition of the self far away from Romantic and modern understandings that used to exist. Social saturation has come to dominate all aspects of everyday life.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 183.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 183.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 73-80.

suit the situation(s) and so-called needs that we find ourselves in: so much for the laid back lifestyle that Eagleton refers to!

In some respects this ability to make choices, as and when the moment takes us, illustrates that there still remains an autonomous element to the postmodern self. However, it is not in the same mould as the modern version. The postmodern self can be claimed to be a decentered self. Whereas the modern self was autonomous in the sense that it made decisions in order to self improve or better itself in a progressive manner; the decentered self does not look for progress for progress's sake. Instead, it makes choices which are ultimately disposable as other options or preferences become available or are more favourable. There is a nomadic character to the postmodern self that, if taken to the extreme, results in a homeless self. Whereas Peter Berger has referred to the 'homeless mind', perhaps here we should think in terms of the homeless heart.¹⁰⁹

Religion, of course, has not avoided being washed along in this tide of consumerism. Indeed, what the postmodern religious self is able to do is to pick and mix elements from different religions in order to construct a version that best suits it (hence the proliferation of the New Age).¹¹⁰ This results in the autonomous self now able to do without any outside religious authority. Furthermore, religion is more personal and consequently has nothing to do with anybody else. This obviously is a huge challenge to religions of all faiths and denominations. However, this dearth of authority and lack of moral accountability has produced a reaction against the floating, playful freedom of anything goes, towards fundamentalism. Lyon writes, concerning this negative reaction toward choice overload, "the choice-overload from consumerism (with its lack of guidelines and reference points), and unease with the trivialization of choice - offer a chance for retrenchment and trust in new authority figures, absolute truths, and fixed certainties."¹¹¹ Is this evidence that suggests the postmodern self is not all it proposes to be? It certainly seems that many people cannot exist in an anchorless, free-floating, nomadic way in the sense that the postmodern self, taken to its extreme, seems to advocate. What will inevitably ensue is a moral crisis of catastrophic proportions. Here

¹⁰⁹ See Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland*, 50.

¹¹⁰ See Paul Heelas, *The New Age Movement* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) for more on this.

we have what seems to be a major weakness in the postmodern self. The so-called freedom of choice open and available to all cannot really mean what it says. “Every choice inevitably rules out a whole series of other options. It is literally impossible to ‘keep your options open’ and live a life of any significance.”¹¹² Furthermore, it can be argued that the choices put in front of us are not ‘real’ choices. The options presented before us are put there by those who wish to manipulate the client in order to serve their own interests. This results in consumers opting for something that they do not really need at all. So, in apparently acting autonomously, the client is duped by smooth and persuasive selling methods to make that purchase, which, in turn, makes her/him feel good (until the newer version arrives). A good example would be the purchase of a new computer. A person owns a computer that is perfectly capable of doing the job for which it is currently needed. However, technology moves so fast as to render the current model seemingly out of date. Advertising pushes newer and faster models into the face of the potential customer/consumer, attempting to lure them into buying the next model, because they feel it will improve their life.

In contemporary theology there is a recognition of the *zeitgeist* that we inhabit and there are developments that have taken place that recognise that the fragmentation of the self is something that needs addressing. Consequently, some theologians are attempting to formulate a theology that incorporates a communitarian understanding of humanity and which takes into consideration the relational aspects of society. This will be addressed later in the thesis as the work of Grenz is analysed.

Conclusion

Thus far, some of the major issues that directly impinge on evangelical theology have been discussed. The so-called examination of the demise of the metanarrative has shown that although it may first appear to be antithetical to the Christian faith, it seems less so once Lyotard’s original definition has been fully understood. The cause for much panic is found in the misreading of what Lyotard means. It is not the scope or breadth of a story that constitutes a metanarrative, but that to which it looks for its legitimation. It has been noted above that some evangelical scholars have

¹¹¹ Ibid., 75.

¹¹² Middleton and Walsh, *Truth is Stranger than it used to be*, 59.

misunderstood Lyotard's meaning of metanarrative. Grenz is one such scholar who misunderstands the basic concept that Lyotard has in mind. This is clearly illustrated in his earlier *Primer on Postmodernism*, and is really the only area in which he explicitly disagrees with an element of postmodern thought. Ironically, it is based upon a misinterpretation. Even in later work he refers to the "metanarrative which Christians espouse."¹¹³

Deconstruction has also been understood as an anathema to Christianity.¹¹⁴ This has its roots in the notion that everything, including the Bible, is open to interpretation, thus encouraging a radical pluralism. This is true, to a degree.¹¹⁵ That is, because everything we understand is filtered through our interpretative framework, and, therefore, has been developed according to a particular cultural environment, nothing can be understood in terms of objective truth. This is contentious for those many evangelical Christians who are propositionalist in their epistemic outlook. Grenz argues for the use of a Christian interpretive framework that endorses such a postmodern approach. Derrida's claim does positively lead to communitarian emphasis on interpretation, and again Grenz puts much emphasis on the communitarian understanding of knowledge. However, as a consequence, the modern notion of objective truth is no longer tenable. Grenz is happy to go along with this but realises that it is a very contentious direction to travel. Communitarian consensus determines whether an interpretation of a text or thing is acceptable or not. This means that not all interpretations are deemed good (or bad), but means that the members of a particular community can judge as they see fit. Communities thus establish contexts from which to establish particular meanings. From a Christian perspective, the notion that everything we see around us is an interpretation has its distinct advantages. What Grenz does to try and safeguard against poor interpretations is add the proviso that it is the Holy Spirit who guides the specifically Christian community in its understanding of the world. We shall see that this does have its

¹¹³ See Grenz, 'The Universality of the Jesus Story and the Incredulity Toward Metanarratives', in *No Other Gods Before Me? Evangelicals and the Challenge of World Religions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 96.

¹¹⁴ Derrida's claim that there is nothing outside the text has been understood as everything is simply open to interpretation. In defending himself against this simplistic view, Derrida wrote, "The phrase that for some has become a sort of slogan of deconstruction, in general so badly understood ('there is nothing outside the text'), means nothing other than: *there is nothing outside context*'. See Derrida, afterword to *Limited Inc* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 136.

¹¹⁵ Of course, this is very true. Different groups do interpret the Bible in very diverse ways. Indeed, all sorts of interpretations have been used to defend certain beliefs. For example, biblical texts have been cited to defend slavery. The same can be said about biblically based defences of apartheid.

problems. Who decides the correct understanding of an issue? Indeed, who decides that the Holy Spirit has actually guided the community in a particular setting? The subjectivity of these questions will be dealt with later.

Furthermore, Christian claims have as much right or validity as any other. Now, the Christian faith can, with as much legitimacy as any other belief system, promote its worldview on a level footing with others, and this should serve to sharpen Christian theological thinking in anticipation of the postmodern challenges to be faced.

Finally, as has been intimated, the postmodern de-stabilising of the 'self' has led to a flurry of activity in communitarian thinking. These developments have helped to generate theological constructions that emphasise the relational aspect of society and take the model of the Trinity as their standard. All these aspects will be considered in more detail later in the thesis, when suggestions will be made regarding the possibility of incorporating some of these aspects of postmodern thought into an evangelical theological methodology.

Ludwig Wittgenstein's Linguistic Turn in Philosophy

Wittgenstein is one of the pivotal figures of twentieth century philosophy. Indeed, his influence has in some ways helped determine the shift from the modern to the postmodern. Three works, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921), *The Blue and Brown Books* (1958)¹ and *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) illustrate the change that has taken place in contemporary Western philosophy. His work has certainly influenced many postmodern and critical theorists.

Wittgenstein's Early Thought

It is common in Wittgensteinian studies to divide his career into two parts. The *Tractatus* written early in Wittgenstein's career and submitted as his PhD at Cambridge University in 1929 tends to follow a modern approach to the understanding of language. The majority of the book is concerned with the nature of language and its relation to the world. In his Preface he writes that "the aim of the book is to set a limit to thought, or rather—not to thought, but to the expression of thought."² It attempts, like the logical atomists,³ to construct a language that is ruthlessly logical. However, Wittgenstein differs from traditional logical atomism in that he deals more with ontological concerns than the ontological/epistemological interests expressed by the former. That is not to say that logical atomism did not have any influence upon him, for it did. That said, he didn't use the term in the *Tractatus*, referring rather to 'atomic facts'. This is hardly surprising, since, studying under Bertrand Russell, Wittgenstein was immersed in this tradition. Again, in the Preface to the *Tractatus* he writes, "I will only mention that I am indebted to Frege's great works and to the writings of my friend Mr. Bertrand Russell for much of the stimulation of my thoughts."⁴

¹ *The Blue and Brown Books* were the result of lecture notes dictated to his students at Cambridge University. The substance of the 'Blue Book' was recorded during 1933-34. He dictated the 'Brown Book' to two of his students, Francis Skinner and Alice Ambrose, in 1934-35. See Rush Rhee's outlining of this in the Preface to *The Blue and Brown Books* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), v-xiv.

² Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), 3.

³ 'Logical Atomism' refers to the philosophy developed by Bertrand Russell and Alfred North Whitehead in the early twentieth century, epitomised in their great work, *Principia Mathematica*, published in three volumes between 1910-1913.

⁴ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 3.

In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein adheres to what scholars call the ‘picture theory.’⁵ The picture theory is thought to have originated while he was serving in the trenches on the Eastern Front in the First World War. In the midst of war he was still preoccupied with the conundrum of what gives propositions their significance. It is said that he read a report in a magazine concerning a car accident in Paris. What made an impact on Wittgenstein was the nature of the model of the accident that was presented to the judge. It was seemingly able to represent the accident as it corresponded to what actually took place in the accident. Models of persons, cars and places were formed that corresponded to what took place. From reading this account, he believed that propositions could do the same. So for Wittgenstein, the picture theory refers to the idea that elementary propositions (propositions that denote ‘atomic’ facts)⁶ are pictures of atomic facts in the world.⁷ “A proposition is a picture of reality. A proposition is a model of reality as we imagine it.”⁸ As Avrum Stroll notes, “What Wittgenstein is stressing is that the fundamental connection between language and reality is via a picturing relationship.”⁹ Wittgenstein comments further:

At first sight a proposition—one set out on the printed page, for example—does not seem to be a picture of the reality with which it is concerned. But no more does musical notation at first sight seem to be a picture of music, nor our phonetic notation (the alphabet) to be a picture of our speech. And yet these sign-languages prove to be pictures, even in the ordinary sense, of what they represent.¹⁰

According to Wittgenstein the ideal language mirrors or pictures the world as it is. However, to be able to do this he insists that a language must be employed that can accurately depict reality. Ordinary languages such as German, French or English are inadequate tools for grappling with the intricate detail of philosophical problems.

⁵ In this doctrine, language is made up of propositions that picture the world. These propositions are the expressions of thoughts which are logical pictures of facts.

⁶ See Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 2.01. A succinct explanation of the theses in the *Tractatus* is summarised well by A. J. Ayer. He writes, “The world is said to be a totality of facts which themselves consist in the existence of what are called ‘atomic facts. The[y] are composed of simple objects, each of which can be named. These names can be significantly combined in ways that express elementary propositions. Each elementary proposition is logically independent of all its fellows. They are all positive and each of them depicts a possible state of affairs which constitutes its sense. These pictures themselves are facts and share a logical and pictorial form with what they represent. Their possession of this form is something that is not assertible but merely shown. The fact that they are logically independent means that in order to give a complete account of reality one has to say which of them are true and which of them are false. In other words, reality consists of the respective existence and non-existence of all possible states of affairs.” See A. J. Ayer, *Ludwig Wittgenstein* (Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 1985), 17.

⁷ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 2.04.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.01.

⁹ Avrum Stroll, *Wittgenstein*, (Oxford: One World, 2002), 50.

Indeed, ordinary language was seen, as Ernest Gellner points out, as “a camouflage thrown over the real logical form, the one unique and fundamental language game or system, played between language and reality or man and reality.”¹¹ For Wittgenstein, only mathematical logic can adequately describe the world rightly. Why is this so? Quite simply, everyday language is too often ambiguous.

In everyday language it very frequently happens that the same word has different modes of signification—and so belongs to different symbols—or that two words that have different modes of signification are employed in propositions in what is superficially the same way. Thus the word ‘is’ figures as the copula, as a sign for identity, and as an expression for existence; ‘exist’ figures as an intransitive verb like ‘go’, and ‘identical’ as an adjective; we speak of *something*, but also of *something’s* happening.¹²

Thus, “In this way the most fundamental confusions are easily produced.”¹³ Ordinary language is defective and conceals the true nature of reality. In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein set out to probe the roots of language in a way that would coherently and accurately uncover what reality is. This endeavour, which was influenced by the logical atomists, and clearly located within the modern approach, was all but jettisoned in his later career. Indeed, as Anthony Kenny writes, “he ceased to believe in logical atoms or to look for a logically articulate language cloaked in ordinary language.”¹⁴

Wittgenstein’s Later Thought

In the 1930s Wittgenstein began to realise that a language which perfectly mirrored the world could not be achieved. Consequently, he put to one side the idea that language is a system of signs that can theoretically transcend everyday life.¹⁵ The traditional method of philosophy that concerned itself with probing beneath the

¹⁰ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 4.011.

¹¹ Ernest Gellner, *Words and Things: A Critical Account of Linguistic Philosophy and a Study of Ideology* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1959), 68.

¹² Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 3.323.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 3.324.

¹⁴ Anthony Kenny, *Wittgenstein*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975), 10.

¹⁵ W. D. Hudson notes three grounds upon which Wittgenstein grew dissatisfied with his theory in the *Tractatus*: (i) his recognition that propositions can form systems. (ii) his recognition of the modal component in language. (iii) his recognition of the limits of analysis. See his *Wittgenstein and Religious Belief* (London: Macmillan, 1975).

surface of 'life' to discover what reality really was, was turned upon its head by Wittgenstein's highly original thought. In the *Philosophical Investigations* he writes,

Logic lay, it seemed, at the bottom of all the sciences. For logical investigation explores the nature of all things. It seeks to see to the bottom of things and is not meant to concern itself whether what actually happens is this or that. It takes its rise, not from an interest in the facts of nature, nor from a need to grasp causal connection; but from an urge to understand the basis, or essence, of everything empirical. Not, however, as if to this end we had to hunt out new facts; it is, rather, of the essence of our investigation that we do not seek to learn anything new by it. We want to understand something that is already in plain view. For this is what we seem in some sense not to understand.¹⁶

For Wittgenstein, philosophy needed to take a radically new direction. "It is the business of philosophy, not to resolve a contradiction by means of a mathematical or logico-mathematical discovery, but to make it possible for us to get a clear view of the state of mathematics that troubles us."¹⁷ Furthermore, "Philosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything. Since everything lies open to view there is nothing to explain. For what is hidden, for example, is of no interest to us."¹⁸ He maintained that to continue to do philosophy in the traditional way, as explained in his comments above, was to take language away from everything that was essential to its function.¹⁹ "Words cannot be understood outside the context of the non-linguistic human activities into which the use of the language is interwoven."²⁰ In what appears to be an extraordinary turn around, Wittgenstein abandons and questions his early work as laid out in the *Tractatus*. The tractarian logico-mathematical methodology was jettisoned along with its findings. "For since beginning to occupy myself with philosophy again...I have been forced to recognise grave mistakes in what I wrote in that first book."²¹ Having said that, although Wittgenstein abandoned these findings, he nevertheless believed that they constituted the best alternative, indeed the only alternative available to what he now proposed.²²

¹⁶ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 89.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 125.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 126.

¹⁹ Marie McGinn, *Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations* (London: Routledge, 1997), 44.

²⁰ Kenny, *Wittgenstein*, 14.

²¹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, x.

²² Wittgenstein wrote, "Four years ago I had occasion to re-read my first book (the *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*) and to explain its ideas to someone. It suddenly seemed to me that I should publish those old thoughts and the new ones together: that the latter could be seen in the right light only by contrast with and against the background of my old way of thinking." *Philosophical Investigations*, x.

Philosophical investigation would now take a ‘grammatical turn’. Wittgenstein would now seek to do philosophy and solve philosophical problems through understanding the use of language in its context.

Our investigation is therefore a grammatical one. Such an investigation sheds light on our problem by clearing misunderstandings away. Misunderstandings concerning the use of words, caused, among other things, by certain analogies between the forms of expression in different regions of language. —Some of them can be removed by substituting one form of expression for another; this may be called an “analysis” of our forms of expression, for the process is sometimes like one of taking a thing apart.²³

It is extremely important to grasp this ‘grammatical investigation’, for it is central to his later philosophy. Indeed, it is in *Philosophical Investigations* that he attempts to unravel the intricacies of language by examining different usages of language in a variety of situations. When Wittgenstein refers to a ‘grammatical investigation’, he refers to the way we *use* language, as opposed to its construction in a syntactical sense. “One cannot guess how a word functions. One has to *look at* its use and learn from that”.²⁴ Furthermore, grammar tells us “what kind of object anything is”.²⁵ Here, he is attempting to help the reader to understand that the old traditional way of doing philosophy is too constrained by the straight-jacket of analysing how concepts work, rather than looking at the way they actually function.

In *The Blue and Brown Books* and *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein developed an approach to doing philosophy that took seriously everyday discourse. In both books he opened with quotations from Augustine’s *Confessions*. He criticises Augustine’s view of language as being far too narrow and restricted (in that Augustine posits what is basically the correspondence theory of truth—a theory not dissimilar to Wittgenstein’s own early thought). Language has very many uses and functions. Instead of a metaphysics that was dedicated to accurate pictures of the features of the world, there now must be a methodology that deals with the experiential side of

²³ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations I*, 90.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 340.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 373 .

discourse (things unsaid), as well as the meaning of language itself. He writes, “We must do away with all *explanation*, and description alone must take its place.”²⁶

Furthermore, he argues that it is our craving for generality that has aided philosophical confusion.²⁷ By ‘generality’ he means several things. Firstly, “the tendency to look for something in common to all entities which we commonly subsume under a general term.”²⁸ For example, he offers the concept of ‘game’ and suggests that we are inclined to think that there is something in common with all ‘games’. This so-called common property is then used as justification to apply the general term ‘game’ to various ‘games’. However, Wittgenstein prefers to use the notion of ‘family resemblance’ or ‘family likeness’ when thinking of such ideas. For Wittgenstein, ‘games’ form a family, with the different aspects that are contained within ‘games’ seen as being resemblances or likeness, just as some human families have similar noses, mouths or eyebrows.

Secondly, Wittgenstein argues that there is a tendency to understand, through usual forms of expression, that a general term such as ‘leaf’, if learnt, can be understood in the broad sense (the general picture of a leaf) as opposed to a particular, individual sense. The term is learnt, according to Wittgenstein, by being shown several different types of leaves. In describing this he explains how someone undertakes this task. “He was shown different leaves when he learnt the meaning of the word ‘leaf’; producing ‘in him’ an idea which we imagine to be some kind of general image.”²⁹ The word leaf is then connected with an image; an image that contains those things that are common to leaves.

Thirdly, and linked with the second premise, Wittgenstein argues that if we have the general idea of ‘leaf’ or ‘plant’ this is then connected with the general confusion “between a mental state, meaning a state of a hypothetical mental mechanism, and a mental state meaning a state of consciousness (toothache, etc.)”.³⁰

²⁶ Ibid., 109.

²⁷ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books: Preliminary Studies for the Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), 17.

²⁸ Ibid., 17.

²⁹ Ibid., 18.

³⁰ Ibid., 18.

Finally, Wittgenstein argues that our craving for generality is strongly linked to the pre-occupation with the method of science. By this, he is referring to the reducing of natural phenomena to the smallest number of natural laws.³¹ Although philosophers are constantly tempted to ask and answer questions in this way, for Wittgenstein this is the path to philosophical darkness.

Language-games

In rejecting the tried and tested (and in his opinion failed) philosophical method that was used to understand language in an isolated and abstract manner, Wittgenstein introduces the concept of the 'language-game' to develop his thesis and to avoid the confusions cited above.

The idea of 'language games' first appeared in *The Blue and Brown Books*, and is said to have come to him suddenly while watching a football match. He realised that what the players were doing with the ball is what we do with words.³² He noticed that each pass (although technically a pass) was executed in different ways. For Wittgenstein, each language game is different and includes the activities of various 'players', be they builders, tribespeople or sportsmen. The inclusion of activity as well as language must be stressed here because they contribute to the overall make-up of language. As G. L. Hagberg has observed the term 'game' is neither trivial nor bound up by following rules.³³ It is not trivial in the sense that it is *only* a game, nor is it pre-occupied with rigid rule following so as to follow a particular pattern of the way language functions. "For not only do we not think of the rules of usage—of definitions, etc.—while using language, but when we are asked to give such rules, in most cases we aren't able to do so."³⁴

He explains the significance of his work in this area as follows:

³¹ Ibid., 18.

³² See W. D. Hudson, *Ludwig Wittgenstein* (London: Lutterworth), pp. 45 for more detail concerning this.

³³ G. L. Hagberg, *Meaning and Interpretation: Wittgenstein, Henry James, and Literary Knowledge* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1994), 10.

³⁴ Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books*, 25.

I shall in the future again and again draw your attention to what I shall call language games. These are ways of using signs simpler than those in which we use the signs of our highly complicated everyday language. Language games are the forms of language with which a child begins to make use of words. The study of language games is the study of primitive forms of language or primitive languages. If we want to study the problems of truth and falsehood, of the nature of assertion, assumption, and question, we shall with great advantage look at primitive forms of language in which these forms of thinking appear without the confusing background of highly complicated processes of thought.³⁵

As David Bloor writes, “the point is to ensure that matters of principle stand out clearly. One such principle is that linguistic responses can only be understood if we see how they are integrated into patterns of activity.”³⁶ In other words, and importantly from a postmodern perspective, language is to be understood contextually. “Here the term ‘language games’ is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life.”³⁷ (‘Form of life’ will be examined in more detail below.) Not only do they deal with linguistic function, but they also take into consideration the practical lives of those speakers within each particular language game. Stroll sums it up well when he describes language games as being “slices of everyday human activity.”³⁸ For Wittgenstein, language has many different functions. In *Philosophical Investigations* he expounds as fully as anywhere the nature of language games. In this passage he writes,

But how many kinds of sentence are there? Say assertion, question, and command?—There are *countless* kinds: countless different kinds of use of what we call “symbols”, “words”, “sentences”. And this multiplicity is not something fixed, given once for all; but new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten. (We can get a *rough picture* of this from the changes in mathematics.)

—It is interesting to compare the multiplicity of the tools in language and of the ways they are used, the multiplicity of kinds of word and sentence, with what logicians have said about the structure of language. (Including the author of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.)³⁹

³⁵ Ibid., 17.

³⁶ David Bloor, 23.

³⁷ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations I*, 23.

³⁸ Stroll, 102.

³⁹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations I*, 23.

In his well-known analogy comparing language to the contents of a tool-box, he writes, “Think of tools in a tool-box; there is a hammer, pliers, a saw, a screwdriver, a rule, a glue-pot, glue, nails and screws. The function of words are as diverse as the functions of these objects.”⁴⁰ As tools are used in a practical way, so, argues Wittgenstein, is language. Language is an everyday affair, and as McGinn observes, Wittgenstein’s use of language games helps resist the urge to look for the representational essence of language. We do not enquire to see what makes a tool a tool; it simply is because that is its function and purpose.⁴¹ Language games are *descriptive* in that they look at and identify what goes on in everyday life. This is a departure from the traditional understanding of philosophy as being *prescriptive*.

Anthony Thiselton notes that the concept of the language game is to “call attention to the fact that language-uses are grounded in the *particular surroundings* of situations in human life. It also points to the fact that language is not used in a singular uniform way.”⁴² As noted earlier, Wittgenstein talks of ‘family resemblances’ or relationships between language games, rather than asserting that there must be a common denominator between them as generally perceived (in his view). In claiming this he foresees a possible objection to his thesis. He writes, “For someone might object against me: ‘You take the easy way out! You take all sorts of language-games, but have nowhere said what the essence of a language-game, and hence of language, is: what is common to all these activities, and what makes them into language or parts of language’”.⁴³ He answers by noting that, “Instead of producing something common to all that we call language, I am saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all—but that they are *related* to one another in many different ways. And it is because of this relationship, or these relationships, that we call them all ‘language.’”⁴⁴

Wittgenstein goes on to cite proceedings that we call ‘games’. Thinking of, for example, ball games, board games, card games and Olympic games, he asks, “What is

⁴⁰ Ibid., 11.

⁴¹ McGinn, *Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations*, 47.

⁴² Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1980), 373.

⁴³ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations I*, 65.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 65.

common to them all?”⁴⁵ He refutes the notion that they all must have common ground because they are all called ‘games’. He repeats his famous saying, “Don’t think, but look!”⁴⁶ If we attempt to think about common identities of ‘games’ we will be bogged down in the philosophical mire. However, what we must do is simply look at what is plainly in view. If we look at ball games, in most cases they conclude with winners and losers. However, if we look at a child who simply throws a ball against a wall and catches it, this competitive feature disappears. Look at the different elements of skill and luck between games. Examine the difference in skill between chess and tennis. Furthermore, are all games amusing? Compare chess and noughts and crosses. For Wittgenstein there is a complicated network of similarities and overlapping qualities and detail that constitutes ‘games’. “I can think of no better expression to characterise these similarities than ‘family resemblances’”.⁴⁷

Wittgenstein’s Builders

In illustrating how language games work Wittgenstein cites many examples. An example commonly cited by other scholars is the language-game that involves a builder known as *A* and his helper *B*.⁴⁸ The task of *B* is to pass a variety of stones to *A* such as bricks, slabs, columns, etc. This particular language game is one that consists of *A* shouting or requesting from *B* one of the materials listed above. *A* shouts ‘slab’ and *B* responds by passing him the required item that the term slab refers to. Furthermore, words such as ‘red’ or ‘blue’ also may have a place within this game. Therefore, if *A* calls for a ‘red slab’ *B* will pass the slab which he understands corresponds to the order given. Adding numerals to the equation can develop this particular game further. What this example does is bring out the different ways that words carry meaning and relate to other words in the world.⁴⁹ Furthermore, Wittgenstein goes on to question the use of the word ‘brick’ in this game in order to highlight that there is a unique relationship between the language used and the world it relates to. Bloor notes, “The point is that a theory that postulates a

⁴⁵ Ibid., 66.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 66.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 67.

⁴⁸ See Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books*, 77.

⁴⁹ Wittgenstein was very aware that an “ostensive definition can be variously interpreted in every case.” *Philosophical Investigations I*, 28.

single...relationship between language and the world will never come to terms with the subtle involvement of language and life.”⁵⁰

A criticism of the above language game that could be raised, and one in which Wittgenstein himself answers, concerns the ‘completeness’ of it. How can such a severely truncated and restricted example be possibly considered complete (it only contains orders)? For example, Kenny has argued that his disclaimer that we should not be troubled by the fact that there are only orders in the builder’s language game hardly meets the objection that it has no syntax.⁵¹ Wittgenstein counters this criticism by asking whether our own language is complete. Indeed, does the concept of completeness have any relevance to where Wittgenstein wants to go? The notion of completeness would be more relevant to his work and thought in the *Tractatus*. “If all true elementary propositions are given, the result is a complete description of the world. The world is completely described by giving all elementary propositions, and adding which of them are true and which are false.”⁵² Having moved right away from the method he employed in the *Tractatus*, it would seem that the notion of completeness does not apply to what Wittgenstein now proposes. For Wittgenstein, it would be possible to describe the language games as both complete and incomplete. That is to say, firstly, each language game is complete; within it is contained all that is required for that particular model to function properly. Secondly, they can be described as incomplete inasmuch as they are continually evolving and exploring ways to increase linguistically. By this I mean that new techniques arise, whilst others fall away, in response to needs, purposes and activities within a particular group or community who use and adapt them. Wittgenstein’s analogy of the sprawling and developing city, used in the previous chapter, illustrates well the shifting sands of language, how it is used, developed and advanced as required.⁵³ For Wittgenstein, language is an extremely complex collection of language games that are distinct from each other, yet are often interdependent with one another. McGinn makes the point:

⁵⁰ Bloor, 23.

⁵¹ Kenny, *Wittgenstein*, 169.

⁵² Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 4.26.

⁵³ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations I*, 18.

“The concept of incompleteness, like the concept of completeness, belongs with the false idea of an absolutely correct or essential system of representation.”⁵⁴

Forms of Life

Another idea that has already been briefly mentioned earlier, and which complements the notion of language-games is that of ‘forms of life’. Norman Malcolm thought that it would be very difficult to place too much emphasis on the importance of this concept.⁵⁵ However, it will probably be no surprise to know that this is a notoriously difficult concept to pin down. Indeed the expression ‘form of life’ is only mentioned five times in *Philosophical Investigations*.⁵⁶ For Wittgenstein, “To imagine a language is to imagine a life-form.”⁵⁷ What does he mean by this? As McGinn notes, “The idea of language as a form of life...is intended to evoke the idea that language and linguistic exchange are embedded in the significantly structured lives of groups of active human agents.”⁵⁸ (The fundamental importance of this idea will resonate with some of the ideas already examined in the previous section on postmodernism.) The term ‘form of life’ is employed to illustrate that language is intrinsically bound up with communities who evolve and change through the process of ongoing dialogue and activity. From this point of view then, language cannot be understood purely on oral grounds. Things unsaid must be taken into consideration, and that which is unsaid is understood within its context. In this respect the idea of ‘forms of life’ refers to the cultural phenomena of language. When one learns a language it is through the interaction and participation within that particular community, which is immersed in a particular culture that one understands and learns about.

G. Pitcher, usefully comments on the well-known and well-used quote by Wittgenstein, “If a lion could talk, we could not understand him,”⁵⁹ and helps illuminate this area. Suppose a lion announced that it was three o’clock, suggests Pitcher, without reference to any watch; or if the lion declared that it was three o’clock and that he was going to be late for an appointment, yawned and went back to sleep. It

⁵⁴ McGinn, 49.

⁵⁵ N. Malcolm, quoted in Alan Keightley, *Wittgenstein, Grammar and God* (London: Epworth Press, 1976), 31.

⁵⁶ See Alan Keightley, *Wittgenstein, Grammar and God*, 32-33 for detailed listing.

⁵⁷ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations I*, 19.

⁵⁸ McGinn, 51.

⁵⁹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations II*, 190.

would show that the lion behaved exactly how it should except that it could speak perfectly good English. Pitcher writes, “we could not say that he has *asserted* or *stated* that it is three o’clock, even though he has uttered suitable words.” Furthermore, “We could not tell what, if anything, he has asserted for the modes of behaviour into which his use of words is woven are too radically different from our own. We could not understand him, since he does not share the relevant forms of life with us.”⁶⁰ As Hudson rightly comments, “Apart from the activities the words are meaningless. The speaking of language is part of a form of life.”⁶¹ Hudson also argues that in talking about ‘forms of life’ Wittgenstein was referring to a kind of ultimacy which language has when it is used in different communities.⁶² “If I have exhausted the justifications” asserts Wittgenstein, “I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: ‘This is simply what I do.’”⁶³ And, “What has to be accepted, the given, is—so one could say—*forms of life*.”⁶⁴ In this respect Hudson is right to suggest a certain ultimacy to this concept. Forms of life are simply there: they exist as the base intrinsically connected with language.

Wittgenstein lists a variety of different instances for what he understands are the characteristic language-games, which also constitute forms of life:

- Giving orders, and obeying them—
- Describing the appearance of an object, or giving its measurements—
- Constructing an object from a description (a drawing)—
- Reporting an event—
- Speculating about an event—
- Forming and testing hypothesis—
- Presenting the results of an experiment in tables and diagrams—
- Making up a story; and reading it—
- Play-acting—
- Singing catches—
- Guessing riddles—
- Making a joke; telling it—
- Solving a problem in practical arithmetic—
- Translating from one language to another—
- Requesting, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying.⁶⁵

This list shows that to understand a language means more than to understand the rules of grammar and vocabulary: it means the culture, the environment and context must be also familiar, otherwise we can end up in the situation illustrated above regarding

⁶⁰ G. Pitcher cited in W. D. Hudson, *Wittgenstein and Religious Belief*, 54-55.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 55.

⁶³ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations I*, 217.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 192.

the lion. As Phillips rightly notes, “It is to know how things bear on one another in such a way as to make it possible to say certain things and see certain connections, but not others.”⁶⁶

Wittgenstein and Theology

Having examined some important aspects of Wittgenstein’s work, it remains to say a little on how theology and religion can ‘fit’ into what we have examined, if indeed there is a place for them at all. The only direct and explicit reference to theology in the *Philosophical Investigations* is in the following statements he makes (which is quoted in full):

One ought to ask, not what images are or what happens when one imagines anything, but how the word “imagination” is used. But that does not mean that I want to talk only about words. For the question as to the nature of the imagination is as much about the word “imagination” as my question is. And am I only saying that this question is not to be decided—neither for the person who does the imagining, nor for anyone else—by pointing; nor yet by a description of any process. The first question also asks for a word to be explained; but it makes us expect a wrong kind of answer.

Essence is expressed in grammar.

Consider: “The only correlate in language to an intrinsic necessity is an arbitrary rule. It is the only thing which one can milk out of this intrinsic necessity into a proposition.”

Grammar tells us what kind of object anything is. (Theology as grammar.)⁶⁷

These statements show that Wittgenstein clearly felt that theology should be understood as a grammar that helps shape and define talk about ‘God’. This, of course, is not surprising since, we have seen, the idea of grammar dominated much of Wittgenstein’s thought. For Wittgenstein, theology is the grammar that determines what can and cannot be said within the particular field of discourse in which it operates. That is to say, this approach cannot be imposed on another context or field of discourse. As Stuart Brown remarks whilst commenting on Wittgenstein’s thought, “The question ‘God cannot be mocked?’ for example is a question about what it makes

⁶⁵ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations I*, 23.

⁶⁶ D. Z. Phillips, *Belief, Change and Forms of Life* (London: Macmillan Press, 1985), 79.

⁶⁷ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations I*, 370-373.

sense to say about God. It can only be considered within the context of a particular religion".⁶⁸

The danger, however, of interpreting Wittgenstein in this way leaves one open to the accusation of fideism. This is something that Wittgenstein did not intend. Fergus Kerr argues that when Wittgenstein wrote the phrase, 'theology is grammar', "he is reminding us that it is only by listening to what we say about God (what has been said for many generations), and to how what is said about God ties in with what we say and do in innumerable other connections, that we have any chance of understanding what we mean when we speak of God."⁶⁹ To a certain extent, this understanding helps the follower of Wittgenstein out of a possible fideistic cul-de-sac. Norman Malcolm, in particular is guilty of perpetrating an understanding of Wittgenstein that takes us into fideism. He talks of religion as a 'form of life'. He wrote, "I believe that he looked on religion as a 'form of life' (to use an expression from the *Investigations*) in which he did not participate, but with which he was sympathetic and which greatly interested him."⁷⁰ This type of understanding might go some way to countering the positivist critique of religion by, in effect, placing it on a level footing with science, for example, as another 'form of life'. The problem is that nowhere does Wittgenstein advocate such a claim concerning religion as a 'form of life'. The examples he gives are on a far smaller scale than that of religion. Joseph Incandela makes a strong case against reading Wittgenstein in this way when he writes,

An overly-narrow focus on forms of life as possessing an ultimacy of sense and justification is perhaps the one mistake which is the father of all the others; for not only does it fail to account for a great deal of what Wittgenstein was saying, but it also obstructs the vision of what he was *doing*: it misses the character of his later work and his use of language-games to play, lead on, joke, and then to reel in the line to convince and persuade."⁷¹

It would seem, therefore, that religion does not have to be considered to be one specific 'form of life' and that it would be more appropriate to consider religion as consisting of different 'forms of life'.

⁶⁸ Stuart C. Brown, *Do Religious Claims Make Sense?* (London: SCM Press, 1969), 47.

⁶⁹ Fergus Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 147-148.

⁷⁰ Malcolm Norman, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 31.

Furthermore, in considering religion as a language-game, would it be more appropriate to think of religion as a series of language games? Patrick Sherry develops Richard Bell's argument that Wittgenstein's language-games are not complete types of discourse, but are instead units of linguistic behaviour which occur in certain types of contexts.⁷² Sherry goes on to argue that Wittgenstein's notion of 'language games' is far more variegated than Bell realised.⁷³ Having said that, this interpretation of his work may simply be due to Wittgenstein's quite difficult and cryptic texts that, despite much study, still have a very ambiguous quality to them.

Summary

Wittgenstein departed radically from his philosophical forebears. This is graphically demonstrated in the change that took place in his own thought, where the *Tractatus* can be seen to represent the early tradition and the *Philosophical Investigations* represents an altogether new methodology. Indeed, this contrast bears a strikingly close resemblance to the way modern thought has given way to the postmodern. In rejecting a philosophical tradition that had been taken for granted for centuries, he has in effect helped pull the rug from under the feet of foundationalism. Language is to be understood from within the particular perspective of a language game. Instead of the meaning of words being understood independently from the world, words are understood contextually. Meanings of words may differ depending on the circumstances in which they are used. Philosophy can no longer prescribe what words mean. The task is to describe meaning within a given context.

Needless to say, Wittgensteinian thought has serious implications for theological study. For example, we will see that this thought affects how we understand the 'truth' of particular propositions: truth must now be understood contextually; language is a social phenomenon; words and concepts are communicated within particular social or community contexts. Consequently, what is 'true' for one community is not

⁷¹ Joseph M. Incandela, 'The Appropriation of Wittgenstein's Work by Philosophers of Religion: Towards a Re-evaluation and an End', *Religious Studies* 21 (1985), 460.

⁷² Patrick Sherry, *Religion, Truth and Language-Games* (London: Macmillan Press, 1977), 23.

⁷³ Sherry, 23.

necessarily true for another. Clearly, as Fergus Kerr has tried to show,⁷⁴ this view of language has important connotations for theology. In particular, many evangelical theologians who understand truth from a foundationalist perspective will find this approach very challenging. Grenz is grappling with such problems, and has sought to engage in dialogue with the work of, amongst others, Wittgenstein in an attempt to construct an “evangelical theology in a post-theological era.”⁷⁵ From a different theological tradition, another theologian who has been heavily influenced by Wittgenstein is George Lindbeck who, because of his influence on evangelical theology, will now be examined in more detail.

⁷⁴ Fergus Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

⁷⁵ See Grenz, *Renewing the Centre* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

George Lindbeck's Cultural-Linguistic Approach to Theology

George Lindbeck is widely regarded as setting out the postliberal agenda in his seminal work, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (1984).¹ In this slender volume he posits what he terms a prolegomena on the current status of doctrine.² This work can be described as “pre-theological” because it is not an exercise in systematic theology, but instead is the provision of a framework within which theology can be discussed and developed.³ Lindbeck’s thesis has emerged out “of a growing dissatisfaction with the usual ways of thinking about those norms of communal belief and action which are generally spoken of as the doctrines or dogmas of churches.”⁴ Approaching theological studies from an ecumenical perspective, Lindbeck is attempting both to overcome divisions within Christendom and to develop a theory that will bring unity closer. For our purposes, the significance of his work lies in its questioning of traditional methodology.⁵

The principal thrust of Lindbeck’s thesis is to promote a ‘cultural-linguistic’ approach to theology, in contrast to what he regards as the two dominant models/theories that have been traditionally employed, namely the ‘cognitive-propositionalist’ and the ‘experiential-expressivist’ models respectively. These two theories, according to Lindbeck, form the basis for the way in which theology has been undertaken. It is important to note at this juncture that these two models are essentially products of modernity and what Lindbeck is attempting to develop could be interpreted as broadly postmodern. Following his analysis of these two models, he argues for a cultural-linguistic approach to theological studies.⁶ Lindbeck critiques the latter two positions with particular reference to Christian theology (and with the ecumenical agenda clearly in view). The validity and accuracy of Lindbeck’s criticisms of these two

¹ Mike Higton also notes that Lindbeck’s work is taken as a manifesto for the so-called ‘Yale School’. Those associated with this school are Hans Frei, David Kelsey, Ronald Theimann, Garrett Green and others. For more on the Yale School of theology see Mike Higton, ‘Frei’s Christology and Lindbeck’s Cultural-Linguistic Theory’, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 50, (1997), 83-95.

² George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (London: SPCK, 1984), 8.

³ Alister McGrath, *A Passion for Truth* (Leicester: Apollos, 1996), 136. in *Conversation* for an excellent discussion of Lindbeck’s work.

⁴ D. Z. Phillips argues that what Lindbeck eventually rejects as theories of religious belief are in fact not theories but are well-

⁵ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 7.

⁶ See for example, Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm (eds.), *The Nature of Confession: Evangelicals and Postliberals in Conversation* for an excellent discussion of Lindbeck’s work.

⁷ D. Z. Phillips argues that what Lindbeck eventually rejects as theories of religious belief are in fact not theories but are well-known and deep-rooted confusions that arise when we attempt to reflect on the character of religious belief. See ‘Lindbeck’s Audience’, *Modern Theology* 4:2 (1988), 133-154.

theories will be evaluated as we examine his understanding of each position in turn. What is clear is that Lindbeck intends his proposals to be acceptable to all religious traditions that fall within its purview.⁷ That is, Lindbeck understands his theory to be both ecumenically and religiously neutral so as not to hinder the purpose for which it is meant. In other words, he has in view not only ecumenism, but also the so-called ‘wider ecumenism’.⁸

Cognitive-Propositionalist Model

The cognitive-propositionalist approach, for Lindbeck, emphasises the cognitive dimensions of religion and “stresses the ways in which church doctrines function as informative propositions or truth claims about objective realities.”⁹ (While Lindbeck does not overtly make the connection, this particular understanding of religion is strongly associated with evangelicalism.¹⁰) Religious statements refer to an objective or object by means of correspondence. There is a direct epistemic correspondence between what amount to isolated propositions and isolated ‘facts’. Lindbeck is critical of this idea because it fails to account for the construction of meaning. Indeed, to think in these terms offers only a truncated view of what religion is.¹¹ In common with D. Z. Phillips, he insists that those who adhere to such a model are conceptually confused.¹² That said, Phillips identifies what seems to be a flaw in Lindbeck’s thesis, namely that he does not provide any philosophical rationale to explain why we are tempted by such confused methods.¹³ The problem is that, whereas Lindbeck wants to correct a misunderstanding concerning how theological claims are generally understood, his argument is ineffective in eradicating this confusion. Consequently, Lindbeck is guilty of being in the grip of the same confusion that he has identified. Phillips cites some examples of where Lindbeck seems to oscillate between, on the one hand, recognising problems with the cognitive approach, and on the other, actually still being conceptually limited by this same approach in his argument.

⁷ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 9.

⁸ For an introduction to religious pluralism and the so-called ‘wider ecumenism’ see Peter Phan (ed.), *Christianity and the Wider Ecumenism* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Paragon Publishing, 1990).

⁹ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 16.

¹⁰ See Alister McGrath, *A Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism* (London: Apollos, 1996), 137

¹¹ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 63-65.

¹² Phillips, ‘Lindbeck’s Audience’, 138.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 138.

With reference to analysis provided by the philosopher Rush Rhees,¹⁴ a student of Wittgenstein, Phillips attempts to demonstrate that Lindbeck is confused when he uses such phrases as ‘definitively and unsurpassably Lord’ when speaking of Christ. Lindbeck writes, “Christians...go on and assert that it is propositionally true that Christ is Lord: i.e. the particular individual of which the stories are told is, was, and will be definitively and unsurpassably the Lord. The great strength of a cognitivist-propositional theory of religion is that ...it admits the possibility of such truth claims.”¹⁵ Although Lindbeck speaks of this as evidence that the cognitive theory is appropriate at times, Phillips argues that it is the very use of such language that “should show him the confusion of grammar involved in thinking so.”¹⁶ In Phillips’ estimate, Lindbeck has taken the claim that ‘Christ is Lord’, and allowed it to be interpreted as if it was a ‘physical’ or ‘material’ object that was being referred to. However, this is a confused view. The claim that ‘Christ is Lord’ should be dealt with in theological and religious discussions apart from talk about physical objects. For Phillips, following Rhees’ lead, what would be more appropriate would be to investigate whether Christ was Lord, in the same kind of way one would investigate if a title to the Lordship of a manor was valid or not.¹⁷ If this approach were taken then a valid conception of what the correct criterion for a title would be before any type of investigation had begun would be possible. While I agree with the general point being made, it seems that Phillips’ critique of Lindbeck is harsh. He clearly fails to appreciate the difficulties of attempting interdisciplinary studies such as that undertaken by Lindbeck. Consequently, when Lindbeck crosses from theology into philosophy, Phillips immediately attacks his ideas, contributing little in the way of constructive criticism.

Lindbeck goes on to claim that meaning should be understood through its function within a categorial scheme. In other words, meaning is achieved through the syntax of a particular system.¹⁸ Furthermore, in what is a rather caricatured picture, Lindbeck

¹⁴ Rhees was a student of Wittgenstein, and wrote the Preface to a collection of his lectures that became known as *The Blue and Brown Books*.

¹⁵ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 63-64.

¹⁶ Phillips, ‘Lindbeck’s Audience’, 141.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 137-145.

¹⁸ See L. C. Barrett, ‘Theology as Grammar: Regulative Principles or Paradigms and Practices’, *Modern Theology* 4:2 (1988), 155-172 for a succinct description of Lindbeck’s critiques of the cognitive-propositionalist and experience-expressive models of

suggests that the cognitivist approach is endorsed by “perhaps only those among whom the sects chiefly recruit who combine unusual insecurity with naiveté....”¹⁹ Moreover, the accusations by Lindbeck concerning the cognitive approach as voluntarist,²⁰ intellectualist²¹ and indeed literalist²² are, as Geoffrey Wainwright points out, far too simplistic for this position, even in its classic form.²³ Many of those who seriously adhere to this position do not claim that their propositions contain the truth about God exhaustively.²⁴ For example, the notion of revelation in Christian theology, although having a cognitive aspect, would be inadequate if the cognitive aspect was taken to encapsulate all.

Expressive-Experiential Model

The expressive-experiential model that Lindbeck examines “interprets doctrines as noninformative and nondiscursive symbols of inner feelings, attitudes, or existential orientations.”²⁵ The principal architect of this model is perhaps Friedrich Schleiermacher, whose theological methodology is firmly rooted in experience—the “feeling of absolute dependence.”²⁶ Interpreted within the context of philosophical Romanticism²⁷, it was this methodology which was used to inform classic Liberal Protestantism.²⁸ For Schleiermacher,

The common element in all howsoever diverse expressions of piety, by which these are conjointly distinguished from all other feelings, or, in other words, the self-identical essence of piety, is this: the consciousness of being absolutely dependent, or, which is the same thing, of being in relation with God.²⁹

understanding religion.

¹⁹ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 21.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

²² *Ibid.*, 20.

²³ Geoffrey Wainwright, ‘Ecumenical Dimensions of Lindbeck’s *Nature of Doctrine*’, *Modern Theology* 4:2 (1998), 122.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 122.

²⁵ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 16.

²⁶ Friederich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1976), 12.

²⁷ See, for example, B. M. G. Reardon, *Religion in the Age of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

²⁸ Schleiermacher is seen as the progenitor of the spirit of modern religious thought. His reputation was built upon two volumes: *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* and *The Christian Faith*. For a short analysis of Schleiermacher’s position cf. S. Sykes, *Friedrich Schleiermacher*; and B. A. Gerrish, *A Prince of the Church: Schleiermacher and the Beginnings of Modern Theology*.

²⁹ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 12.

Sometimes referred to as essentialism,³⁰ the hallmark of this general tradition consists of the location of what is ultimate or has ultimate significance in religion, in the pre-reflective and pre-linguistic experience of humanity. H. H. Farmer, for example, an essentialist in his understanding of the nature of religion, wrote,

I shall assume that there is underlying all genuinely religious phenomena a common defining essence of some sort, by which they are constituted genuinely religious phenomena and distinguished from other phenomena which merely look like religion or are usually closely associated with religion.³¹

This phenomenon is a core experience of the pressure of the divine that is and has been interpreted in different ways according to the cultural context. In short, the essence of 'religion' in this model is to be located in the depths of a subjective human life. This allows for the logical possibility, as Lindbeck points out, that a Christian and a Buddhist potentially have the same divine-human encounter expressed and interpreted in very different ways.³² This approach is of great advantage for those who are concerned with inter-religious dialogue, and indeed contributes significantly to the development of inclusivist and pluralist theologies of religion.

This thesis, however, has not been without its problems. Schleiermacher was even accused of pantheism, such was the reaction in some quarters to his work. Indeed the eminent Scottish theologian A. B. Bruce (1831-1899) wrote, concerning *The Christian Faith*, "You read the passage...with increasing attention...and still you fail to see the idea clearly. The reason is that it is moonlight through which you are looking—the moonlight of Christian faith reflected from the Christian consciousness of the writer upon the dark planet of a pantheistic philosophy."³³ This type of criticism dogged Schleiermacher throughout his career and he was never able to satisfy his accusers. This is only one example of how an essentialist proposal has been criticised.

³⁰ For a succinct study of essentialism cf. C. H. Partridge, *H. H. Farmer's Theological Interpretation of Religion: Towards a Personalist Theology of Religions* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellor Press, 1998), 52-129.

³¹ H. H. Farmer cited in C. H. Partridge, *H. H. Farmer's Theological Interpretation of Religion: Towards a Personalist Theology of Religions*, 52.

³² Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 17.

³³ A. B. Bruce, *The Humiliation of Christ* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1876), 206.

Needless to say, since Schleiermacher there have been many proponents of this particular approach, from Rudolph Otto³⁴ through to Bernard Lonergan.³⁵ Indeed, Lindbeck is aware of its strengths. Regarding one such strength, he writes, “The rationale suggested, though not necessitated, by an experiential-expressive approach is that the various religions are diverse symbolisations of one and the same core experience of the Ultimate, and that therefore they must respect each other.”³⁶ He acknowledges that this particular model has been in the ascendancy and, therefore, that it is somewhat difficult to abandon. However, the major problem with this model is that it is impossible to verify that such an experience is common to all humanity. The notion that there is a ‘common human experience’ is now seen as fanciful by many.³⁷

Lindbeck offers two critiques of this model. First, he argues that because such a model allows for the idea that there is a universal, core religious experience, it is impossible to determine its distinctive features. Yet, unless this is somehow done, the assertion of such a commonality of experience is deemed to be totally absent. “Because this core experience is said to be common to a wide diversity of religions, it is difficult or impossible to specify its distinctive features, and yet unless this is done, the assertion of commonality becomes logically and empirically vacuous.”³⁸

Secondly, Lindbeck argues that the expressive-experiential model somewhat distorts the relationship between experience and conceptual systems. He argues that the ability to understand religious experience (or any type of experience for that matter) depends upon the conceptual system employed and the proficiency in using that particular system. For example, he cites the simple illustration that there are tribal languages that do not discriminate between colours such as blue and green. They have difficulty in recognising their differences because they do not possess the necessary verbal categories that differentiate between the two. They are not visually deficient in any way so this cannot be used as an excuse for their seeming inability to distinguish the

³⁴ See Otto's *Kingdom of God and the Son of Man* (London: Lutterworth, 1938) as a good example of his thought.

³⁵ See Lonergan's very influential, *Method in Theology* (London: DLT, 1972).

³⁶ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 23.

³⁷ See for example McGrath's comments in his essay, 'An Evangelical Evaluation of Postliberalism', in Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm (ed.) *The Nature of Confession: Evangelicals and Postliberals in Conversation* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1996), 26.

³⁸ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 32.

two. On the other hand, they distinguish between colours which we would say appear the same. For Lindbeck, the understanding of some language is a cultural *a priori* for experience.³⁹

Phillips acknowledges that Lindbeck is at his best when he recognises that the main difficulty with this theory is that it is incoherent.⁴⁰ “No intelligible account can be given to the notion of an experience which is not only supposed to be contingently related to the language in which it is expressed, but which is supposed to remain constant in character while the linguistic expressions of it vary enormously.”⁴¹

McGrath notes that “his account of those ‘experiential-expressive’ theories of doctrine which treat doctrine as referring to ubiquitous private pre-reflective experience underlying all religions appears to be fair and accurate, and that his criticism of this theory seems persuasive and effective, and may well be judged to be the most significant long-term contribution he has made to the contemporary discussion of the nature of doctrine.”⁴²

The overall point, however, is that Lindbeck’s response to these two common ‘theories’ of religion, and what he claims to be the best viable alternative, is the cultural-linguistic approach. This is a method of analysing religions in a way in which religion *per se* is said to resemble language.

The Cultural-Linguistic Model

Lindbeck writes the following regarding the cultural-linguistic model: “The function of church doctrines that becomes most prominent in this perspective is their use, not as expressive symbols or as truth claims, but as communally authoritative rules of discourse, attitude, and action.”⁴³ Here we see Lindbeck attempting to utilise methods already applied in other disciplines (particularly the social sciences) in order to resolve his ecumenical concerns. He recognises that the previous two models traditionally have tended to avoid any possibility of doctrinal reconciliation for fear of doctrinal

³⁹ Ibid., 36-37.

⁴⁰ Phillips, ‘Lindbeck’s Audience’, 142.

⁴¹ Ibid, 142.

⁴² McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine*, 20.

capitulation.⁴⁴ “For a propositionalist, if a doctrine is once true, it is always true, and if it is false, it is always false.”⁴⁵ In other words, to compromise on such issues is to undermine the propositionalist position and therefore to capitulate. Lindbeck, it seems, is again caricaturing the propositionalist position by taking a very extreme example. It is clear to see, even with a cursory glance over church history, that those who have adhered to a propositionalist approach to theology have an understanding that has developed over time. Very little in the way of doctrinal teaching has stood absolutely still.

For Lindbeck, the cultural-linguistic model is far better equipped to account for the varieties of aspects within particular religious traditions. He believes that the elements of a cultural-linguistic approach have been neglected by theologians.

It has become customary in a considerable body of anthropological, sociological, and philosophical literature...to emphasise neither the cognitive nor the experiential-expressive aspects of religion; rather, emphasis is placed on those respects in which religions resemble languages together with their correlative forms of life and are thus similar to cultures.⁴⁶

Lindbeck is clear about his indebtedness to Wittgenstein. “Wittgenstein’s influence has been strong in some theological circles. While this does not appear to have yet inspired consideration of the problems of doctrinal consistency and change and of agreement and disagreement with which this book is concerned, it has served as a major stimulus to my thinking (even if in ways that those more knowledgeable in Wittgenstein might not approve).”⁴⁷ Indeed, he even prefers to think of church doctrine in terms of a ‘regulative’ or ‘rule’ theory.⁴⁸

Stated more technically, a religion can be viewed as a kind of cultural and/or linguistic framework or medium that shapes the entirety of life and thought. It functions somewhat like a Kantian *a priori*, although in this case the *a priori* is a set of acquired skills that could be different. It is not primarily an array of beliefs about the true and the good (though it may involve these), or a symbolism expressive of basic attitudes, feelings, or sentiments. Rather, it is

⁴³ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 18.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

similar to an idiom that makes possible the description of realities, the formulation of beliefs, and the inner attitudes, feelings and sentiments. Like a culture or language, it is a communal phenomenon that shapes the subjectivities of individuals rather than being primarily a manifestation of those subjectivities. It comprises a vocabulary of discursive and nondiscursive symbols together with a distinctive logic or grammar in terms of which this vocabulary can be meaningfully deployed.⁴⁹

Religious traditions provide a framework within which talk about religion can take place. This type of framework precedes experience. Religions are interpretative structures that aid individuals in their apprehension of the world. What makes religions different from other linguistic systems is the fact that they are employed to describe “what is taken to be more important than everything else in the universe.”⁵⁰ Without this element, though its influence may still be great, the function of such a system is non-religious. Furthermore, as Wittgenstein suggested that language is correlated to a ‘form of life’, so the same applies to a religious tradition. All that pertains to a religious tradition, “its doctrines, cosmic stories or myths, and ethical directives...”⁵¹ are intertwined intrinsically with that particular ‘form of life’ and help shape the communities to which they adhere.

This approach stands in contrast to the expressive-experiential paradigm. For Lindbeck, the cultural-linguistic theory reverses the relationship between the inner and the outer dimensions. In other words, whilst the expressive theory made much of the notion that inner experience shapes the external features of religion, Lindbeck argues that it is in fact the inner experiences which are derivative of the outer or external cultural and/or linguistic features. For Lindbeck, “A religion is above all an external word, a *verbum externum*, that moulds and shapes the self and its world, rather than an expression or a thematization of a preexisting self or preconceptual experience.”⁵² This reversing of the outer and inner dimensions of religion, as far as Lindbeck is concerned, resembles, to a point, the cognitivist approach. The major difference, of

⁴⁹ Ibid., 33.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 32-33.

⁵¹ Ibid., 33.

⁵² Ibid., 34 .

course, is that whereas with the cognitivist model the external beliefs (propositionally stated) are primary, in the cultural-linguistic theory they are not.⁵³

Lindbeck also seeks to develop an 'intratextual' as opposed to an 'extratextual' theology.

The task of descriptive (dogmatic or systematic) theology is to give a normative explication of the meaning a religion has for its adherents. One way of pursuing this task that is compatible with a cultural-linguistic approach is what I shall call 'intratextual', while an 'extratextual' method is natural for those whose understanding of religion is propositional or experiential-expressive.... Meaning is constituted by the uses of a specific language rather than being distinguishable from it.⁵⁴

Extratextual, in general terms, locates religious meaning outside of the text either within objective realities to which it refers or, as in the experiential-expressive model, in the experiences it symbolises.

Intratextual, on the other hand, holds that the meaning of a text cannot be disconnected or isolated from its surroundings. Intratextual theology

does not make scriptural contents into metaphors for extrascriptural realities, but the other way round. It does not suggest, as is often said in our day, that believers find their stories in the Bible, but rather they make the story of the Bible their story.... Intratextual theology redescribes reality within the scriptural framework rather than translating Scripture into extrascriptural categories. It is the text, so to speak, which absorbs the world, rather than the world the text.⁵⁵

With some of these ideas in mind, Lindbeck claims that the best of both worlds can be achieved. That is to say, on the one hand, the cultural-linguistic approach can accommodate the expressive "concern for the unreflective dimensions of human existence far better than...a cognitivist outlook."⁵⁶ On the other hand, it can allow for

⁵³ Ibid., 35.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 113-114.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 118.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 35.

the possibility of truth claims as in a cognitivist approach, although on different grounds.

Lindbeck goes on to argue that doctrines should be seen as ‘second-order’ propositions which help to govern first-order truth claims. To understand his precise point here, we need to unpack his understanding of ‘truth’. In his discussion of inter-religious problems which cover the three areas of what he terms ‘unsurpassability’, ‘dialogue’ and ‘the salvation of others’,⁵⁷ Lindbeck argues, in regard to unsurpassability, that religions can be compared with each other “in terms of their propositional truth, their symbolic efficacy, or their categorial adequacy.”⁵⁸ The best option, for Lindbeck, is categorial adequacy.

...in a cultural-linguistic outlook, religions are thought of primarily as different idioms for construing reality, expressing experience, and ordering life. Attention, when considering the question of truth, focuses on the categories (or “grammar,” or “rules of the game”) in terms of which truth claims are made and expressive symbolisms employed. Thus the questions raised in comparing religions have to do first of all with adequacy of their categories. Adequate categories are those which can be made to apply to what is taken to be real, and which therefore make possible, though they do not guarantee, propositional, practical, and symbolic truth. A religion that is thought of as having such categories can be said to be “categorially true.”⁵⁹

This approach to claiming unsurpassable truth has great strengths when compared to the experiential-expressive model. However, as Kenneth Surin points out (and Lindbeck himself acknowledges⁶⁰), there are both strengths and weaknesses with the cultural-linguistic theory when compared to the propositional method.⁶¹ Surin, summarising Lindbeck’s analysis, writes,

A ‘categorially true and unsurpassable’ religion can then be defined as one which ‘is capable of being rightly utilised, of guiding thought, passions, and actions in a way that corresponds to ultimate reality, and thus of being ontologically (and “propositionally”) true, but is not always and perhaps not even usually so employed.’⁶²

⁵⁷ See Ch. 3 ‘Many Faiths and the One True Faith’, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 46-72.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁶¹ See Kenneth Surin, *The Turnings of Light and Darkness*, 159-179.

More specifically, this outlook has its problems with regard to the historicity of religions.⁶³ That is to say, when the idea of ‘categorially and unsurpassably true’ is put against Christianity it would seem that there are many instances in which Christianity falls far short of the mark. In theory Christianity may evoke such claims, but in practice, as seen through the centuries, many times it has been twisted to suit particular gains or motives.⁶⁴ It is this performative aspect of Christianity that exposes its weakness when set against a plumb-line of unsurpassability. Lindbeck allows for the performative nature of Christianity and indeed contends that practice is at its core. However, because of its performative nature, Christianity is vulnerable when the claim of unsurpassability is made. Unless, as Surin suggests, an ‘exemption clause’ is installed, due to the failures of Christians in the performance of their faith, then his insistence that Christianity is both primarily practical and at the same time unsurpassable runs into trouble.⁶⁵

Following on from this, Lindbeck distinguishes between the ‘intrasystematic’ and ‘ontological’ statements of truth. Intrasystemic truth pertains to the idea that something is true if it coheres with its total context. In respect of a religion when it is viewed in cultural-linguistic terms, this refers not only to other utterances but also to correlative forms of life. So, for example, Lindbeck, thinking of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, “Denmark is the land where Hamlet lived”.⁶⁶ This statement is intrasystematically true and not ontologically true, the reason being that within the context of the play it makes perfect sense. However, because this is not a reference to a historical fact it cannot be verified ontologically. Thus for Lindbeck, “for a Christian, ‘God is Three and One,’ or ‘Christ is Lord’ are only true as parts of a total pattern of speaking, thinking, feeling and acting.”⁶⁷ However, these statements would be false if their use in a particular moment contradicted or was inconsistent in any way with that particular pattern of understanding of God’s being. Furthermore, for a statement to be ontologically true, it must first be intrasystematically so. A statement

⁶² Lindbeck cited in Surin, *The Turnings of Light and Darkness*, 165.

⁶³ See Surin, *The Turning of Light and Darkness* for a summary of such problems, 165-167.

⁶⁴ Surin notes “given that Christianity was (at least notionally) the religion of the majority of those who administered the Nazi death camps, it would seem to follow from Lindbeck’s definition that Christianity is precluded from being a ‘categorially true and unsurpassable religion’ when viewed from the standpoint of the inmates of Dachau, Treblinka, Auschwitz, Sobibor, Bergen-Belsen...”, 166.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁶⁶ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 65

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 64.

that is deemed to be intrasystematically true can also be ontologically false if it refers back to a system that has insufficient concepts or categories to refer to the relevant realities or has no categorically true reference.

Returning to the idea that doctrines are second-order regulative devices, Lindbeck argues that it is because they are communally authoritative that they have this role. Doctrines, in this respect, resemble the grammar of a language.

Just as grammar by itself affirms nothing either true or false regarding the world in which language is used, but only about language, so theology and doctrine, to the extent that they are second-order activities, assert nothing either true or false about God and his relation to creatures, but only speak about assertions. These assertions, in turn, cannot be made except when speaking religiously...⁶⁸

In essence, what Lindbeck is suggesting is that theology (a system of doctrines) regulates the way Christians speak about God; it is the grammar that controls religious statements. However, because doctrines constitute a second-order activity they cannot say anything ontologically about God. It is only in an intrasystematic manner that they provide statements about God. This is problematic for many who acknowledge that religions do tend to make external truth claims.⁶⁹

In developing his argument, Lindbeck cites, as an example, that the Nicene Creed does not make first-order truth claims.⁷⁰ In simple terms, and in what could be perceived to be a perilous development, he posits the notion that the Nicene Creed makes no ontological reference. All it does is regulate language concerning God and Christ. The grounds upon which he makes this claim rest on what he suggests are three regulative principles found in the Bible. Firstly, the monotheistic principle asserts that there is one God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Jesus. Secondly, there is a principle of historical specificity that includes the stories of Jesus and refers to historical events and people. Finally, there is the principle of what Lindbeck terms 'christological maximalism', which refers to the idea that all possible importance

⁶⁸ Ibid., 69.

⁶⁹ C.f. A. E McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine*, 14-34, and D. Z. Phillips article 'Lindbeck's Audience'.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 92-96. Lindbeck is clearly indebted to Bernard Lonergan whose insights he has utilised in his argument. However, Wainwright clearly believes that Lindbeck has misinterpreted Lonergan. See 'Ecumenical Dimensions of Lindbeck's Nature of

must be ascribed to Jesus, which is consistent upon the first rule.⁷¹ Lindbeck argues that all three of these rules were at work in New Testament times, and would be fairly easy to detect in the subsequent three to four centuries of Trinitarian and christological development.

It can thus be argued that the Nicene and Chalcedonian formulations were among the few, and perhaps the only, possible outcomes of the process of adjusting Christian discourse to the world of late classical antiquity in a manner conformable to regulative principles that were already at work in the earliest strata of the tradition.⁷²

Lindbeck interprets the Athanasian explanation of the *homoousion* as “whatever is said of the Father is said of the Son, except that the Son is not the Father.”⁷³ In this respect, says Lindbeck, “the theologian most responsible for the final triumph of Nicaea thought of it, not as a first-order proposition with ontological reference, but as a second-order rule of speech.”⁷⁴ However, on this point I agree with McGrath and Wainwright, who both argue that Athanasius was not advocating a grammatical rule of a formal kind that would enable an indefinite number of interpretations.⁷⁵ What Athanasius was attempting to do, as McGrath argues, was “base the regulative function of the *homoousion* on its substantive content.”⁷⁶ Athanasius did not have a grammatical rule in mind that enabled a flux of different interpretations, what he intended was that the Creed would be substantive in content and something that would be a reference for Christians for what he believed to be the foreseeable future.

Conclusion

Lindbeck is right to question what he describes as the cognitive-propositionalist and the expressive-experiential models of religious methodologies. Certainly, it would seem that he has pinpointed many of the problems associated with such theories, even though he tends to caricature, to a degree, both models.

Doctrine’, 121-132 .

⁷¹ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 94.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 95.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁷⁵ See Wainwright, ‘Ecumenical Dimensions of Lindbeck’s Nature of Doctrine’, *Modern Theology* 4:2 (1988), 125-126. See also McGrath’s, *The Genesis of Doctrine* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 29-30.

⁷⁶ McGrath, ‘An Evangelical Evaluation of Postliberalism’, in T. R. Phillips and D. L. Okholm (eds.), *The Nature Of*

Having said that, in castigating the aforementioned methodologies in favour of the cultural-linguistic approach, Lindbeck, is in danger of throwing the baby out with the bath water. There are some virtues, as Lindbeck admits, in the cognitive approach. Lindbeck's admission in this respect, however, betrays some confusion. The confusion is highlighted when he writes,

We must not simply allow for the possibility that a religion may be categorically as well symbolically or expressively true; we must also allow for its possible propositional truth...The great strength of a cognitive-propositional theory of religion is that, unlike a purely experiential-expressive one, it admits the possibility of such truth claims...⁷⁷

The cognitive-propositional theory does not merely admit the possibility of truth claims, it is built upon the reality of such claims. Furthermore, Lindbeck writes that it is possible to permit the cognitive-propositionalist understanding that 'Christ is Lord'⁷⁸ (as we saw earlier). In positing this, Lindbeck is, as Wainwright observes, reneging on his commitment to dismissing this theory by positively permitting a propositionalist understanding of such a claim.⁷⁹ It seems that Lindbeck is arguing for a position that, put simply, wants to hold on to propositional statements without evidence for them being ontological. This certainly is a confused situation.

Moreover, the same can be said with regard to the expressive-experiential model as has been highlighted. The claim by Lindbeck that these two approaches are not able to account for both variable and invariable aspects of religious traditions without resorting to "complicated intellectual gymnastics,"⁸⁰ although a valid criticism, implies a failure to appreciate the diverse character of doctrine. Doctrine is polymorphic and polyvalent in character and quality and therefore requires a more nuanced approach. Rather than selecting one theory over the other two, perhaps combining some elements of the rejected theories would help to produce a more holistic understanding. This view of doctrine seems to be somewhat reductionist. Doctrine is stripped to its bare essentials to such a degree that an appreciation of its

Confession, 37.

⁷⁷ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 63-64.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁷⁹ Wainwright, 'Ecumenical Dimensions of Lindbeck's Nature of Doctrine', 180.

complexity is overlooked. McGrath notes, "It is my contention that such reductive theories demonstrate an inherent tendency to deal with an idealized and historically abstracted conception, rather than an historical and social phenomenon."⁸¹

Another problem, albeit minor, with Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic model is its origin. Lindbeck implies that it is simply a 'given'. Whilst critiquing other models, he avoids any sort of critique of the cultural-linguistic approach. Understandably, this has vexed commentators of Lindbeck who have analysed his work on this very issue.⁸² He readily admits that it has been inspired by anthropological, sociological and philosophical studies, but offers no hard evidence from these sources for its existence.⁸³ At one point he implies that the cultural-linguistic approach looks to "a set of stories used in specifiable ways to interpret and live in the world,"⁸⁴ therefore hinting that the Bible may in some way be responsible for its origin. McGrath complains that this has a knock on effect when it is applied to the Christian tradition. Where does the Christian idiom for speaking about God originate?⁸⁵ Lindbeck does not tackle this problem.

Perhaps the principal flaw in Lindbeck's thesis is that he works with an inadequate theory of truth. He asserts that a religion can be interpreted as possibly containing ontologically true affirmations, not only in cognitivist theories but also in cultural-linguistic ones. He writes, "There is nothing in the cultural-linguistic approach that requires the rejection (or acceptance) of the epistemological realism and correspondence theory of truth..."⁸⁶ Ontological claims are possible, but they are not necessary, as long as there is coherence within the intrasystematic scheme of things. Consequently, the external referent that is traditional within Christian thought is left with an unsatisfactorily ambiguity. As Vanhoozer states, "there is serious doubt as to whether Lindbeck's approach is able to make truth claims about anything 'outside' the intratextual story world of Scripture."⁸⁷ Outside the Christian world, Christian thought

⁸⁰ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 17.

⁸¹ McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine*, 37.

⁸² C.f. Wainwright, 'Ecumenical Dimensions of Lindbeck's Nature of Doctrine', 123-125 and McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine*, 28-31.

⁸³ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 32.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁸⁵ McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine*, 28.

⁸⁶ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 68-69.

⁸⁷ Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 95.

has little significance. Here we return, once again, to a seemingly Wittgensteinian reluctance to move out of the 'Christian language-game' toward an external reference point. Because doctrines are second-order regulative devices that provide rules for doing theology it seems correct to say in the words of Brad Kallenburg that "our doctrinal talk about God is not talk *about God* at all, but talk *about talk* about God."⁸⁸ Theology is a regulator that governs the way Christians speak about God without having to make any specifically ontological truth claims upon the statements that are made, but does not rule out that they may have an external referent. Lindbeck does leave the door open to metaphysical realism but it is only ajar. A question that will be a concern later in this thesis is how can the postliberal interpretation of truth as represented by Lindbeck, with truth reduced to an internal consistency, be applied to or even contemplated from an evangelical perspective? We will see such an attempt by Stanley Grenz, who argues for a theological method that is very much influenced by Lindbeck.

⁸⁸ Brad J. Kallenburg, 'Unstuck from Yale: Theological Method After Lindbeck', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 50:2 (1997), 200.

The Theological Methodology of Stanley J. Grenz

Introduction

“A new day has dawned. A new generation has come of age. The new generation is post-Christian, post-Enlightenment, and postmodern.”¹ These are the bold words of David Dockery in the Preface to a volume that addresses the postmodern challenge by a group of evangelical scholars.² Included in the volume are articles by such evangelical luminaries as Carl Henry, Thomas Oden and R. Albert Mohler Jr. However, there is one author amongst them, Stanley Grenz, who, it seems to me, is doing more than many of his peers within evangelical academia in attempting to engage with the challenge that postmodernism offers to theology, and, in particular, evangelical theology. The focus of this section will be, firstly, to highlight the contribution Grenz has made to the debate over how evangelicalism should engage with postmodernism. This will involve succinctly summarising the salient points of some of those works published that contain what I perceive to be the main developments in his methodological work between the years 1993-2005.³ There will then be an analysis of the key themes in the volume, co-authored with John Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (2001), as this volume represents the culmination of the fruits of the previous works which I summarise, and is Grenz’s most mature work on theological methodology.

Before embarking on an analysis of his work it is important to note from the outset that Grenz is an evangelical scholar whose aim is to engage thoroughly with postmodern thought. Where he differs from many evangelicals is in his emphasis on giving priority to pietism over doctrine.⁴ “Fundamentally, I believe, the evangelical

¹ David S. Dockery, ‘Preface’ in *The Challenge of Postmodernism*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 9.

² These not only are bold words, but I think they are a little overstated, in that to argue that we inhabit a world that is post-Christian is, in my view, exaggerated. The root of this error lies in the overuse of the prefix ‘post,’ that seems to be placed in front of almost everything that is discussed in connection with postmodernism. The term, I suggest, needs to be used with a little more discrimination.

³ Essentially, Grenz’s academic career can be split into two distinct parts. The ‘early’ Grenz can be judged to be from the early 1980s to 1993. His work here is very much within the tradition of his baptist heritage and as such is recognised as a valuable contribution not only to baptist theology, but also to evangelical theology generally. The later Grenz, from 1993 until his death in 2005, clearly developed a more progressive theological outlook that ultimately resulted in him taking a non-foundationalist position.

⁴ David Clark however, writes, “So is evangelicalism most essentially a sociological, theological, or experiential movement? Grenz and other reformists usually say that evangelicalism is an experiential movement. Although I see the wisdom in the warnings sounded by Grenz’s critics, I think Grenz landed his horseshoe closest to the pin.” See Clark’s *To Know and Love God: Method for Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003), xxviii. On the other hand, William Travis notes that “overall, the views of Grenz and those who agree with him on both the nature and role of Pietism in the evangelical movement need significant revision. In terms of the history component, ‘renewing the center’ needs serious rethinking.” William G. Travis, ‘Pietism and

understanding of what it means to be Christian focuses on a distinctive spirituality.”⁵ Furthermore, “two strands run through my spiritual psyche: a non-negotiable concern for the work of the Spirit in transforming human hearts and an unabashed commitment to a Bible-focused intellectual rigour. You might say I am a pietist with a PhD.”⁶ Firmly positioned as an evangelical, his intention is to stay within that camp and not to blur any perceived boundaries attached to such a ‘label’. For Grenz, postmodernism does not represent the heinous anathema to evangelical Christianity that some evangelicals claim it does.⁷ On the contrary, for Grenz and others,⁸ postmodernism offers opportunities and not just challenges to the Christian faith which must be addressed if Christianity is to remain relevant.

Grenz’s Engagement with the ‘Postmodern Turn’

Grenz has written prolifically on many topics.⁹ However, no other topic has occupied his time more than the subject of theological methodology, and how it should be developed in the face of the postmodern challenge.¹⁰ As we have seen, postmodernism is a notoriously difficult family of ideas to define and understand. Yet, over the course of his academic literary output Grenz has done more than most in the evangelical community to communicate many of the ideas associated with the postmodern turn and the problems that such diverse ideas bring to theology. Consequently, his contribution to the debate over the direction of evangelical theological methodology in the wake of the shift in the epistemic climate deserves our full attention.

From his *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* (1993) to *The Named God and the Question of Being: Trinitarian Theo-Ontology* (published posthumously in 2005),¹¹ Grenz has consistently sought to unpack key

the History of American Evangelicalism’ in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times* (eds.) Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004).

⁵ Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993), 31.

⁶ Grenz, ‘Concerns of a Pietist with a PhD’ in *Weslyan Theological Journal* 37 (Fall, 2002), 61.

⁷ See, for example, David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth, Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Leicester: IVP, 1993), Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000).

⁸ Other evangelical scholars sympathetic in differing degrees to the postmodern turn are Roger Olsen, John Franke, Carl Raschke, Merold Westphal and Kevin Vanhoozer.

⁹ See bibliography.

¹⁰ Of the books Grenz published from 1993, nine are specifically related to theology and the postmodern condition.

¹¹ *The Named God and the Question of Being* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005) is the second of what was to be a projected six volume set on what Grenz termed the ‘matrix of Christian theology’. The term ‘matrix’ was employed in place of ‘systematic’, which Grenz thought had too many connections with a modernist mindset. ‘Matrix’, for Grenz, is a more favourable term that reflected his own leanings toward a coherentist, non-foundational approach to theology. Also it is more in

elements for a revised theological methodology. Indeed, it is the former volume that marks a clear change of direction from his earlier work. Generally speaking, until then his writings were considered to be solid, traditional evangelical material, very much within the Baptist heritage to which he had belonged since childhood. However, following the publication of this volume, opinions within evangelicalism would begin to change.¹²

Favourably reviewed when it first appeared, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* marks the emergence of Grenz's interest in, and engagement with, the nature of the evangelical theological enterprise and the challenges presented to it by postmodernism. Here, in his emergent methodology, he evaluates the course of evangelical theology and takes the step of arguing for an evangelical theology that focuses, not on the doctrinal commitments of evangelicalism, as has traditionally been done, but more on the contextual faith of the believing community. "I would suggest that central to evangelicalism is a common vision of the faith that arises out of a common religious experience couched within a common interpretive framework, consisting in theological beliefs we gain from the Scriptures."¹³ For Grenz, the balance should be redressed between the cognitive and the pietist dimensions of the evangelical faith,¹⁴ with the pietist dimension being given more weight.¹⁵ Why is this? Fundamentally, it is because, he argues, evangelicalism is in something of a crisis, the source of which is the reliance on cognitive elements that have been exposed by the intellectual shift toward postmodernism.¹⁶

I am convinced that the current dissatisfaction affecting thinkers of all theological orientations, including evangelicals, is part of a larger cultural shift transpiring in the West. In fact we may be in the midst of a transition rivalling the intellectual and social changes that marked the birth

keeping with the postmodern climate. The first volume is entitled, *The Social God and the Relational Self* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

¹² See Grenz bibliography for some of his earlier works. See David Dockery's comments in *Baptist Press*, March 14, 2005. downloaded 17/01/2006 from <http://bpnews.net/bpcolumn.asp?ID=1763>

¹³ *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 34.

¹⁴ In 1994 he wrote, "Since 1988, I have been seeking to intergrate the rationalistic and pietistic dimensions of the Christian faith." See preface to *Theology and the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), xxxii. See also his article 'Concerns of a Pietist with a PhD' in *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 32: 2 (Fall, 2002), 58-76. He is not alone in having these concerns. Bloesch writes, "evangelicalism must give due appreciation to both religious experience and doctrinal integrity, and certainly also to the call of ethical obedience, if it is to become a viable option for the church of the future. See *Essentials of Evangelical Theology: God, Authority and Salvation*, vol. 1 (Peabody: Prince Press, 1998), 5.

¹⁵ Some evangelical scholars have argued that Grenz went too far to the pietistic side of evangelicalism and in doing so abandoned the evangelical commitment to biblical authority and propositional truth. See David Dockery's thoughts printed in *Baptist News*. See also Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), and Carl Henry, *God, Reason and Authority* 6 vols. (Waco: Word Publishing, 1976-1983) for systematic theologies that major in a propositional approach to theology.

¹⁶ *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 14.

of modernity out of the decay of the Middle Ages. The world appears to be entering a new phase of history...*postmodernity*. The current disquiet within evangelicalism, therefore, heralds a challenge: we must prepare to meet the postmodern age.”¹⁷

This change in the intellectual ferment has made the plight of evangelicalism more acute. Grenz rightly concludes that evangelicalism has adopted many of the cognitive tools of modernity and as a consequence has become shackled to it.¹⁸ Because of this, evangelicalism is now disadvantaged when faced with its postmodern detractors. He suggests that an example of how evangelicals have taken onboard rationalist tendencies is found in the evangelical propositionalism of Carl Henry.¹⁹ Henry understands God’s revelation to be “rational communication conveyed in intelligible ideas and meaningful words, that is, in conceptual-verbal form.”²⁰ This, for Grenz, sums up the rationalistic approach of much evangelical theology.²¹ That said, there is a sense in which Grenz caricatures evangelical theology. This is a good example, in that he closely links evangelical theology and Henry’s own rationalistic approach. A more balanced understanding would be to differentiate more clearly between acknowledging that, on the one hand, evangelicalism is heavily influenced by rational tendencies, and that, on the other, many evangelicals, in practice, do not necessarily think in this rationalistic way.

It is true to a large degree that evangelicalism and Enlightenment thought have become so intertwined that it has become almost impossible to separate them. However, it is unfair and inaccurate to give the impression that virtually all evangelicals understand their faith in purely rational terms.²² The last twenty years, in particular, have also heralded a great deal of theological activity in evangelical thought that has certainly not been as heavily focused on the rational as Grenz would

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

¹⁸ Many evangelical scholars would agree with this point. See A. E. McGrath’s *A Passion for Truth* (Leicester: 1996), 163-200 for a good introduction to how evangelicalism has been heavily influenced by the Enlightenment.

¹⁹ See Carl F. Henry, *God, Authority and Reason*, vol. 3, for Henry’s explication on the subject. See also Grenz’s *Renewing the Center* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000) where he puts both Henry and Millard Erickson on the right of evangelicalism.

²⁰ See Carl F. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 3:457.

²¹ See also *Renewing the Center* for a further unpacking of this. Grenz is accused of depicting evangelical theology as almost a type of Protestant Scholasticism in his description. See Millard Erickson, *Postmodernizing the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 99. This is a fair point; however, this is not Grenz’s intention. McGrath is also critical of Henry’s approach. See *A Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism* (London: Apollos, 1994), 171-173.

²² This criticism by Grenz bears the hallmarks and influence of Lindbeck’s ‘cognitive-propositionalist’ model discussed earlier. It certainly is somewhat of a caricature to generalise evangelicalism the way Grenz does here. It does not take into consideration the historical changes that doctrine undergoes, and the linguistic developments inherent in doctrine over time. McGrath flags up this problem in his critique of Lindbeck’s ‘cognitive-propositional’ model. See A. E. McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine: A Study in the Foundation of Doctrinal Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 15-16.

have us believe.²³ Although evangelicalism is known for majoring on the cognitive dimension of doctrine, within many evangelical churches there is a strong pietist tradition.²⁴ One need not look further than the Pentecostal and charismatic denominations of Evangelicalism to see evidence of this.²⁵

To combat this rationalist approach, which is the root of many of evangelicalism's problems when faced with the postmodern challenge, Grenz turns to the role of the community and its usefulness in countering the inherent individualism of rationalist thought.²⁶ It is the role and importance of community that is a major theme for Grenz's later work.²⁷ He argues that there is a need to move beyond the autonomous individual. Indeed, personal identity is formed within the larger social group. "There is an intricate web of traditions and beliefs in which we understand ourselves and shape our lives...."²⁸ It is the social group in which this mediation of beliefs and traditions, which shapes who we are, takes place. "...I believe the way of experiencing the Christian life which as evangelicals we all share—the experience of belonging to this group because of this shared orientation to life—lies at the center of the evangelical ethos. Our cherished theological commitments, in turn, are important insofar as they serve and facilitate this shared life-orientation—and precisely because they are intended to be so."²⁹

Furthermore, he argues that the nature of theology is that it is 'second order' because it attempts to articulate the faith that the community holds.³⁰ Theology, as a consequence, must be considered from an 'insider' perspective. Theology is a reflection on faith within the context of the believing community. "Theology formulates in culturally conditioned language the confession and worldview of the community of faith—of that people who have been constituted by the human response

²³ See Donald G. Bloesch, *Holy Scripture, Revelation and Inspiration, and Interpretation* (Leicester, IVP, 1994), Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005). James McClendon, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993-2001). A. E. McGrath *A Scientific Theology* 3 vols. as examples of evangelical approaches to theology which are far from the thorough-going rationalism of Henry.

²⁴ See Brian L. MacClaren's, *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Friends on a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2001).

²⁵ Pentecostal and charismatic theology has quickly developed intellectually over recent years. The publication of academic journals such as *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* bear witness to this.

²⁶ *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 72-73.

²⁷ Although the theme of community becomes a consistently integral part of Grenz's theology other theologians are critical of its use. See Kevin Vanhoozer's comments in 'Evangelicalism and the Church: The Company of the Gospel', in *The Futures of Evangelicalism: Issues and Prospects* (eds.) C. Bartholomew, R. Parry and A. West (Leicester: IVP, 2003), 40-99.

²⁸ *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 73.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

³⁰ This influence permeates much of Grenz's work.

to the story of the salvific act of God in the history of Jesus Christ.”³¹ More importantly, “the assertion that theology speaks a second-order language is not intended to deny the ontological nature of theological declarations. Nevertheless, the ontological claims implicit in the theological assertions arise as an outworking of the intent of the theologian to provide a model of reality, rather than describe reality directly.”³² Here we have a clear indication that Grenz’s ‘revisioning program’ is erring from the realist agenda of traditional evangelical thought, and it is in this area that major disagreements within evangelicalism will become evident.

Another important variation that Grenz introduces in his ‘revisioning’ program is the notion that theology has only three sources as opposed to the four normally associated with Christian theology.³³ Grenz advocates scripture, tradition and culture as the primary resources for theology. Reason, the usual bedfellow, is omitted and experience is replaced by culture. It is the inclusion of culture as one of the partners in the theological conversation that causes concern for some evangelical theologians.³⁴

Last but not least, Grenz revises his understanding of the place of the Bible in systematic theology and its role in the theological enterprise. The Bible should be central to evangelical theology. However, he suggests that it should come under the rubric of pneumatology.³⁵ Grenz bemoans what he sees as the separation of pneumatology from the doctrine of scripture because, he argues, “the Scriptures are the vehicle or instrumentality of the Holy Spirit through which he chooses to speak to the people of God.”³⁶ There is an integral relationship between the two. For Grenz, this approach aids in fostering the close links between ecclesiology and eschatology, which he argues also fall under pneumatology. The important point to note here is that scripture in and of itself is not the final authority for Christians. Drawing on, it would

³¹ *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 78.

³² *Ibid.*, 78.

³³ For a simple introduction see Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 188-200. See Clark Pinnock, *Tracking the Maze: Finding Our Way Through Modern Theology from an Evangelical Perspective* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990), 170-181 for more detail.

³⁴ Rodney Decker argues that elevating both tradition and culture to the same category as scripture lowers scripture from its *sola Scriptura* position. See Decker’s *May Evangelicals Dispense with Propositional Revelation? Challenges to a Traditional Evangelical Doctrine*. A paper presented at the 53rd Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Society, 14.11.2001. Also D. A. Carson vehemently disagrees with Grenz and writes, “With the best will in the world, I cannot see how Grenz’s approach to Scripture can be called ‘evangelical’ in any useful sense.” Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Leicester, Apollos, 1996), 481.

³⁵ This is clearly illustrated in *Theology for the Community of God* in which Grenz places the section on the Bible in the section on the Holy Spirit. See 379-404.

³⁶ See *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 114.

seem, neo-orthodox approaches³⁷ and showing the particular influence of Pannenberg,³⁸ Grenz posits that, “the source of our knowledge of divine truth is neither the scriptures expounded according to our private interpretation alone nor any private individual ‘word from the Spirit.’ Rather, it consists in an external principle—inspired Scripture—combined with an internal principle—the witness of the Holy Spirit.”³⁹ It is the Holy Spirit who opens up the scriptures to the Christian who prayerfully engages with it. Indeed, this is similar to Barth’s thesis that “When it is a matter of instructing and instruction by the Word, that instructing and instruction are the work of the Holy Spirit. Without that work there is no instruction, for the Word is never apart from the Holy Spirit. And by this very work of the Holy Spirit, and because in the Holy Spirit we recognise that God’s Word is the truth...”⁴⁰

Introducing the concept of revelation in relation to the Bible, Grenz suggests that there exists a threefold connection between the two.⁴¹ Firstly, the Bible is revelation in a derivative sense. That is to say, as with Barth,⁴² it is the record of the historical revelation of God.⁴³ Secondly, it is revelation in a functional sense, in that the Bible points beyond itself in revelatory action, informing the reader how to know God. Thirdly, it is revelation in the sense of an intermediary, for it mediates to the reader what God is like. In this sense, it is the word about God.⁴⁴ It is this triune understanding of revelation that enables the Christian to understand that it is the Holy Spirit speaking through the pages of the Bible which is the sole authority. It can be gleaned from this that Grenz, although not explicitly stating it, is arguing that the Bible cannot be considered ‘first-order’ in itself. Needless to say, this has caused some concern amongst fellow evangelical theologians.⁴⁵ The Bible only reveals God and his purpose in conjunction with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

³⁷ See for example, K. Barth *Church Dogmatics* VII (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 203-244.

³⁸ See Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 1: 189-258.

³⁹ *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 114.

⁴⁰ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, 244. For a good discussion of evangelical analyses of Barth see S. W. Chung (ed.) *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006).

⁴¹ See G. Fackre, ‘Revelation’ in S. W. Chung (ed.), *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology*, 1-25 for a useful discussion in the area.

⁴² Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/1, 339-383.

⁴³ *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 133.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁴⁵ See Stephen Wellum’s article, ‘Postconservatism, Biblical Authority, and Recent Proposals for Re-Doing Evangelical Theology: A Critical Analysis’, in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times* (eds.) Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth and Justin Taylor, 161-197 as a good example.

One point remains to be made with regard to the promotion of evangelical pietism in Grenz's agenda. That is, it would appear that, for Grenz, emphasising pietism allows him to loosen the shackles of Enlightenment thought on evangelical theology.

Interestingly, this approach addresses similar concerns to those of the Romantics who reacted to the rationalism of their day. This is perhaps not surprising considering the similar Pietist theologies developed by Romantic theologians such as Schleiermacher.⁴⁶ This allows Grenz to sidestep the cognitive, propositionalist and dogmatic approach traditionally accepted by evangelicals (in regard to doctrine) and allow his postmodern discourse to gain ascendancy. Moreover, the reduction of theology to the status of 'second order' gives Grenz ontological flexibility in terms of the claims theologians can make in their methodological assertions. Again, this allows him to engage in a more positive way with the postmodern condition.

The ideas in *Revisioning* are developed in his massive *Theology for the Community of God* (1994).⁴⁷ This tome was endorsed wholeheartedly by J. I. Packer, who considered it to be, "...firmly anchored in the mainstream of Christian wisdom. Orientated to the church, the Holy Spirit, and the future in a biblically proper way, this work transcends the rationalism and individualism that mar some of its predecessors... An outstanding achievement."⁴⁸ This very positive endorsement by Packer (an elder statesman of traditional evangelicalism) is surprising when one examines the main features of the work,⁴⁹ in that Grenz continues his attempt to take theology in a markedly different direction to that developed by Packer and traditional evangelicals.

The themes outlined previously in *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* are taken up. Interestingly, scripture now takes its place under pneumatology.⁵⁰ However, after suggesting that ecclesiology and eschatology should also take their place under the

⁴⁶ See B. M. G. Reardon, *Religious Thought in the Victorian Age: A Survey from Coleridge to Gore* (London: Longman, 1980). and Larry H. Peer and Diane Long Hoeveler (eds.), *Romanticism: Comparative Discourse* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

⁴⁷ Indeed, he writes in the Preface that this volume "comprises a preliminary sketch of the theology called for in my earlier, programmatic book *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*". See *Theology for the Community of God*, xxxii.

⁴⁸ See back cover of this book for endorsement.

⁴⁹ It is surprising because Packer is very much a traditional evangelical in every sense. It is most surprising that he would endorse Grenz's attempt to change theology's sources, and allow Grenz to emphasise the love of God over any of the divine attributes so as to minimize the holiness of God.

⁵⁰ I think that for many evangelicals, Grenz has to be careful not to relegate scripture to being a footnote of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

rubric of pneumatology, here they remain in their own categories. This is something that Grenz fails to explain.

Grenz emphasises the love of God over all the other divine attributes in a move that could be interpreted by evangelicals as liberalising the gospel. However, it is the stress on 'community' that becomes the focus for Grenz.⁵¹

As the title suggests, the concept of community is extremely important for him and together with the eschatological nature of the kingdom of God, forms part of the 'integrative motif' for his work.⁵² Indeed, it is Grenz's unpacking of the importance of community that constitutes the main advance of his thought from his earlier work. For Grenz, the root of the emphasis on community lies within the trinitarian understanding of God. God the Father is in eternal fellowship with the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is God's desire for creation also to be in 'community.' That is to say, it is God's desire that the world "participate in community."⁵³ Indeed, he believes God's whole intention for creation can be summed up by using the term 'community.'⁵⁴ To clarify these statements it is necessary to unpack the communitarian basis for his claims a little more.

Community is emphasised for a number of reasons. Building on the trinitarian assumptions noted above, he argues that God, as creator, intends for his creation to share in his existence and to have the same sort of relationship as he does with the members of the Trinity. The sharing of fellowship with the social Trinity is what God wants to establish. For Grenz, proof of this desire lies within the pages of the Bible. He cites numerous biblical texts to support his argument convincingly⁵⁵ and to highlight the idea that God wants to establish community and be present amongst 'his people'. He refers to the creation account in Genesis (Gen 1:26-28): God creates the first humans, Adam and Eve, in order for them to enjoy fellowship with one another. What begins here will find its completion in the consummation of history. The

⁵¹ Grenz expends much time over the importance and place of community in his work. See also *Created for Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996).

⁵² The integrative motif is "the central idea that provides the thematic perspective in light of which all other theological concepts are understood and given their relative meaning or value." Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 21.

⁵³ *Theology for the Community of God*, 112.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁵⁵ For example, Gen 2:18; 28:13-17; Ex 20:2-3. Grenz cites Mat 1:22-23; John 1:14; 14:23 as examples of how the divine, through Jesus, is present with humankind.

intention of God is to see humankind establish community with one another and their creator. He writes, “We may summarize God’s intention for the world by employing the term ‘community’. Just as the triune God is the eternal fellowship of the trinitarian members, so also God’s purpose for the creation is that the world participate in ‘community’.”⁵⁶

Connected with this is the concept of the *imago dei*. For Grenz, “we are the image of God insofar as we have received, are now fulfilling, and one day will fully actualize a divine design. And this—God’s intent for us—is that we mirror for the sake of creation the nature of the Creator.”⁵⁷ It is because humanity has been created in God’s image that it has a special standing before God. Of course, all humanity has this potential to live out the goals that they perceive God has for them. Every human being has the possibility to fulfil their destiny in God, according to Grenz. However, in practical terms this is not the case.⁵⁸

The highest sense of the term community, for Grenz, is the ‘redeemed community.’ It is within this realm of the redeemed community that humanity can truly be related to the image of God. “Only in fellowship with others can we show forth what God is like...”⁵⁹ He writes, “The final goal of the work of the triune God in salvation history is the establishment of the eschatological community—a redeemed people dwelling in a renewed earth, enjoying reconciliation with their God, fellowship with each other, and harmony with all creation. Consequently, the goal of community lies at the heart of God’s actions in history. And God’s ultimate intention for creation is the establishment of community.”⁶⁰ Here we have the full integrative motif of the eschatological community that determines the direction of Grenz’s method. For Grenz, “Community is important as an integrative motif for theology not only because it fits with contemporary thinking, but more importantly because it is central to the message of the Bible...Taken as a whole the Bible asserts that God’s program is directed to the bringing into being of community in the highest sense.”⁶¹

⁵⁶ *Theology for the Community of God*, 112.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁵⁸ Evangelicals would argue that anyone who does not become a Christian will not be able to fulfill their destiny in God. Also those Christians that have ‘strayed’ from the Christian life may be deemed to have failed to have fulfilled their potential.

⁵⁹ *Theology for the Community of God*, 179.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

In a nutshell, Grenz takes seriously the postmodern turn toward the community and applies it to his theological program. Arguably, therefore, his communitarian turn is right in this context, not because it is a broadly postmodern way of doing things (though this can't be denied), but because it is, in Grenz's opinion, the most suitable way of understanding and doing theology.⁶²

A feature that Grenz tends to stress and which is mentioned, not only in this volume but in subsequent work, is the adoption of a trinitarian structure for theology.⁶³ That is to say, because doing theology should presuppose an element of faith from within the Christian community, this faith presupposes a trinitarian understanding of the Christian doctrine. Consequently, as with Barth,⁶⁴ his systematic theology starts with God as Trinity ('theology proper' as Grenz likes to refer to it).

Thus far, we have seen that Grenz is steadily testing the methodological waters in order to develop the possibilities for an effective evangelical theological methodology in the face of postmodern pressure and influence. However, up to this point in his work, he has not directly dealt with the potential philosophical conundrums that go hand in hand with such shifts. This changes in 1996 with Grenz's first substantial and specific analysis of the nature of postmodernism, entitled *A Primer on Postmodernism* (1996).⁶⁵ The purpose of this work is to outline the main features of postmodern thought and then to conclude with a discussion of how evangelicals might respond to the issues raised.

Whilst this is by no means a substantial philosophical or theological unpacking of postmodernism, and is not intended to be, it is useful for tracing Grenz's thought. He outlines those areas which he thinks to be of most importance to theology in general and evangelical theology in particular. Of course, largely because it is not a

⁶² Of course, there are difficulties when attempting to understand the Trinity in such social terms. Using human analogies such as this and transferring them to God can cause problems in theology. Barth would likely accuse Grenz of adding to the revelation of God. See *Church Dogmatics*, I/1, 383-99.

⁶³ Grenz tends to emphasise this trinitarian aspect throughout this and subsequent work, as, in his view, a truly Christian theology should be thoroughly trinitarian. See *Rediscovering the Triune God* for a full explication of his trinitarian thought. It is true to say that trinitarian thought has enjoyed something of a renaissance in recent years. See the following as good examples of this trend: Miroslav Volf, *After our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and the Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1992); Ted Peters, *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993); David S. Cunningham, *These Three are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

⁶⁴ See Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, I/1 for an appreciation of this.

⁶⁵ Although aimed at unpacking the main tenets of postmodern thought, Grenz targets those elements that he perceives have the most direct effect upon theology.

substantial work, but also because it is a shift away from traditional evangelical thought, the book has not been without its critics. Millard Erickson has criticised the contents of *A Primer* because, he argues, it describes the postmodern phenomena in far too simplistic a way.⁶⁶ However, while Erickson may have a point, he misunderstands what Grenz is trying to do. Grenz does not claim that the book is anything other than an introduction, 'a primer', on the subject. Moreover, it is a selective introduction, in which he clearly concentrates on the issues he feels to be of most relevance.

In the *Primer* he introduces an effective, yet simple, illustration, which has become something of a 'Grenzian' feature over the past decade. He compares the emergence of the postmodern era from modernity to the evolution of the *Star Trek* series.⁶⁷ According to Grenz, *The Next Generation* represents the new postmodern era, whilst the original *Star Trek* series bears the hallmarks of modernity. He claims that the makers of the series "discovered that the world of their audience was in the midst of a subtle paradigm shift: Modernity was giving birth to postmodernity."⁶⁸

Having discussed *Star Trek*, he then makes the bold, but dubious, statement that "postmodernism was born in St. Louis, Missouri, on July 15, 1972."⁶⁹ This reference point was the destruction of a building that was once hailed as a landmark of modern architecture.⁷⁰ It stood as "the epitome of modernity itself in its goal of employing technology to create a utopian society for the benefit of all."⁷¹ Here, Grenz is influenced by Charles Jencks,⁷² who claimed in the wake of its demolition that "this event symbolises the death of modernity and the birth of postmodernity."⁷³ Such a conclusion is exaggerated, and is one example of Grenz uncritically embracing the ideas of some postmodern theorists. It is exaggerated because, as we have already

⁶⁶ See Millard Erickson, *Postmodernizing the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 98. This is a contrast to the opinion of David Dockery who in the *Baptist Times* writes that, "Most would agree that Stan's description of postmodernism was as clear, cogent and helpful as any that could be found." 3.

⁶⁷ See also 'Star Trek and the Next Generation: Postmodernism and the Future of Evangelical Theology' by Grenz in *The Challenge of Postmodernism*, David S. Dockery (ed.) (Grand Rapid: Baker Books, 1995), 75-89.

⁶⁸ *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 1.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁷⁰ The building in question was the Pruitt-Igoe project in St. Louis, USA which was demolished due to sustained vandalism.

⁷¹ *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 11.

⁷² Jencks has been lauded as the most influential proponent of architectural postmodernism. See Steven Connor, *Postmodern Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 69. See also Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (London: Academy, 1991).

⁷³ *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 11.

seen, to identify so precisely the origins of postmodernism is almost impossible. Indeed, the term is itself a very slippery one which defies precise meaning.⁷⁴

As many now do, Grenz rightly recognises the distinction between *postmodernity* and *postmodernism*. This is an important distinction highlighted earlier in the thesis. However, he does not fully engage with social theory, but rather tends to concentrate on the epistemological significance of postmodernism for theology. Informative sections on Foucault, Derrida and Rorty, the ‘philosophers of postmodernism’ are preceded by an introduction to Nietzsche whom he understands to be the progenitor of the postmodern ideas prevalent today.⁷⁵

Whilst this is a helpful book in some respects, there are some inaccuracies and misunderstandings. For example, he labours under the belief that “although he spoke with many different voices, Nietzsche consistently showed himself a foe of humanity.”⁷⁶ However, Nietzsche was not a foe of humanity. What he objected to was the intellectual conditioning brought about by the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment hope of a rational world driven by scientific progress was, for Nietzsche, a complete anathema. He thought that the time in which he lived was a low point in human culture. He was not a foe of humanity *per se*. He may have despised those people who lived out what he saw as products of modern culture (particularly those attributes encouraged by the Christian faith that, to him, exhibited weaknesses such as pity, compassion⁷⁷), and he detested the anthropocentrism so prevalent at the time. However, to interpret this as some extreme form of misanthropy is to misunderstand Nietzsche’s work.⁷⁸

Again, a similar misreading is evident in Grenz’s analysis of Lyotard’s seminal book, *The Postmodern Condition*, which, for him, finally brought postmodernism indelibly onto the intellectual landscape. “The book did not so much initiate the discussion as describe in an accessible manner the revolution in outlook that lay beneath the

⁷⁴ See the section on Postmodernism in this thesis for reasons why it defies precise definition.

⁷⁵ *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 88. See also Jurgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. Here Habermas argues that Nietzsche’s work marks an entrance into postmodernity, 83-105.

⁷⁶ *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 88.

⁷⁷ It was Nietzsche’s rejection of the notion that pity was a virtue that was one of the reasons why he parted company with much of Schopenhauer’s ideas. Having said that, he still hailed Schopenhauer as the last German of any great note.

⁷⁸ See Michael Tanner, *Nietzsche: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), Peter R. Sedgwick, *Nietzsche: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995) and M. Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) for good introductions to Nietzsche’s thought.

cultural phenomenon occurring throughout the Western world and the theoretical and philosophical basis of the postmodern view.”⁷⁹ The rejection by Lyotard of the metanarrative, it must be borne in mind, is a particular definition of what a metanarrative is.⁸⁰ As we have seen, Lyotard’s understanding of the metanarrative is that grand story (*grand recits*) which seeks legitimation beyond itself to a universal reason for its justification. Lyotard’s simple statement has become almost a mission slogan for postmodernism, especially as seen through the eyes of evangelical theologians.⁸¹ Grenz is no exception. However, while he provides a fairly close reading of what Lyotard argues, he makes a common error in understanding what Lyotard defines as a metanarrative. That said, it is important to acknowledge (partly in Grenz’s defence) that Lyotard does not have a monopoly on the definition of what a metanarrative is. It is reasonable to assume that once Lyotard has posited his understanding of this term it can take on a broader definition as other scholars develop the idea. Furthermore, although Lyotard does not mention the biblical story in *The Postmodern Condition* this doesn’t necessarily mean he would not include it in his evaluation of metanarratives. However, this does not excuse Grenz’s misreading of Lyotard’s original definition. Grenz assumes that any narrative that aspires to universality constitutes a metanarrative. He writes, “We may welcome Lyotard’s conclusion when applied to the chief concern of his analysis—namely, the scientific enterprise. Indeed, we can live quite well without such myths as the progress of knowledge. But we cannot accede to the extension of Lyotard’s thesis to reality as a whole.”⁸² However, a close reading of Lyotard reveals that a metanarrative is only such if it appeals directly to an external authority such as science or reason.⁸³ I will argue that the biblical story is not a metanarrative in Lyotard’s sense because it does not seek legitimation in the same way as the modern metanarratives that Lyotard cites and dismisses. Instead, although of course in a sense reasonable, there is an appeal to

⁷⁹ *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 39.

⁸⁰ See James K. A. Smith, ‘A Little Story about Metanarratives’ in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn* by Myron Penner (ed.) (Grand Rapids, Brazos Press, 2005), 123-140. Here Smith rightly points out the prevalent misinterpretation of Lyotard’s notion of what a metanarrative is. See also the subsection on metanarratives earlier in this thesis.

⁸¹ I contend that despite the quick conclusions of some evangelical theologians, this ‘slogan’ is not the central tenet of postmodern thought. One might argue with equal vigour that deconstruction is central, or even the idea of the de-centered self.

⁸² *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 164.

⁸³ Lyotard writes, “I will use the term *modern* to designate any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse of this kind making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth.” Here, amongst others, he is referring to Hegelianism (Spirit), Kantian rationalism and Marxism (working subject). See J. F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979), 3. Trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. J. K. A. Smith suggests that the hermeneutical aspect that Lyotard notes could be Schleiermacher, however, I think this unlikely. See Smith’s, ‘A Little Story about Metanarratives: Lyotard, Religion and Postmodernism Revisited’ in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn: Six Views*, 129.

faith which is not the same as an external, rational element. We will return again to this later in the thesis.

As a result of Grenz's misreading of Lyotard, he concludes that because postmodernity is concerned with rejecting metanarratives, this rejection has itself to be rejected. Grenz has pushed himself into a philosophical cul-de-sac due to misunderstanding Lyotard. This is because the biblical story, in his view, is a metanarrative. Had Grenz revised his understanding of the Bible as a metanarrative he would have been in a more secure position to revise evangelical theology. Hence, in terms of devising a postmodern theology, this is certainly a backward step.⁸⁴ We will return to this below.

The epistemological themes that Grenz briefly unpacks are those which occupy much of his subsequent thought, and, although only briefly highlighted here, will occupy a large part of our critique of his work. He briefly touches on the demise of foundationalism and the emergent epistemic threat postmodern thought offers.⁸⁵

Grenz understands postmodernity as coming to the end of the objective world, a world built upon the certainties of universal reason. In its place we have a 'constructionist' understanding of knowledge.⁸⁶ This is an acknowledgement that all knowledge is socially constructed. The turn to such a conception is a move away from the correspondence theory of truth, and a realist understanding of knowledge to a non-realist epistemology. In a nutshell, for Grenz, postmodernists now have two assumptions upon which they construct knowledge. Firstly, "postmoderns view all explanations of reality as constructions that are useful but not objectively true," and secondly, they "deny that we have the ability to step outside our constructions of reality."⁸⁷ This is a radical departure from previous Enlightenment thought, and an approach Grenz himself will endorse later in his own work.

⁸⁴ See also Grenz's 'The Universality of the Jesus Story', in *No Other Gods Before Me* (ed.) John G. Stackhouse Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001) for his argument that it is the theocentric character of the Jesus-story which actually provides the key to affirming its universality.

⁸⁵ This is the first time we encounter Grenz's understanding of foundationalism. As we shall see in the main critique it is a very ambiguous understanding which lumps all foundationalisms together under what can only be described as 'classical' or 'strong' foundationalism. This is a profound oversight in Grenz's work and does much to hinder his methodological developments, simply because he does not take into consideration other more nuanced forms of foundationalism

⁸⁶ See John Searle's, *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1995) for a thorough unpacking of this.

⁸⁷ *A Primer on Postmodernism.*, 43.

The loss of the Enlightenment's 'autonomous self' is examined, with the 'de-centered self' offered as the postmodern alternative.⁸⁸ Ferdinand de Saussure,⁸⁹ the founding father of 'structuralism,' paved the way for an understanding of language that alters the way we perceive humanity. That understanding asserts that "an objective, universal cultural system 'structures' our mental processes and that this structure is evident in both human language and social institutions."⁹⁰ Consequently, thinkers such as Claude Levi-Strauss⁹¹ have developed these ideas and argued that there exists a universal social structure within which, ultimately, all humanity participates. This helps to reverse the Enlightenment process that elevated the individual, giving the autonomous 'self' priority over the community.

As noted above, this communitarian shift is central to Grenz's thesis. In answering some of the above postmodern challenges to modernity, he suggests that Christians would be better to respond accordingly with a postmodern view of the gospel. This understanding of the gospel would be post-individualistic, post-rationalistic, post-dualistic and post-noeticentric. This is central to his development of the 'communitarian turn'. The post-individualistic gospel is an approach that still recognises the individual focus of the gospel but does away with the radical individualism that has characterised the modern mind. Instead, Grenz refers to a group of thinkers he terms the 'new communitarians,'⁹² who offer a constructive alternative to this. This understanding sees the individual within the community. The role of community is given paramount epistemic importance. Furthermore, the community is the place where humans develop their personal identities. These are not formed outside a community but within it. Moreover, such communitarian thought echoes the "great biblical theme that the goal of God's program is the establishment of community in the highest sense."⁹³ In the postmodern climate theology can no longer

⁸⁸ For Grenz's examination of the idea of the 'self' see *The Social God and the Relational Self*.

⁸⁹ See for example, Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (London: Duckworth Press, 1983). See also, Roy Harris, *Language, Saussure and Wittgenstein: How to Play Games with Words* (London: Routledge, 1990) for a good introduction to Saussure's thought.

⁹⁰ *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 117.

⁹¹ See Claude Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (London: Penguin Books, 1963) and *Myth and Meaning* (London: Routledge, 1978).

⁹² 'New Communitarians' is a reference to scholars such as MacIntyre, Sandel, Taylor and Walzer, who have launched a sustained attack upon the modernist ideal of the 'self'. See the following works for good examples of this, Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (London: Duckworth, 1988) and *After Virtue: A study in Moral Theory* (London: Duckworth, 1992) 4th edition. Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989), Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

⁹³ *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 168.

put the individual centre stage. Faith is social. This is ultimately reflected in the social Trinity.⁹⁴

The post-rationalistic approach to the gospel that Grenz posits is an approach that does not jettison the role of reason, but whilst acknowledging that reason has a role to play, room should be made for the concept of “mystery—not as an irrational complement to the rational, but as a reminder that the fundamental reality of God transcends human rationality. While remaining reasonable...the appeal of our gospel must not be limited to the intellectual aspect of the human person.”⁹⁵ Furthermore, for Grenz, the traditional evangelical fixation with a propositionalist approach to the Christian religion must take the above into consideration. Reliance on the idea of Christian truth being correct doctrine is no longer acceptable. Moreover, Grenz acknowledges the postmodern trend toward linguistically and socially constructed knowledge as opposed to the foundational and rational understanding which is replacing the foundationalist mindset. Humanity does not live in a vacuum. On the contrary, “no transformation comes to us apart from an interpretation facilitated by the concepts—the ‘web of belief’—we bring to it.”⁹⁶

The post-dualistic approach to the gospel, for Grenz, goes beyond the Enlightenment duality of ‘mind’ and ‘matter,’ the ‘body’ and ‘soul.’⁹⁷ The postmodern context in which we live, demands a more holistic approach. “The gospel we proclaim must speak to human beings in their entirety.”⁹⁸ Moreover, this postmodern approach must go further than just uniting the so-called Enlightenment project, “we must not dwell merely on the individual in isolation but also on the person-in-relationships.”⁹⁹

Finally, the gospel must also be post-noeticentric. That is to say, “our gospel must affirm that the goal of our existence encompasses more than just the accumulation of knowledge. We must declare that the purpose of correct doctrine is to serve the attainment of *wisdom*.”¹⁰⁰ For Grenz, although intellectual endeavour is a good thing,

⁹⁴ See also *The Social God and the Relational Self* and *Rediscovering the Triune God* for a further unpacking by Grenz on the Trinity. See also John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985) for an unpacking of some of these ideas.

⁹⁵ *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 170.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁹⁷ Grenz seems to imply that this duality is an Enlightenment invention. However, this thinking dates back to the ancient Greeks.

⁹⁸ *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 171.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 172.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 172.

and the intellectual pursuit for right thinking should be encouraged, we must also not allow the intellectual dimension to sideline the pietistic element of Christian faith. To use Grenz's expression, 'activism' and 'quietism' need to go hand in hand.¹⁰¹

In summary, although I consider that there are elements of misunderstanding, Grenz provides a careful and clear introduction to the basic tenets of postmodern thought. Concerning the misunderstandings, he accepts too uncritically postmodernism *per se*. Indeed, it seems implicit within his argument that, whereas modernity sounded the death knell for Christianity, so postmodernism has revived it. Of course, this is problematic and repeats the same mistakes that much evangelical theology has made in the past, in that there is an attempt to divorce evangelical theology from modernity, the result being a remarriage, as it were, to its new mistress of postmodernism. Hence, theology remains wedded to a philosophical authority that dictates its direction. What will be suggested later in the thesis is the development of a theology married to neither movement, but independent and able to engage in dialogue with the current philosophical spirit of the day without becoming shackled to it.

The final piece of work that Grenz produced prior to *Beyond Foundationalism* is a volume entitled *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (2000). This work is a precursor to his arguments in *Beyond Foundationalism*. It can be split into two parts. In the first part, Grenz outlines the development of evangelical thought: "...the following chapters treat evangelicalism as a theological phenomenon and therefore draw from the particularly theological character of the movement's historical trajectory."¹⁰² In surveying contemporary evangelical movements, Grenz compares three pairs of evangelical theologians whom he considers represent two evangelical poles of thought. Bernard Ramm and Carl Henry are the first generation of neo-evangelicals, with Ramm representing a more irenic and culturally sensitive theology. On the other hand, as we have seen, Grenz understands Henry to be a typically modernist and culturally critical theologian. The next generation is represented by Clark Pinnock and Millard Erickson, with Pinnock holding the baton inherited from Ramm. Finally, John Sanders and Wayne Grudem are nominated to be typical representatives of current evangelical theologians, with

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 173.

¹⁰² *Renewing the Center*, 15.

Grudem carrying on from Erickson, and Sanders from Pinnock. Although it would be a digression to evaluate these comparisons here, it should be noted that, to some extent, this is a caricature of evangelical theology over the last fifty years. Certainly, Grudem cannot be considered to be representative of evangelicalism, being more fundamentalist, and some have even questioned the evangelical credentials of both Pinnock and Sanders.¹⁰³

The heart of what Grenz wants to say, however, appears in the second part.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, much of what is written in this part is fleshed out in *Beyond Foundationalism*. However, the salient points that concern us here and find their methodological culmination in *Beyond Foundationalism* relate to Grenz's epistemological shift. He uncritically dismisses foundationalism on the basis that it is a product of modernity. Furthermore, the foundationalism that he dismisses can only be understood as the classical or strong version of it. That modest versions are not considered, again, indicates a lack of critical engagement with the wider elements of this form of epistemology. Indeed, very few contemporary scholars are cited in his analysis of foundationalism's demise. Foundationalism *per se* is rejected simply because it is a modernist creation. In these postmodern times, for Grenz, a foundationalist epistemology is increasingly inappropriate, particularly in a world that is post-theological.¹⁰⁵

In his quest for an alternative to what he understood to be the crumbling edifice of foundationalism, Grenz briefly examines coherentism and pragmatism. He cites early twentieth century examples of both alternatives to unpack the basic tenets for each.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ D. A. Carson is particularly critical not only of Grenz's comparisons here but of his scholarship in general with regards his findings in the historical development of evangelicalism. He writes that "These and other historical misjudgements would be merely irritating if they were not being used to determine the direction of Grenz's argument." Much of Carson's criticisms in regard to the historical are unwarranted and irrelevant to what Grenz wants ultimately to achieve: that is develop a postmodern theology. For an interaction between the two see D. A. Carson, 'Domesticating the Gospel: A Review of Grenz's *Renewing the Center*' in Millard Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth and Justin Taylor eds, *Reclaiming the Center* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2004). This is a slightly different version to that which was published in *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 6: 1 (Spring 2002):82-97. Grenz's reply is published in *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 30 (2003), 455-461, entitled 'Toward an Undomesticated Gospel: A Response to D. A. Carson'. It is interesting to note that Grenz was refused permission to publish his reply in the *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*. See editor's note on 455 of Grenz's reply cited above.

¹⁰⁴ An overview of chapter 6 by Grenz can also be found in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method* (Leicester: IVP, 2000), 107-136 entitled 'Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic: Theological Method after the Demise of Foundationalism.'

¹⁰⁵ *Renewing the Center*, 185. I think the use of the term post-theological is unnecessary. It is true that intellectual paradigms have been given different labels (Patristic period, Renaissance, Enlightenment etc.) to signify the change in understanding, but theology has always been theology. To prefix theology with 'post' is to get carried away with the current trend of putting 'post' on anything remotely to do with postmodernism.

¹⁰⁶ Grenz cites Arthur Kenyon Rogers as a pioneer of coherentism. See Rogers, *What is Truth?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923). The work of Charles Peirce is cited for the pragmatist understanding. See Peirce, *Selected Writings* (New York: Dover, 1953) (ed.) Philip Wiener.

Both of these provided ways to leave behind the correspondence theory of truth, which was preferred by foundationalist thinkers. Both are seen by Grenz to be of great value toward developing a non-foundationalist theology, particularly coherentism with the integration of knowledge as a whole, into a 'web of belief' or 'nest of beliefs'.¹⁰⁷

Indicating, again, his indebtedness to Pannenberg, he explicitly argues that he has "exemplified more clearly the application to theology of the non-correspondence epistemological theories of the modern coherentists and pragmatists..."¹⁰⁸ Indeed, it is Pannenberg's understanding of truth that aids him in reformulating a coherentist theological method. For Pannenberg, truth is essentially historical.¹⁰⁹ Truth shows itself through the passage of time and climaxes in the end event, which is anticipated in the here and now. This is evident as humans continually modify and repackage their understandings. Moreover, truth is only fully manifest in God, who is the "ground of the unity of truth."¹¹⁰ This then leads to Pannenberg's quest for a coherentist theological methodology, because the goal of theology is to "demonstrate the unity of truth in God, that is, to bring all human knowledge together in our affirmation of God. Or stated another way, theology seeks to show the postulate of God illumines all human knowledge."¹¹¹

Because attempting to achieve this is impossible, Pannenberg argues that truth is eschatological in nature. Due to truth being historical, the only focal point that Pannenberg argues is certain is the eschatological future. In the meantime, all truth claims must remain provisional.¹¹² All statements pertaining to truth must be held lightly, because until the *eschaton* they are conjecture, although educated conjecture.

As well as Pannenberg, Grenz acknowledges an indebtedness to the work of Lindbeck, who, we have seen, advanced a coherentist theological approach with a

¹⁰⁷ The term 'web of belief' is taken from W. V. O. Quine. See W. V. O. Quine and J. S. Ullian, *The Web of Belief* (New York: Random House, 1970), for an unpacking of this idea and those related to it. 'Nest of Beliefs' is taken from Wesley A. Kort, *Take, Read: Scripture, Textuality, and Cultural Practice* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996). Grenz later adapts these terms for his own method using the term 'belief mosaic'.

¹⁰⁸ *Renewing the Center*, 195.

¹⁰⁹ See Pannenberg's *Systematic Theology* 1: 48-61.

¹¹⁰ *Renewing the Center*, 197.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹¹² Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* 1:54.

linguistic twist.¹¹³ Although Lindbeck makes some useful suggestions, Grenz wants to go beyond his thesis, offering his own proposal for understanding the “extra-linguistic referential character of Christian doctrine,”¹¹⁴ as opposed to Lindbeck’s intra-textual methodology.¹¹⁵

Again, taking the idea of community seriously (in line with the Reformed epistemologists Plantinga and Wolterstorff)¹¹⁶ he writes that “the evangelical theology proposed here avers that the various religions mediate religious experiences that are categorically different from each other. The encounter with the God of the Bible through Jesus, which is foundational to Christian identity, is shared only by those who participate in the *Christian* community.”¹¹⁷ Moreover, Grenz adds, “my proposal differs from liberalism in that the evangelical approach takes seriously the experience-forming dimension of interpretive frameworks.”¹¹⁸ Experience does not precede interpretation. Instead, experiences are constantly filtered through an interpretive framework. Furthermore, “there is no generic religious experience, only experiences endemic to specific religious traditions, i.e., experiences that are facilitated by an interpretive framework that is specific to that religious tradition.”¹¹⁹ Consequently, the Christian experience is facilitated by the Christian gospel, “and every such proclamation comes clothed in a specifically Christian theological interpretive framework that views the world in connection with the Bible.”¹²⁰

Grenz denies that this Christian interpretive framework is basic for theology in the foundationalist sense. He argues that his interpretation provides a radical departure from such an understanding. “The cognitive framework that is ‘basic’ for theology is not a given that precedes the theological enterprise...Rather, in a sense the interpretive framework and theology are inseparably intertwined. Just as every interpretive framework is essentially theological, so also every articulation of the Christian cognitive framework comes already clothed in a specific theological

¹¹³ *Renewing the Center*, 198.

¹¹⁴ Grenz, ‘Toward an Undomesticated Gospel: A Response to D. A. Carson’ in *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 30: 4 (Winter 2003), 459.

¹¹⁵ See the section on Lindbeck for analysis of his ideas.

¹¹⁶ See particularly the important volume *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (eds.) (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983).

¹¹⁷ *Renewing the Center*, 202.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 202.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 203.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 203.

understanding.”¹²¹ This is basically a protracted way of saying that different Christian communities have their own way of understanding and interpreting the Christian gospel. It is in this sense that Grenz is attempting to get around the foundationalist problem. It is the emphasis on the communitarian turn that he relies on to give a postmodern twist to his methodology. The Bible informs the Christian interpretive framework which takes the form of an integrated and prescriptive statement of doctrine which Grenz believes leads to the type of coherentist method that Pannenberg has developed.¹²²

Grenz once again brings alternative images to his developing method. The ‘belief mosaic’ is an image, he argues, that is helpful in attempting to understand and articulate theological work in a particular community. The mosaic should consist of different interlocking pieces that together form the ‘belief mosaic’ of the Christian community. Moreover, because of this quality, “theology is a second-order conversation that seeks to serve the mission of the church...”¹²³ Theology should be seen as an ongoing conversation that the faith community participates in and develops.

This conversation has three sources. Firstly, there is the Bible. Grenz refers to the Bible as the ‘norming norm’ for theology. The Bible is the instrumentality of the Spirit. This is particularly apt for the postmodern climate in which we find ourselves. Using insights from contemporary speech-act theory he writes, “Through Scripture the Spirit performs the illocutionary act of addressing us.”¹²⁴ Furthermore, the spirit performs the perlocutionary act of creating ‘world’. That is to say, the spirit creates a new world which is eschatological and which finds cohesion in Jesus Christ. “And this world consists of a new community comprised of renewed persons.”¹²⁵

The second source is tradition. Grenz acknowledges that contemporary Christians stand at the head of a hermeneutical trajectory that spans the development of Christian thought throughout the ages. This community will recognise the theological heritage that it has been left with as it reads the Bible which, in turn, is appropriated by the

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 204.

¹²² See Pannenberg’s *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991-1998).

¹²³ *Renewing the Center*, 206.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 206.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 207.

Spirit. Tradition has an important though secondary role in doing theology. “Hence, our theological heritage provides a reference point for us today. This heritage offers examples of previous attempts to fulfil the theological mandate, from which we can learn.”¹²⁶

The final source is that of culture. Although the ultimate authority for Christians is the Spirit speaking through the Bible, this is not done in a cultural vacuum. Whatever the situation, there is always a particular context in which the Spirit addresses Christians. Grenz reflects that the Bible itself was written in different contexts through which the Spirit communicated.

The identification of culture is crucial to the hermeneutical task. Grenz argues that “because the life-giving Spirit is present wherever life flourishes, the Spirit’s voice can conceivably resound through many media, including the media of human culture...Consequently, in the conversation that constitutes theology, evangelical theologians should listen intently for the voice of the Spirit, who is present in all life...”¹²⁷ However, theologians must be careful not to pit the Spirit’s voice in the cultural climate against that which is contained in the Bible. There can be no contradiction between them. Indeed, primacy must be given to the Spirit speaking through the biblical texts. This then safeguards against rogue interpretations. Nevertheless, although Grenz places a safeguard here, this element is still open to abuse. For example, whose interpretation of the Bible is authoritative? Biblical texts are, after all, interpreted in a great many different ways. This subjectivity (although Grenz attempts to mitigate it by interpreting texts through a particular community), from an evangelical perspective, poses hermeneutical dangers. An erroneous interpretation can be the basis for misunderstanding the spirit speaking through culture, therefore doubling the error.

Understanding theology in this constructive, conversational way ultimately leads to the conclusion that all theology is ‘specific’ or local.¹²⁸ However, Grenz points out that despite the differences in theological interpretation, they all share a similar pattern in their make up that makes them distinctively Christian. Furthermore, he

¹²⁶ Ibid., 208.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 210.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 211.

reiterates his position that theology should be trinitarian in structure. “At its core the content of Christian theology consists of a witness to, as well as participation in, the narrative of the being of God. As such theology’s structuring motif is rooted in the Christian confession of God as triune, and hence must be trinitarian.”¹²⁹ Furthermore, as we will see in more detail below, the integrative motif is the church as community and the orientating motif is eschatology.

The eschatologically orientated methodology that Grenz advocates brings us to the eschatological realism that he posits. After examining the relationship between science and theology in the light of what he sees to be the demise of realism, Grenz concludes that theologians need to be scientists and scientists theologians, due to the post-empirical context in which we now live.¹³⁰ This is on the basis that, following particularly the insights of Michael Polanyi, “Scientists are theologians...in that personal ‘stance’ affects, even directs, their research...Like theologians, scientists engage in their discipline as persons of ‘faith.’ They bring a certain type of personal commitment, i.e., faith, to their work.”¹³¹

The post-empirical context not only allows for the dimension of faith to be given a greater role but also helps to show that scientific knowledge and religious knowledge are not necessarily as incompatible as some have thought. The universe is a “more ‘mysterious’ place than the empirical scientists of the modern era realized. Because the natural world is not a simple, closed network of causal relations, the older model of science is not capable of explaining it completely.”¹³² Grenz suggests that because of this element of faith in both disciplines, there should be a closer relationship between the two.¹³³ Furthermore, again drawing on Polanyi, Grenz concludes that our understanding of the world is of our own construction. That is to say, our understanding of the world is dependent on our social locality. He, of course, acknowledges that some scientists would disagree with this and would deny that they unwillingly devise socially determined constructions of the world, believing

¹²⁹ Ibid., 213.

¹³⁰ That is to say, we have progressed to a post-empirical understanding of science, which has led to a chastened view of science. See Arthur Peacocke, *Intimations of Reality: Critical Realism in Science and Religion* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989).

¹³¹ *Renewing the Center*, 240. Grenz is reliant here on Polanyi’s, *Personal Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

¹³² *Renewing the Center*, 241.

¹³³ This certainly is the case in contemporary thought. See for example Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Frame of Mind: Reason, Order, and Openness in Theology and Natural Science* (Colorado: Helmers and Howard Publishing, 1989).

themselves to be engaged with the task of discovering objective facts about the world. Indeed, in arguing against this assumption he could make good use of critical realist scholarship which would be of benefit here (particularly the work of Roy Bhaskar).¹³⁴ Unfortunately, however, he seems almost to dismiss this school of thought, referring to it only in passing.¹³⁵ Furthermore, there is an element of contradiction in his work at this point. He admits that there is a 'givenness' to the world and the universe that exists independently of human linguistic constructions. In defending this apparent contradiction he argues that we apprehend the world at different levels. Citing Norwood Hanson's argument that we live in a world of our own 'construal,' he argues that "seeing and construing are not two separate epistemological moments, but that 'construing is there in the seeing'".¹³⁶ He cites Hanson's own illustration of two astronomers, Kepler (who regarded the sun as fixed) and Tycho, (who believed the earth was fixed). Hanson asks if either of the two astronomers see the same thing, and responds by declaring,

Tycho sees the sun beginning its journey from horizon to horizon. He sees that from some celestial vantage point the sun (carrying with it the moon and planets) could be watched circling our fixed earth... Kepler will see the horizon dipping, or turning away, from our fixed local star. The shift from sunrise to horizon-turn is ... occasioned by differences between what Tycho and Kepler think they know.¹³⁷

Grenz writes, "We do not (yet) live in the universe as a given, external reality. We do not inhabit the 'world-in-itself.'"¹³⁸ For Grenz, "The 'universe' we inhabit, then, is a socially constituted reality, which an individual member of society learns to take for granted as 'objective' knowledge about the world."¹³⁹ The language of empirical scientists is simply another example, along with those of religion, of a socially constructed 'reality.'

Both scientists and theologians are involved in constructing 'world.' This returns directly to answer the question Grenz asked earlier, "Can Christian theology continue

¹³⁴ Roy Bhaskar is acknowledged as one of the leading thinkers within critical realist thought. We will examine some of Bhaskar's thought in the next section.

¹³⁵ *Renewing the Center*, 242.

¹³⁶ *Renewing the Center*, 242. See Norwood Hanson, *Patterns of Discovery: An Inquiry into the Conceptual Foundations of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958).

¹³⁷ Cited in Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 242.

¹³⁸ *Renewing the Center*, 242.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 242-243.

to talk about an actual world in the face of the postmodern condition characterized by the demise of realism and the advent of social constructionism?”¹⁴⁰ He also asks “can Christian theology make any claim to speak ‘objective truth’ in a context in which various communities offer diverse paradigms, each of which is ultimately theological?”¹⁴¹ Lindbeck’s proposal is an example of a nonfoundationalist methodology that seems to be unable to attach itself to any reality beyond itself. Does the move to nonfoundationalism herald a break with metaphysical realism? Grenz does not like the way this question is put because he thinks it improper and unhelpful. Instead he prefers to ask, “How can a postfoundationalist theological method lead to statements about a world beyond our formulations?”¹⁴²

In attempting to answer the above question, Grenz points to the eschatological nature of God’s will. Again, drawing on Pannenberg,¹⁴³ he argues that because of the future ‘dimension’ of God’s will, the only ‘objective world’ that we can speak about is a future one, the universe that will one day come to pass. This is the eschatological realism mentioned above.¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, it is this aspect that actually can take forward a social constructionism, according to Grenz. Christians participate with God through their linguistic world that sees all reality from an eschatological perspective. This “eschatological world is the realm in which all creation finds its connectedness in Jesus Christ (Col. 1:17) who is the *logos* or the Word (John 1:1), that is, the ordering principle of the cosmos as God intends it to be. The centrality of Christ in the eschatological world of God’s making suggests that the grammar that constructs the ‘real’ world focuses on the narrative of Jesus given in Scripture.”¹⁴⁵ Of course, as we have seen with Grenz’s previous work, the Holy Spirit provides the dynamic for an eschatological worldview for Christians. Ultimately, the Christian worldview should posit a universe only with reference to God who has himself created the heavens and the earth. “And the only ultimate perspective from which that universe can be viewed is the vantage point of the eschatological completion of God’s creative activity.”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 244.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 245.

¹⁴² Ibid., 245.

¹⁴³ See Pannenberg’s *Systematic Theology* 3: 527-595.

¹⁴⁴ Grenz’s eschatological realism bears a striking resemblance to John Hick’s eschatological verificationism. See Hick’s *Philosophy of Religion*, 2nd. Edition (New Jersey: Englewood Cliffs Inc, 1973), 84-96.

¹⁴⁵ *Renewing the Center*, 247.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 247.

Concerning the question of how Christian theology can claim to speak objective truth, Grenz finally gets around to addressing the issue in his discussion of evangelicalism and other religions. After outlining the three main positions with regard to salvation, that is exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism,¹⁴⁷ he goes on to explore the possible ‘providential role’¹⁴⁸ that other religions may have in the divine plan. Grenz argues that, from an evangelical perspective, a theology of the religions involves a “yes/no attitude” towards them.¹⁴⁹ That is to say, while, on the one hand, other religious traditions may have some form of insight into the divine, on the other hand there is a resounding ‘no’ because they lack specifically the Christian theological vision that culminates in Jesus Christ.¹⁵⁰

Again, Grenz bases his conclusions on the term ‘community’, which for him, represents what he understands to be a summary of God’s intent for humanity. It is this that provides the providential link mentioned above. Grenz understands that a major challenge that presents itself to an evangelical theology of the religions is to find out what this providential role is. Of course, it may be that all religions have a providential role in the work of God. The question remains the same however: What is that role? Grenz’s conclusion is that “The providential place of human religious traditions may lie with their role of fostering community in the present.”¹⁵¹ In a way reminiscent of Lindbeck, he argues that whatever their goal, human religious traditions contribute to social cohesion and personal identity.¹⁵²

So why is it that Grenz (and, indeed Lindbeck) privileges the Christian vision as that which is the best and most complete religious understanding for humanity? While Lindbeck’s thesis rests more on eschatological verification, Grenz bases his conclusions on the ‘communitarian turn’ that he has readily adopted thus far. Because he understands that the goal of all social traditions, be they religious or secular, is to promote and construct social cohesion, Grenz asks the question: “Which theologizing

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 252-268.

¹⁴⁸ Grenz is indebted to J. A. DiNoia for this observation. See *The Diversity of Religions: A Christian Perspective* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1992) for DiNoia’s unpacking of this.

¹⁴⁹ *Renewing the Center*, 275.

¹⁵⁰ There is some similarity of approach with the work done by evangelical inclusivists, such as John Sanders and Clark Pinnock. See Pinnock’s *The Wideness of God’s Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Eugene, Or: Wpif & Stock, 1997) and Sanders’ *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelised* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992). For a critical assessment of these positions see D. Strange, *The Possibility of Salvation among the Unevangelised: An Analysis of Inclusivism in Recent Evangelical Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001).

¹⁵¹ *Renewing the Center*, 276.

¹⁵² This typology was first posited by Alan Race in *Christianity and Religious Pluralism* (London: SCM Press, 1993).

community articulates an interpretive framework that is able to provide the transcendent vision for the construction of the kind of world that the particular community itself is in fact seeking?”¹⁵³ Or to put it more succinctly, he adds, “Which religious vision carries within itself the foundation for the community-building role of a transcendent religious vision?”¹⁵⁴ Of course, for Grenz it is the Christian theological vision, because other religious visions cannot provide the same level of understanding of community as the Christian one. The Christian theological vision, based upon the relational trinitarian understanding of God and understood through the life and work of Jesus Christ, represents the fullest understanding of community with God more than any other religion. He writes, “The Christian vision, a vision of God as triune and of our creation to be *imago dei*, provides the transcendent basis for the human life-in-community that all belief systems in their own way and according to their own understanding seek to foster.”¹⁵⁵ The Christian theological vision looks to the divine as the basis for its own communitarian relations. As we have seen earlier, Grenz argues that the inter-relationship between the members of the Trinity is the basis upon which the Christian understanding should rest. The biblical vision of community is not simply an idea put forward by God, it is nothing less than the outworking of the divine trinitarian pattern.

This neatly brings the general human quest for community to its full potential. This general quest is something that emerges as a direct result of humanity being created in the *imago dei* and is therefore a natural exploration that, although it is manifest in other religious traditions, has its culmination only in the Christian understanding of it.

As far as the question of truth is concerned, Grenz writes, “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 awaits the eschatological completion of the universally directed program of the God of the Bible.”¹⁵⁶ In other words, Grenz is arguing that the Christian vision is the most valid option out of the plethora of alternatives available and it is therefore the ‘truest’ we have to go on until God invokes the eschaton. Whilst there is much that is useful

¹⁵³ *Renewing the Center*, 281.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 281.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 282.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 283.

in Grenz's thesis, this is not a satisfactory answer to Grenz's problem and will be further examined later.

Grenz still wants to hold on to Christian universality, but acknowledges that with his emphasis on a community-based approach to knowledge he is siding with the 'incredulity toward metanarratives' that Lyotard speaks of. To combat this he attempts to argue that a connection with universality can be seen with the divine eschatological intent of salvation for all humankind. Furthermore, Grenz argues that there is a biblical link between creation and new creation. That is to say, for Grenz, God will transform the original creation into the eschatological new creation. "The very people who now exist in this world God will make perfect through the resurrection after the pattern of the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ, for through faith they are united with Christ."¹⁵⁷

Beyond Foundationalism

The most developed work by Grenz on theological methodology can be found in the volume co-authored with John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (2001). The emergent methodology Grenz and Franke present here builds upon the earlier work reviewed above. Because *Beyond Foundationalism* is his most detailed attempt at the construction of an evangelical theological methodology this will be the principal focus of my critique. It is important to note also that although this volume is co-authored, the actual substance of the book is an unpacking of what Grenz has already proposed in his earlier work. This, of course, is not to deny the significant contribution of Franke.¹⁵⁸

The title *Beyond Foundationalism* is an explicit declaration of authorial intent. This challenge lies in overcoming what is a fundamentally epistemic problem, rooted in the assumption that foundationalism has collapsed. Therefore, if a credible theological methodology (indeed particularly an evangelical methodology) is to be developed it should be done in the knowledge that a paradigm shift is underway and that scholars

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 284.

¹⁵⁸ It should be noted that in the Preface to *Beyond Foundationalism*, chapters 1, 2 and 4 are attributed to Franke and chapters 3, 5, 7 and 8 to Grenz, x.

must engage sensibly and sensitively within the postmodern climate in which they now find themselves.

The volume itself is divided into three parts, each of which shall be examined in turn. Part One examines the nature of theology in 'postmodern' times. Part Two examines what Grenz and Franke deem to be theology's sources. Part Three suggests theology's focal motifs.

In the opening pages of *Beyond Foundationalism* they rightly observe that theology "is in a time of transition and ferment, partly as a result of the collapse of the categories and paradigms of the modern world as spawned by the Enlightenment."¹⁵⁹ Moreover, for Grenz and Franke, this has led to fragmentation within theology that extends well beyond, what they term in rather simplistic fashion, the traditional 'liberal/conservative' division that has been typical of much twentieth century theology.¹⁶⁰ There is also widespread fragmentation *within* these two 'groups.' David Tracy is cited as being representative of some contemporary theologians who have attempted a 'revisionist' exploration and development of nineteenth century liberalism by upholding the primacy of universal human experience as a foundation for the theological task.¹⁶¹ On the other hand, Lindbeck, as we have already seen, prefers to adopt an 'intratextual theology' that seeks to contextualise the modern world using the symbols and categories of the Bible.¹⁶²

In the 'conservative' camp, Grenz and Franke argue similar divisions are evident. This is certainly true. For example, Erickson is an evangelical scholar at the forefront of those who challenge what is perceived as the 'Evangelical left', those theologians who are sympathetic to postmodern developments.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 3.

¹⁶⁰ This is a rather simplistic division drawn up by the authors inasmuch as the differences between what they term as liberal and conservative are not as black and white as they would have us believe. Proof of this lies in their recognition that within these two so-called camps there are cracks and fissures. Furthermore, I would argue that theology has always been fragmented throughout the centuries, as theologians have struggled with developments in doctrine, against so-called heresies, and consequently sought continually to transform theology within the context it finds itself. As long as different contexts evolve, theology will always be in a transitional state.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 5. David Tracy, it seems to me, is not really that representative of the current liberal program, although of course he is still influential. *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975) which Grenz and Franke cite is now 30 years old.

¹⁶² See George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*. As we have seen earlier, Lindbeck uses the term 'post-liberal' to describe his cultural-linguistic approach.

¹⁶³ See *The Evangelical Left* for an outline of some theologians that Erickson accuses of slipping away to the left. See also *Reclaiming the Center* as a prime example of the type of responses some evangelicals are constructing as a rebuttal to the work of what might be termed 'postconservative' theologians. Grenz is a particular target in this volume of essays. In the opinion of

Grenz and Franke pose a set of questions at the outset: “How should theology respond to the collapse of the modern worldview? How can Christian scripture that emerged in particular ancient contexts exercise a normative function for culturally diverse incarnations of Christian theology? What is the value of past theological formulations? What is the role of culture in theological reflection?”¹⁶⁴ All such questions are, of course, important when attempting to work out a methodology. In short, they want to develop a theological methodology that rescues the discipline from “its destructive accommodation to modernity while fostering the vitality and relevance of Christian theology for the church.”¹⁶⁵

They begin by offering the following ‘working definition’ of theology:

Christian theology is an ongoing, second-order, contextual discipline that engages in critical and constructive reflection on the faith, life, and practices of the Christian community. Its task is the articulation of biblically normed, historically informed, and culturally relevant models of the Christian belief-mosaic for the purpose of assisting the community of Christ’s followers in their vocation to live as the people of God in the particular social-historical context in which they are situated.¹⁶⁶

From this definition, the key methodological concepts Grenz and Franke wish to promote become clear.¹⁶⁷ Theology is a pilgrim theology that is always done within specific contexts, and as such it is affected by the contemporary climate and will always have an ongoing nature to it. Furthermore, theology is a second-order discipline. This is an interesting thesis that reveals the influence of Lindbeck. Theology is an interpretive discipline. “Doctrinal and theological formulations of theologians are the products of human reflection on the stories, symbols, and practices of the Christian community. As such, theological statements must be sharply distinguished from these ‘first-order’ commitments of the Christian community.”¹⁶⁸

many of these theologians Grenz and company are pandering to the whims of postmodernity and consequently are guilty of evangelical accommodationism.

¹⁶⁴ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 11.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁶⁷ In *The Social God and the Relational Self*, Grenz writes, “... I would suggest that the purpose of theology is to serve the church and its mission by engaging in the constructive task of setting forth a coherent model of the Christian belief-mosaic that is faithful to the biblical narratives and teachings, is informed by the trajectory of the church’s theological reflection, and is relevant to the contemporary setting.” 8-9.

¹⁶⁸ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 17.

That it is a second-order discipline also means that we should think in terms of a 'servant theology'.¹⁶⁹ Theology's purpose is to serve the church by aiding it to work out, coherently and faithfully, the implications of the Christian faith in contemporary contexts. We will revisit the issues pertaining to what is classed as 'first' and 'second' order in theology later.

The Quest for an Alternative Epistemology

According to Grenz and Franke, foundationalism is in irreversible demise.¹⁷⁰

However, before we examine their quest for an epistemological solution, we will analyse their understanding of foundationalism.

In coming to the conclusion that foundationalism is in decline, it is disappointing to see that there is, unfortunately, a lack of engagement with contemporary scholarship. Certainly, scholars from what might be termed the evangelical right have been very critical of their lack of philosophical rigour. J. P. Moreland and Garret De Weese have attacked Grenz and Franke for dismissing foundationalism without any real engagement with other scholars.¹⁷¹ They cite leading epistemologists only occasionally, relying mainly on secondary sources to aid their argument. Erickson writes, regarding Grenz and Franke's work, "What is striking about reading the nonfoundational and postfoundational literature is the virtually total absence of any reference to the works of Alston, Audi, or... Triplett. The entire book *Beyond Foundationalism...* does not contain a single mention of this literature..."¹⁷² Of course, it is not essential to cite a catalogue of scholars, in order to be an adept epistemologist, but what is of some concern is that Grenz and Franke fail to discuss the work of any of them.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 17.

¹⁷⁰ See *Renewing the Center*, 184-193.

¹⁷¹ J. P. Moreland and Garrett De Weese, 'The Premature Report of Foundationalism's Demise' in *Reclaiming the Center*, 89-90. See also Millard Erickson, 'On Flying in Theological Fog' in *Reclaiming the Center*, 323-349, for similar observations. Furthermore, Franke in his book *The Character of Theology: An Introduction to Its Nature, Task, and Purpose* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005) published 4 years after *Beyond Foundationalism*, fails to correct this oversight. He does not engage with, or indeed mention, alternatives to classical or strong foundationalism.

¹⁷² Millard Erickson, 'On Flying in Theological Fog', in *Reclaiming the Center*, 330. It must be said that Erickson has an axe to grind with Grenz, or for that matter anyone who he reads as 'postconservative'. Furthermore, the three cited scholars are not the only philosophers of note working in the area. See E. Sosa, 'Epistemic Presuppositions' in *Justification and Knowledge* (ed.) G. P. Pappas (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1979). Also Richard L. Kirkham, *Theories of Truth* (London: MIT Press, 1995).

¹⁷³ What about the work of other epistemologists such as Roderick Chisholm, Paul Moser and Laurence Bonjour to name but another three all of which have written prominent, highly rated but rather different epistemological works. See L. Bonjour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), R. Chisholm, *The Foundations of Knowing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982) and Paul Moser, *Knowledge and Evidence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

It is perhaps surprising, then, that they portray foundationalism only in its ‘classical’ or ‘strong’ sense, with little consideration given to ‘modest’ or weak versions.¹⁷⁴ We have seen earlier that ‘classical’ foundationalism is the understanding that we have some beliefs that are basic and which are indubitable (sometimes referred to as ‘immediate’ beliefs), from which non-basic ideas are derived. However, in acknowledging that there are problems with ‘classical’ foundationalism, some philosophers¹⁷⁵ have attempted to re-think foundationalism and have produced versions of it that are far more modest in their claims.¹⁷⁶ William Alston is one such thinker. He asserts that the main reason for adopting foundationalism is the impossibility of “a belief’s being mediately justified without resting ultimately on immediately justified belief.”¹⁷⁷ However, he argues that, unlike Grenz and Franke, it is important to differentiate between types of foundationalism. Alston advocates a ‘simple’ foundationalism as opposed to what he terms ‘iterative’ foundationalism.¹⁷⁸ Iterative foundationalism is a self-certain understanding of knowledge in the classical sense. To illustrate this he writes, “For any epistemic subject *S*, there are *p*’s such that *S* is immediately justified in believing that *p* and *S* is immediately justified in believing that he is immediately justified in believing *p*.”¹⁷⁹ This is in contrast to simple foundationalism’s understanding that “for any epistemic subject *S*, there are *p*’s such that *S* is immediately justified in believing *p*.”¹⁸⁰ The difference between them is significant. For Alston, iterative foundationalism is beyond the powers of reasoning that simply ends in the unpalatable position of infinite regress. Employing the regress argument,¹⁸¹ he argues that, although one can have some immediately justified beliefs that enable the termination of justificational regress, what is of especial importance is that all epistemic beliefs require mediate justification. This means that simple foundationalism is the most suitable form of foundationalism to

¹⁷⁴ See William P. Alston’s article ‘Foundationalism’ in *A Companion to Epistemology*, (eds.) Jonathan Dancy and Ernest Sosa (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 144-147 for a brief introduction to foundationalism. See also Keith Lehrer, *Theory of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1992) for an excellent critique of foundationalism.

¹⁷⁵ The development of postmodern thought has served as a catalyst for some foundationalist philosophers. However, disagreements with classical foundationalism go back many years. For example the Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid was very critical of strong foundationalism. See Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* ed. B. Brody (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1969).

¹⁷⁶ See for example Alston’s, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (London: Cornell University Press) and Robert Audi, *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1998).

¹⁷⁷ See Alston’s, ‘Two Types of Foundationalism’ in *Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 73: 7 (April, 8, 1976), 165-185.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 182. Other terminology that means basically the same is ‘hard’ and ‘soft’; ‘minimal’ and ‘maximal.’

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 171.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 171.

¹⁸¹ The regress argument has traditionally been employed to defend against infinite regress. That is the notion that that no terminus for beliefs can be reached. This leads to infinite regression; the inability to reach the source for epistemic justification.

adopt, as it holds in principle that all beliefs should have immediate justification. However, they do not have to be proved, and therefore, they can remain hypothetical. The result of this theory is that a position between classical foundationalism and coherentism can be taken that avoids what he sees are the pitfalls of infinite regress (associated with strong or iterative foundationalism) on the one hand, and non-foundationalism (coherentism) on the other.

This is just one example of epistemological foundationalist thinking that allows for a certain flexibility that moves some contemporary foundationalist theories away from the Cartesian model prominent in the Enlightenment and the form of foundationalism discussed by Grenz and Franke.¹⁸²

However, it must be said that, although moving away from classical understandings of foundationalist theory, according to some critics even modest versions are ultimately still not able to ward off the same general weakness that foundationalism suffers from. That is, when a rationale is given in defence of one's basic beliefs, this suggests that they are, strictly speaking, not 'basic'. The rationale given is often more basic and, therefore, usurps the original so-called basic beliefs.¹⁸³ That is to say, infinite regress is unavoidable, undermining attempts to provide any reasonable foundation upon which a theory of knowledge can be built.

Overall, despite the lack of academic rigour in coming to their conclusions, Grenz and Franke's final assumptions on the plight of foundationalism do reflect a growing concern for many scholars that alternatives to foundationalism of any sort must be explored in order to meet the postmodern climate. Even the modest versions of foundationalism seem eventually to run into trouble. Of course, some scholars reject this as what they understand to be an unfaithful, defeatist attitude, and suggest that, correctly articulated, modest versions are able to counter traditional criticisms.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Other examples that could be cited are Alvin Plantinga, 'Reason and Belief in God' in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, (eds.) Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 16-93; J.P. Moreland and William Craig Lane, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003); E. Sosa, 'Epistemic Presupposition' in *Justification and Knowledge* by G. S. Pappas (ed.) (Dordrecht: Reidel Press, 1979).

¹⁸³ Keith Lehrer offers an uncompromising critique of foundationalism in his book *Theory of Knowledge*. See in particular ch.3 and ch.4, pp.39-86.

¹⁸⁴ Astoundingly, Millard Erickson believes that many foundationalisms have existed for around 30 years that are invulnerable to postmodern critiques and have been designed precisely to combat such postmodern questioning. See Millard Erickson, 'On Flying in Theological Fog', in *Reclaiming the Center*, 330.

In promulgating the decline of foundationalism there are consequences. What now happens to the correspondence theory of truth, which is so closely connected to this understanding of knowledge? Does the end of foundationalism also indicate the death of realism, as many postmodern theorists would have us believe?¹⁸⁵ Is it possible to have an epistemology that resists such an outcome and maintains a realist epistemology?¹⁸⁶

In answering the first question regarding the fate of the correspondence theory of truth we shall see that they implicitly move beyond this theory in their own methodological developments.

In the volume *A Primer on Postmodernism* (1996), Grenz argues the following:

Concerning one important aspect of the postmodern agenda, such fears are well founded. Postmodernism has tossed aside objective truth, at least as it has classically been understood. Foucault, Derrida, and Rorty stand against what has for centuries been the reigning epistemological principle—the correspondence theory of truth (the belief that truth consists of correspondence of propositions with the world ‘out there’). This rejection of the correspondence theory not only leads to a scepticism that undercuts the concept of objective truth in general; it also undermines Christian claims that our doctrinal formulations state objective truth.¹⁸⁷

It is clear at this point (1996) that Grenz still adhered to and indeed thought that the correspondence theory of truth was intrinsically important for the understanding of the Christian faith. Without such an understanding Christian claims to the objective truth of their doctrines are weakened. However, the development of his thought in this area moves him beyond this traditional understanding of knowledge.

In *Renewing the Center* published in 2000, Grenz makes four interesting references to the correspondence theory of truth that clearly show a move away from such an understanding. The first reference simply maps out very briefly what this theory is.¹⁸⁸ However, it is interesting to note that the context of the discussion in which Grenz

¹⁸⁵ See Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) and Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (New Jersey: Princeton, 1981) for good examples of anti-realist stances.

¹⁸⁶ The term realism or realist refers to a group of philosophical positions which take the general line of thought that there exists a real world, external to the human mind.

¹⁸⁷ *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 163.

¹⁸⁸ *Renewing the Center*, 169-171.

unpacks this theory leads into the introduction of what Grenz terms a ‘constructionist’ view of truth. One is aware that Grenz, if he does not move beyond the correspondence theory of truth, certainly sympathises with other approaches.

After explicitly noting that the correspondence theory of truth became the strong preference for the Enlightenment project, Grenz writes, “Foundationalism, allied as it was with metaphysical realism and the correspondence theory of truth, was undeniably the epistemological king of the Enlightenment era. Today, however, it no longer commands the broad, unquestioned acceptance it once enjoyed.”¹⁸⁹

Although Grenz here is primarily writing *about* foundationalism, the correspondence theory of truth is closely related. As Grenz is arguing that foundationalism is in demise, so he is also implicitly doing the same for the correspondence theory of truth and is looking to pave the way for an alternative theory. “Coherentism and pragmatism provided ways to leave behind the foundationalist preference for the correspondence of truth.”¹⁹⁰ The final reference to this theory in *Renewing the Center* is indirect. Nevertheless, it gives notice of Grenz’s favoured direction and possible intentions in regard to developing an epistemology that fits his outlook.

In *Beyond Foundationalism* it is interesting to note that the correspondence theory of truth is not even listed in the index! However, there are some references in the text that illustrate Grenz and Franke’s movement beyond this theory. In the first reference of note they write that

most Enlightenment thinkers readily adopted Descartes’s concern to establish some type of sure foundation for the human knowing project. And with this concern, the Enlightenment project assumed a realist metaphysic and evidenced a strong preference for the correspondence theory of truth, that is, the epistemological outlook that focuses on the truth value of individual propositions and declares a proposition to be ‘true’ if and only if—or to the extent that—it corresponds with some fact.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 190.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 194.

¹⁹¹ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 32.

Inextricably linking the correspondence theory of truth with foundationalism in this way illustrates Grenz's dislike for it. In a further example, Grenz and Franke cement the progress made in *Renewing the Center* when they write (in the context of searching for alternative ways of constructing truth and, again, damning foundationalism), "If coherentism and pragmatism provided ways to leave behind the foundationalist preference for the correspondence of truth, the 'turn to linguistics' offered the means to overcome metaphysical realism."¹⁹²

It is clear they have moved beyond the correspondence theory of truth. They no longer see it as adequate for a postmodern age. The fact that there is no reference to it in *Beyond Foundationalism* indicates that it is of little use to Grenz and Franke when it comes to determining an evangelical methodology for the so-called 'post-foundational' era. Furthermore, it is only referred to in a somewhat derogatory way in connection with foundationalism.

Of course, some evangelicals vehemently disagree with these ideas. Douglas Groothuis is one example. He defends the correspondence theory of truth, arguing that ultimately alternatives, including coherence, pragmatism and *all* noncorrespondence theories of truth are inadequate. He goes as far to say that "Christians, of all people, must swear allegiance to the notion that truth is what corresponds to reality—and we must do unswervingly whatever the postmodern winds of doctrine may be blowing in our faces."¹⁹³ This sounds like idolatry toward particular philosophical understandings of truth! However, Grenz and Franke do tread very carefully when expounding the merits of alternative epistemological theories, knowing full well that their suggestions are controversial to many traditional evangelicals. It may be that in an attempt to keep them onside they prefer surreptitiously to disregard methods that are deemed to be no longer credible and by doing so avoid head on confrontation. This irenic approach is certainly a characteristic of Grenz's work in general.¹⁹⁴ From an academic point of view, there does not seem to be another viable reason why they should not be so straightforward with their conclusions.

¹⁹² Ibid., 42.

¹⁹³ Douglas Groothuis, 'Truth Defined and Defended' in *Reclaiming the Center*, 79.

¹⁹⁴ Clearly some scholars do not concur with this. See Erickson's comments 'Flying in Theological Fog', in *Reclaiming the Center*, 334.

Returning to the question raised above of whether with the collapse of classical foundationalism it is to be assumed that the collapse of realism goes hand in hand with such developments, this is certainly not the case. Much has been written in regard to this debate, with many postmodern theorists claiming that an anti-realist approach is preferred over a realist understanding. However, before pressing on with critiquing Grenz and Franke, I will very briefly turn to the work of McGrath, an evangelical theologian who vigorously argues for a form of ‘critical realism’.¹⁹⁵

Alister McGrath’s Critical Realist Approach to Theology

McGrath’s *Magnum Opus*, the three volume *A Scientific Theology*¹⁹⁶ (2001-2003), encapsulates at length his attempt to delineate a theology that draws upon the natural sciences as an aid to theological reflection.¹⁹⁷ This is useful because it provides an example of an alternative methodology by an evangelical theologian.

As we have noted, with the demise of foundationalism there are implications for correspondence theories of truth, and consequently also for realist understandings of the world. McGrath maintains that there is a real world, independent of, but capable of being grasped by, the human mind. What is of considerable debate is to what extent the knower is involved in the complex process of grasping and representing this ‘real’ world. McGrath notes three types of realism.¹⁹⁸ The first is naïve, the idea that reality impacts directly on the human mind, without any reflection on the part of the person. Secondly, there is ‘critical’ realism. This is the notion that reality “is apprehended by the human mind which attempts to express and accommodate that reality as best it can with the tools at its disposal.”¹⁹⁹ Finally, there is postmodern anti-realism which broadly purports that the human mind is completely free to construct its own ideas in view of there being no access to the so-called ‘external world’. Hence, the epistemic relationship between the object and the knowing subject can be understood as (a) direct continuity, (b) mediated continuity, or (c) discontinuity. However, it is realism and specifically critical realism that McGrath understands to be the most resilient

¹⁹⁵ “The term ‘critical realism’ arose by elision of the phrases ‘transcendental realism’ and ‘critical naturalism’, but Bhaskar and others in this movement have accepted it since ‘critical’, like ‘transcendental’, suggested affinities with Kant’s philosophy, while ‘realism’ indicated the differences from it.” Margaret Archer, Roy Bhaskar, Andrew Collier, Tony Lawson and Alan Norrie (eds.) *Critical Realism: Essential Readings* (London: Routledge, 1998), ix.

¹⁹⁶ Alister E. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology* vol. 1 *Nature*, vol. 2 *Reality*, vol. 3 *Theory* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001-2003).

¹⁹⁷ McGrath is well qualified to write on such a vast subject as he has a PhD in the sciences as well as a theological PhD.

¹⁹⁸ McGrath, *A Scientific Theology*, 2: 195.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 195.

account of understanding the world in which we live. In other words, there must be some form of epistemic continuity. However, this continuity is mediated through communities. Hence, knowledge can be held to be knowledge about the world, even though communities shape responses to the world.

For McGrath, it is the natural sciences that are widely judged to have beaten off postmodern anti-realist challenges to their fundamental premises. Realism has continued to flourish despite sustained attack from postmodern theorists. After reviewing elements of John Searle's support for realism,²⁰⁰ McGrath makes the following statement,

Realism, then, is back in fashion. My defence of realism (is) with the basic conviction that realism offers the best explanation of the successes and strategies of the natural sciences, and that it is clearly presupposed and applied by the classic Christian theological tradition, within which I stand.²⁰¹

Having made such a stand, McGrath proceeds to unpack the particular type of realism he sees fit to endorse for his methodological task, which is critical realism. More specifically it is the work of the critical realist Roy Bhaskar that McGrath champions for his own cause.

Before analysing Bhaskar's work, McGrath first of all notes three important points to combat the pertinent question of whether the use of any philosophy then runs the risk of making theology very much dependent upon such a philosophy. Firstly, the critical realism that McGrath will employ is not allowed to act as an *a priori* foundation for theology, which will, in effect, determine its norms in advance of doing it. Secondly, the critical realism used will have an ancillary role. Thirdly, the critical realism being used is an *a posteriori* discipline, "whose central ideas rest on a sustained engagement with the social and natural structures of the world, rather than a dogmatic *a priori* determination of what those structures should be."²⁰²

Having cleared the ground and alerted the reader to different types of critical realism that differ in degree to Bhaskar's position,²⁰³ McGrath finally turns to the critical realism of Bhaskar.

²⁰⁰ See John Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (London: Penguin books, 1995). See particularly 127-149.

²⁰¹ McGrath, *A Scientific Theology*, 2: 199.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 201.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 203-209.

With the publication in 1975 of Bhaskar's *A Realist Theory of Science* there began a steady flow of books and articles that have brought Bhaskar to the forefront of critical realist developments.²⁰⁴ Indeed, McGrath writes that his "work was hailed as a 'Copernican Revolution' in the study of the natural sciences precisely because it transcended an increasingly sterile conflict concerning the achievements of the natural sciences as well as illuminating the classic conflict between empiricists and rationalists."²⁰⁵ A feature in *A Realist Theory of Science* is the recognition of how important the philosophy of sciences are, as they have traditionally been understood, whilst also taking into consideration the social nature of the scientific project. This tends to avoid ahistorical methods which have generally characterised traditional approaches to this area.

According to McGrath there are three key issues which Bhaskar's approach highlights.²⁰⁶ Firstly, realism embraces both natural and social sciences. That is to say, Bhaskar reintegrates the social and the historical within a realist perspective. This avoids the pitfalls of the Enlightenment project which failed to take into account the historical location of the knower. Critical realism views history with the utmost seriousness.

Secondly, epistemology is to be distinguished from ontology. Two fallacies are noted by Bhaskar, the epistemic and the ontic. The epistemic fallacy is defined by Bhaskar as the view "that statements about being can be reduced to or analysed in terms of statements about knowledge; i.e. that ontological questions can always be transposed into epistemological terms."²⁰⁷ This is related to the ontic fallacy "which holds that knowledge is to be analysed as a direct, unmediated relation between a subject and being."²⁰⁸ The consequences of such fallacies are summed up by McGrath as follows: "the epistemic fallacy results in the projection of the external world onto a subjective phenomenal map, whereupon the ontic fallacy projects the world as objective sense

²⁰⁴ See Bhaskar's seminal work *A Realist Theory of Science* 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 1997). See also, *The Possibility of Naturalism*. An important work that seeks to explore and dialogue with Bhaskar's work is the volume edited by Margaret Archer, Roy Bhaskar, Andrew Collier, Tony Lawson and Alan Norrie, *Critical Realism: Essential Readings* (London: Routledge, 1998).

²⁰⁵ *A Scientific Theology* 2: 209. It should be noted that the claim of Bhaskar's work constituting a 'copernican revolution' is somewhat overstated, in that although Bhaskar does play a fairly prominent role in philosophy it should not be stated in such exaggerated terms. This is not to undermine Bhaskar's ideas, or the importance of them, but to help counter McGrath's criticism of others who do not use him. For example Arthur Peacocke's important work *Intimations of Reality: Critical Realism in Science and Religion* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984) makes no mention of Bhaskar at all. See also John Polkinghorne's *Belief in God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

²⁰⁶ *A Scientific Theology*, 2: 214.

²⁰⁷ Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science* (London: Verso, 1997), 36.

²⁰⁸ McGrath, *A Scientific Theology* 2: 218.

data, of which we are held to have direct perceptual knowledge.”²⁰⁹ The identification of these two fallacies by Bhaskar allows him to argue that generative mechanisms can exist which have not yet been observed or are, indeed, unobservable. This, in turn, means that it is possible that their powers may exist undiscovered or may not even be discoverable.

Finally, reality is stratified. That is to say, reality is multi-layered. Bhaskar’s account of how reality is stratified is, in McGrath’s opinion, one of the most distinctive developments in critical realism.²¹⁰ McGrath writes, “The image of a ‘stratum’ suggests a difference in depth, allowing a causal explanatory link to be posited between different strata.”²¹¹ Importantly, “the image allows an immediate distinction to be drawn between surface phenomena and what may initially be argued—and subsequently perceived—to lie beneath that surface.”²¹² Reality cannot be simply reduced to just one ontological level, rather it must be acknowledged that there are a plurality of levels of reality. This takes any form of reductionism out of the equation, a reductionism that simplistically attempts to argue for one methodology corresponding to one level of reality.

Although this approach is posited by Bhaskar with regard to natural sciences, McGrath takes Bhaskar’s model and applies it to theology. McGrath is careful to point out that “in appropriating Bhaskar’s approach...I have not made a scientific theology dependent upon an understanding of the nature of reality which has been imported from outside the Christian tradition...Rather, I am using the framework developed by Bhaskar as a means of exploring and appreciating the insights of a scientific theology, which exist and apply independently of Bhaskar’s analysis.”²¹³ For McGrath, the consequences of such an approach by Bhaskar are that a scientific theology can be regarded as a “response to an existing reality”²¹⁴ the existence of which is independent of the possibility of human observation. Secondly, “each intellectual discipline must adopt a methodology which is appropriate to, and determined by, the ontology of its

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 219.

²¹⁰ He is not the first to adopt this stratification of reality. Others have done so before him such as Arthur O. Lovejoy *The Revolt Against Dualism* (Lasalle: Open Court, 1930) and Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (New York: Doubleday, 1966).

²¹¹ McGrath, *A Scientific Theology* 2: 219.

²¹² Ibid., 219.

²¹³ Ibid., 224-225.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 225.

specific object. Its methodology is thus determined *a posteriori* rather than *a priori*.”²¹⁵

McGrath argues for a tradition-mediated rationality of the Christian faith, which is underpinned by assumptions that are distinctly Christian concerning the nature of the world as creation, and also the role of Christ as the agent of creation.²¹⁶ This is tied in with the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*.²¹⁷ From here McGrath argues for a stratification of theological reality. “The Christian revelation holds that God’s revelation is to be located in nature, in history, in personal experience, in the life of the church, and especially in Scripture.”²¹⁸ McGrath believes that each of these can be regarded as representing a level of reality that is open to further investigation.²¹⁹

Examining horizontal stratifications²²⁰ of theological knowledge, McGrath turns to Karl Barth²²¹ and T. F. Torrance.²²² For McGrath, these two important thinkers are helpful examples of this type of approach.²²³ For example, he highlights Barth’s understanding of the ‘threefold form of the word of God’ to illustrate a horizontal stratification of theological knowledge. Barth writes,

One in three, and three in one: revelation, scripture, and preaching—the Word of God as revelation, the Word of God as scripture, the Word of God as preaching, neither to be confused nor separated. One Word of God, one authority, one power, and yet not one but three addresses. Three addresses of God in revelation, scripture and preaching, yet not three Words of God, three authorities, truths or powers, but one. Scripture is not revelation, but from revelation. Preaching is not revelation or scripture, but from both. But the Word of God is scripture no less than it is revelation, and it is preaching no less than it is scripture.²²⁴

²¹⁵ Ibid., 225.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 227.

²¹⁷ McGrath observes that some of these assumptions would be completely dismissed by most Jewish or Islamic scholars.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 227.

²¹⁹ For McGrath, “A fundamental assumption of a scientific theology is that, since the ontology of the natural world is determined by and reflects its status as God’s creation, the working methods and assumptions of those natural sciences which engage most directly with that natural world are of direct relevance to the working methods and assumptions of a responsible Christian theology.” Ibid., 245.

²²⁰ “That is to say, the horizontal understanding of stratification focusses on clarifying the relation between various theological entities within a single stratum.” Ibid., 231.

²²¹ See S. Sykes, *Karl Barth—Studies of His Theological Methods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979) for an introduction to this area.

²²² See Thomas F. Torrance, *Theological Science* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969).

²²³ See also McGrath’s biography of Torrance: *T. F. Torrance: An Intellectual Biography* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999).

²²⁴ Karl Barth, *The Gottingen Dogmatics: Instruction to the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 14-15. Also cited in McGrath, 233. See also Barth’s *Church Dogmatics V/2* for his extensive unpacking of the area.

This discussion, for McGrath, is an example of how Barth's concept of the three-fold Word of God, although at first seeming to be an excellent example of the stratification of theological reality,²²⁵ is actually not differentiated in relation to their cultural or historical strata.

Turning to T. F. Torrance, whom he argues, with some justification, is one of the most important interpreters of Barth, he focuses on his multi-levelled understanding of the Trinity.²²⁶ Torrance employs a three-tiered understanding of knowledge within science which can be applied to theology.²²⁷ However, the general problem for McGrath is that this approach, although acknowledging and attempting to deal with issues of ontological depth, is still horizontal in regard to stratification. For McGrath, Bhaskar's understanding which "focuses primarily on *the stratification of the reality which generates theories*, rather than *stratification within resulting theories*"²²⁸ is preferential. It is Bhaskar's understanding that provides a vertical stratification for theological explanation. In McGrath's view Bhaskar's critical realism encourages theology to engage with the different levels of reality that exist. Thus some of the stratified elements of reality that theology must engage with are nature, history and experience.

The use of critical realist approaches to theological methodology is gathering momentum. J. Wentzel van Huysteen argues for a postfoundationalist 'critical theological realism' in theological methodology, and a method of justifying theological theories that is similar to those found in the natural sciences.²²⁹ On the other hand, Nancey Murphy's critique of critical realism argues that it remains caught in an epistemological foundationalism which cannot withstand the criticisms of postmodernism. For Murphy, it must be replaced with a holist epistemology and methodology that transcends the boundaries between theology and philosophy. "Critical realists are chastened moderns."²³⁰ To do this Murphy has adapted the progressive research program of Imre Lakatos and applied it to her own theological

²²⁵ The three-fold nature of the Word of God involves linking "a divine event (revelation), a historically mediated text (scripture), and a social activity (preaching)." McGrath argues that this differentiation is actually ideational. See McGrath, *Scientific Theology*, 2:233.

²²⁶ See Torrance's *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being, Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996) for his detailed unpacking of this area.

²²⁷ The first level is 'evangelical' or 'doxological'; the second is the 'theological level'; the third is the 'higher theological level'. See Torrance, *Christian Doctrine of God*, 91-110.

²²⁸ McGrath, *A Scientific Theology*, 2: 238.

²²⁹ See J. Wentzel van Huysteen, *Essays in Postfoundationalist Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) and *Theology and the Justification of Faith: Constructing Theories in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

²³⁰ See Nancey Murphy, 'Scientific Realism and Postmodern Philosophy', *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, 41: 3 (Sep., 1990), 296. See also her *Anglo-American Postmodernity* (Colorado: Westview, 1997), 39-48.

methodology.²³¹ This is useful because it provides an alternative non-foundational methodology that employs insights from not only Lakatos's work but also W. V. O. Quine's holist, coherentist approach that moves away from foundationalism. We shall return to critical realism in the final section where it will be employed in a limited capacity for use in a prospective theological method.

Having briefly outlined some of the elements of McGrath's critical realism, and noted also that the demise of realism is somewhat overstated, we shall return to Grenz and Franke's work. Returning to the task set before them to find an alternative epistemology that takes into account the philosophical ferment and engages with the current intellectual climate, they cite coherentism and pragmatism as possible ways to negotiate the route forward.

Coherentism²³² is, in its simplest meaning (and again Grenz fails to deliver solid, well-researched support for this²³³), the thesis that, for a belief to be justified, it must 'fit' together with other held beliefs.²³⁴ For a belief to be able to fit in with other beliefs in the first place there must be no contradiction between them. Furthermore, coherentists believe that all these beliefs that 'fit' together must form some sort of integrated whole in order to fully cohere. Contrary to understanding knowledge in a foundationalist manner, coherentists argue that there is no base upon which the superstructure of knowledge rests. Instead, beliefs are interdependent on one another. Hence, and very importantly for Grenz and Franke, knowledge should form a 'web of belief'.²³⁵ Truth is located in the interconnectedness of beliefs.

Pragmatism²³⁶ can be defined as suggesting no more than the idea that truth is 'what works'.²³⁷ Grenz and Franke look to Charles Pierce who took this understanding further when he measured how 'truthful' a particular understanding was by examining

²³¹ See Nancey Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press Int., 1996).

²³² Grenz and Franke draw on the work of Arthur Kenyon Rogers for some insights into coherentism. Their understanding of coherentism seems very minimal. More could be said as to the type of coherentist approach they intend to adopt. For an unpacking of coherentism see Robert Audi, *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* 2nd Edition (London: Routledge, 2003). See also Keith Lehrer's article, 'Coherentism', in *A Companion to Epistemology* (eds.) Jonathan Dancy and Ernest Sosa (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 67-70.

²³³ Grenz fails to illustrate the different variations of coherentism developed over recent years. See *Renewing the Center* ch. 6 and *Beyond Foundationalism*, 38-49 for inadequate descriptions. For a detailed defence of coherence theory see Keith Lehrer, *Theory of Knowledge*.

²³⁴ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 38.

²³⁵ Here, Grenz and Franke are citing W. V. O. Quine, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 39. See also *Renewing the Center*, 191 for further references to this idea.

²³⁶ Pragmatism is widely recognised as being developed in North America.

²³⁷ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 40.

how ‘successful’ it was in advancing factual inquiry.²³⁸ However, for Grenz and Franke, it was William James who most successfully advanced the pragmatist project by advocating the sentiments implicit in Peirce:

Truth for us is simply a collective name for verification-processes, just as health, wealth, strength, etc. are names for other processes connected with life, and also pursued because it pays to pursue them. Truth is *made*, just as health, wealth and strength are made, in the course of experience.²³⁹

Hence, for James, truth is what happens to an idea.

After marking coherentism and pragmatism as possibilities in advancing their epistemological quest, Grenz and Franke disappointingly skirt over the influence of Wittgenstein, stopping long enough only to mention the ‘turn to linguistics’ as an important development.²⁴⁰ Indeed, Grenz and Franke state that “Wittgenstein completed the shift toward belief systems and the communal dimension of truth pioneered by the coherentists and the pragmatists.”²⁴¹

The main influences on Grenz and Franke now start to emerge more fully. The introduction of coherentism and pragmatism serves to introduce two theologians who, having taken on board insights from non-foundationalist philosophers, and provide helpful models as to how non-foundational theological methodologies may look.

Unsurprisingly, Wolfhart Pannenberg²⁴² is employed. We have seen that for Pannenberg, truth is essentially historical. He sees truth as that which “shows itself throughout the movement of time climaxing in the end event.”²⁴³ This aspect of truth is particularly evident in the present where our understandings are monitored and changed according to our experiences. Furthermore, all truth is linked to God, who is the reality that determines all things. This understanding forms the basis for a

²³⁸ See Charles Sanders Peirce, *Selected Writings*.

²³⁹ William James in *Beyond Foundationalism*, 41.

²⁴⁰ This is very surprising given the influence Wittgenstein had on Lindbeck and in turn how important Lindbeck is for Grenz.

²⁴¹ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 42.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 43. For a detailed analysis of Grenz’s work on Pannenberg see *Reason for Hope: The Systematic Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 11–43. Grenz has a deep appreciation of Pannenberg’s work particularly as Pannenberg was his mentor whilst he studied in Munich.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 44. Pannenberg writes, “The universal meaning of the history of Jesus...is grounded in its eschatological character, that is, in the fact that the ultimate meaning and goal—and, thus, also the origin—of all things is revealed in him.” *Basic Questions in Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1967), 1:200.

coherentist understanding of knowledge, inasmuch as all truth “ultimately comes together in God, the ground of the unity of truth.”²⁴⁴ This in turn paves the way for a coherentist theological methodology.

Of course, this task is impossible to accomplish because the actual reality of God is never fully known and our knowledge is never complete and certain. Pannenberg appeals to the eschatological nature of truth and the scientific nature of theology. The only point of certitude for truth to be known is in the eschatological future. Until then all truth can only remain provisional and because of this contestable.²⁴⁵ Indeed, Pannenberg himself writes that, “the knowledge of Christian theology is always partial in comparison to the definitive revelation of God in the future kingdom (1 Cor. 13:12)...Recognising the finitude and inappropriateness of all human talk about God is an essential part of theological sobriety. This does not make our statements indifferent, but it is a condition of the truth of our statements.”²⁴⁶

Consequently theological claims, like any other claims, have to be tested. It is in this testing that the internal and external coherence of theological claims are determined. However, according to Grenz and Franke, Pannenberg maintains, optimistically, that this testing process will confirm “the power of the assertion of the reality of God to illumine the totality of human knowledge.”²⁴⁷

However, important though Pannenberg is for Grenz and Franke, as we have seen, Lindbeck is one of their most significant influences. Although there is no need to examine Lindbeck’s work in great detail as this has already been done earlier in this thesis,²⁴⁸ something does need to be said about understanding what is of most value in his thesis. Grenz and Franke recognise that, in proposing a cultural-linguistic alternative to the traditional foundationalist approach noted above, he reacquisitions Wittgenstein’s linguistic turn in philosophy. Indeed, for them, Lindbeck gives coherentism a Wittgensteinian twist.²⁴⁹ They note that Lindbeck’s use of Wittgenstein’s ideas has important ramifications for the concept of truth. Furthermore,

²⁴⁴ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 44.

²⁴⁵ See Pannenberg’s *Systematic Theology* 1: 54.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 1: 55.

²⁴⁷ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 45. See also Pannenberg’s *Systematic Theology*, 1: 48-61 for the unpacking of some of these ideas.

²⁴⁸ See Section Two of this thesis.

²⁴⁹ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 45.

doctrinal statements are not seen as first-order truth claims and therefore they do not assert anything in an objective manner about reality. They are second-order assertions. To understand them as asserting objective truth claims is to remove them from their original contexts and to treat them apart from their regulative role within the Christian tradition. Hence, doctrinal claims are ‘intrasystematic’. Grenz and Franke conclude that Lindbeck’s work is similar to Pannenberg’s inasmuch as the “theologian expounds the doctrinal core or framework of the Christian faith, determines that it coheres within itself, and indicates how doctrine illuminates human experience.”²⁵⁰ They also acknowledge that Lindbeck’s “suggestion that theological assertions are ‘in-house’ statements potentially results in a ‘sectarian church—one that no longer assumes any role in the public realm.”²⁵¹

This raises the question of whether a move beyond foundationalism, as Lindbeck sees it, entails a move from metaphysical realism.²⁵² In a shift that is perhaps puzzling,²⁵³ they believe that to posit such a question is unhelpful. Rather we should ask, “How can a nonfoundationalist theological method lead us to statements about a world beyond our formulations?”²⁵⁴ (I have already hinted that it may not be necessary to abandon a realist approach, with critical realism as an alternative.) To redefine the question in this manner, it would seem, is to disguise the real issue at stake.

In support of the possibilities and developments proposed by Pannenberg and Lindbeck, Grenz and Franke cite the work of the Reformed epistemologists Nicholas Wolterstorff and Alvin Plantinga. The main point here for them is that these philosophers, although advocating non-foundational ideas, look to the role of community as basic for Christian theology.²⁵⁵ It is the Reformed epistemologists’ recognition that we are situated in a particular community²⁵⁶ and that our conceptions, understandings and ideas are formed within a specific context that provides Grenz and Franke with, they argue, a decidedly postmodern, non-foundationalist understanding

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 46.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 52.

²⁵² See Jeffrey Hensley’s essay, ‘Are Postliberals Necessarily Antirealist? Reexamining the metaphysics of Lindbeck’s Postliberal Theology’, in *The Nature of Confession: Evangelicals and Postliberals in Conversation*, (eds.) by Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Ockholm (Downers Grove: IVP, 1996) 69-80.

²⁵³ It is puzzling because they opt for a more indirect attempt at answering the question. It would be far better to be more direct and face the issues head on.

²⁵⁴ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 52.

²⁵⁵ See Plantinga and Wolterstorff, *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*. Grenz misinterprets Plantinga as being nonfoundationalist, when really he is a modest foundationalist.

²⁵⁶ Of course, this acknowledgement is not unique to the Reformed epistemologist camp. Many philosophers acknowledge this.

of knowledge.²⁵⁷ It is this ‘communitarian turn’ that provides an important advance for them, although they acknowledge that this will provide difficulties when attempting to offer claims of universal truth,²⁵⁸ which, indeed, is a criticism that can be levelled at Lindbeck’s work. For Grenz and Franke, the focus of theological reflection is now where it should be—in the believing community. This is in stark contrast to the Enlightenment ideal that took theology out of the church and into the academy.²⁵⁹

According to Grenz and Franke, Christians are a people of vision who should be the Christ-focused community who have experienced the redemptive power of Jesus Christ—the identifying event. This experience that is shared by Christians becomes an ‘identity-constituting narrative’²⁶⁰ that is retold by Christians as they share their faith. Importantly, it is the role experience plays that differentiates between various communities. Although the Christian experience is potentially universal it is only experienced within that community. Accordingly, different religions mediate different religious experiences that are categorically different from each other. A different experience marks someone as being a member of another community.

Grenz and Franke introduce the idea of experience-forming interpretive frameworks. However, unlike the Romantic theologians, such as particularly Schleiermacher²⁶¹ experiences are not pre-cognitive/pre-reflective, “Rather, experiences are always filtered by an interpretive framework—a grid—that facilitates their occurrence.” Here they are trying to distance themselves from a liberal program. “Hence, religious experience is dependent on a cognitive framework that sets forth a specifically religious interpretation of the world.”²⁶² Moreover, “Christian theology...is an intellectual enterprise by and for the Christian community. Through theological reflection, the community of those whom the God of the Bible has encountered in Jesus Christ seeks to understand, clarify, and delineate its interpretive framework

²⁵⁷ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 47.

²⁵⁸ See Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 163-189 for an early unpacking of this idea. For a more detailed analysis by Grenz see his *Theology for the Community of God*, 461-569.

²⁵⁹ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 48.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

²⁶¹ See Schleiermacher’s, *The Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1928).

²⁶² *Beyond Foundationalism*, 49.

informed by the narrative of God's actions on behalf of all creation, as revealed in the Bible."²⁶³ They elaborate a little more on what they mean when they write,

The cognitive framework that is 'basic' for theology is not a given that precedes the theological enterprise; it does not provide the sure foundation on which the theological edifice can in turn be constructed. Rather, in a sense the interpretive framework and theology are inseparably intertwined. Just as every interpretive framework is essentially theological, so every articulation of the Christian cognitive framework comes already clothed in a specific theological understanding.²⁶⁴

This means that,

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.²⁶⁵

While the above statements would appear to suggest a return to Enlightenment foundationalism, Grenz and Franke insist that they actually represent a radical departure from such thinking, while maintaining the central concerns of foundationalism.²⁶⁶ "While we might view the Christian interpretive framework as in a certain sense foundational for theology, we could more properly speak of theology as the articulation of the cognitive mosaic of the Christian faith."²⁶⁷ The Christian-experience-interpretive-framework is a combination of scripture, tradition and experience. That is to say, it is a combination of the Christian's experience of being encountered by Jesus Christ, informed by the Bible within the particular context of the community. Again, to reiterate their divergence from a Schleiermachiian program that understood experience to be a basic foundation, they write that they do not interpret the Christian experience of Christ in terms of a "single, universal, foundational religious experience that supposedly lay beneath the plethora of religious experiences found in various religious beliefs",²⁶⁸ but rather as part of the interpretive framework

²⁶³ Ibid., 49.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 49-50.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 50.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 49.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 51.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 48.

that arises from the Bible and within the community context. However, the use of the Bible in this fashion could be interpreted as falling back into the foundationalism from which they are seeking to escape. Are Grenz and Franke using the Bible as a foundation on which to build a Christian understanding of the world? The answer to this is both yes and no. That is to say, as we shall see below, on the one hand, their understanding of the Bible is that it is accepted as a 'given' for the Christian faith. Conversely, it is interpreted in a non-foundational manner by the variety of Christian communities that exist.

There are some problems for such an understanding, particularly in the context of evangelical theology, the least of which concerns the role and authority of the Bible. As we shall see, the Bible is one of three sources for theology which comprises the interpretive framework, and in this sense it is certainly not regarded as first-order.²⁶⁹ "As the intellectual engagement with what is 'basic', theology is a second-order enterprise, and in this sense theological statements constitute second-order language."²⁷⁰ This 'second-order' understanding of the interpretive framework, which is theological in nature, is heavily influenced by Lindbeck. For Grenz and Franke, theological formulations, as informed by the Bible, within particular communities are merely contextual expressions of Christianity. However, the spectre of anti-realism here poses a serious threat to Grenz and Franke's ideas. This will be taken up later in this thesis.

Theology's Sources

The identification of only three sources by Grenz and Franke for theology is a reduction from what has generally been acknowledged to be four.²⁷¹ Traditionally, in evangelical theology, the four sources used are scripture, tradition, reason and experience. However, Grenz and Franke opt for scripture, tradition and culture.²⁷²

²⁶⁹ See Wellum's essay 'Postconservatism, Biblical Authority, and Recent Proposals for Re-doing Evangelical Theology: A Critical Analysis', in *Reclaiming the Center*, for a detailed analysis of this problem from a conservative perspective, 161-197.

²⁷⁰ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 49.

²⁷¹ See Alister E. McGrath, *An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 117-149. McGrath cites Scripture, reason, tradition and experience as the main sources for theology. John Wesley adhered to what became known as Wesley's quadriga. In his later book, *The Character of Theology*, Franke continues to argue for three sources. Indeed, much of what he writes here is simply a regurgitation of that written in *Beyond Foundationalism*.

²⁷² In *The Character of Theology*, Franke writes, "The constructive task of theology involves the development and articulation of models of the Christian faith that are biblically normed, culturally relevant, and historically informed. This suggests three sources that must be taken into account in the formulation and construction of theology: canonical Scripture, the cultural contexts in which theology is developed, and the tradition of the church." 119.

Scripture

Grenz and Franke raise the debate that has raged particularly within North American evangelicalism as to what ought to function as the ultimate authority in theology. They conclude that as Protestants they naturally side with the intent of Luther's *sola scriptura* principle (although we shall see that they move beyond this). Endorsing Ramm's adherence to a 'Protestant principle of authority' that understands the Holy Spirit speaking to the church through the Bible as the ultimate authority for Christians,²⁷³ they argue that this approach is also sensitive to the Reformation legacy inherited by evangelicals.

The Protestant principle means the Bible is authoritative in that it is the vehicle through which the Spirit speaks...The authority of the Bible is in the end the authority of the Spirit whose instrumentality it is...We believe that the Spirit has chosen, now chooses, and will continue to choose to speak with authority through the biblical texts.²⁷⁴

2 Tim. 3:16-17 are cited as verses in the Bible that actually support the argument of a Spirit-energised text. Indeed, they argue it is this type of interpretation that was endorsed in the Westminster Confession of Faith.²⁷⁵ The bringing of the Bible and the Holy Spirit together provides the basis for understanding the Bible, which Grenz and Franke refer to as the *norming norm* in theology.²⁷⁶ Put like this, at first glance, the Bible could be understood to function as the ultimate and primary authority for evangelical theology. However, this is not the case. Put simply, developing an essentially neo-orthodox approach, the Bible on its own is not the ultimate authority for theology. (For Barth, the text of the Bible is a witness to revelation, not revelation itself.)²⁷⁷ "The authority of the Bible is in the end the authority of the Spirit whose instrumentality it is."²⁷⁸ It is the Bible in tandem with the Holy Spirit speaking through it to the contemporary situation that constitutes the final authority. (This is clearly a move beyond Luther's *sola scriptura*.)

²⁷³ See Bernard Ramm, *The Pattern of Religious Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959).

²⁷⁴ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 65.

²⁷⁵ See J. MacPherson, *Westminster Confession of Faith with Introduction and Notes* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1882).

²⁷⁶ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 65.

²⁷⁷ See Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, 1/1.

²⁷⁸ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 65.

There are two problems with this non-foundational approach that are extremely important within the context of evangelical theology. Firstly, it can be argued that the actual authority of the Bible is undermined. Traditionally evangelical theology has argued for an inerrant Bible that is an authority in itself because it is *the* written word of God.²⁷⁹ The Bible is fully authoritative, inerrant and infallible. Viewed in this way it is first-order and because of this status it serves as the foundation for all theological reflection which is second-order.

This problem is not a new phenomenon. The neo-orthodox approach to scripture, particularly Barth's, became the centre of a debate some fifty years ago when Cornelius Van Til, writing from a Reformed position, wrote a volume entitled, *The New Modernism*. Van Til criticised Barth and Brunner, questioning the orthodoxy of neo-orthodox theology. Indeed, neo-orthodoxy is more akin to neo-liberalism, or as Van Til called it, the new modernism.²⁸⁰ He writes "that the Theology of Crisis, in the case of both Barth and Brunner, is an essentially *modern* theology. By an essentially modern theology we mean a theology which, like modern critical and dialectical philosophy, seeks to be activist and anti-metaphysical at all costs."²⁸¹ However, Van Til's critique has itself been subject to severe criticisms. G. C. Berkouwer singled out Van Til's findings as being largely misunderstood. "Van Til has no eye for the fact that often in the history of dogma particular philosophical assumptions played a part in a theology, assumptions that is, *in which* and *alongside of which* an influence of the Word of God makes itself felt in such a way that it is impossible to *deduce* the theology logically and consequently from the particular philosophical assumptions. Because Van Til thinks that he can point out certain assumptions in Barth, he thinks he can draw the lines of them *on through*, and so essential statements of Barth are neglected or distorted."²⁸²

A more revisionist approach was put forward by Rogers and McKim, who argued that the Bible is not completely error free. However, in its message it is infallible. Part of this argument was also an attempt to show that the nineteenth century Princetonian

²⁷⁹ See the following works as good examples of the development and debate over biblical inerrancy: J. Rogers and D. K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979); James Boice, *Does Inerrancy Matter?* Oakland, Calif.: International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, 1979); Kenneth S. Kantzer, *Applying the Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987).

²⁸⁰ T. F. Torrance subjects Van Til's volume, *The New Modernism* to a withering critique, in which he makes the point that if Van Til's method was turned on himself, he can be proved to be heretical in several ways using his own dialectical argument against him. See T. F. Torrance, in *Evangelical Quarterly* (1947) 19: 144-149.

²⁸¹ Van Til, *The New Modernism*, viii.

²⁸² G. C. Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth* (London: Paternoster, 1956), 386.

scholars had transformed the historic scripture into something that amounted to an indefensible inerrancy. Rogers and McKim posited that complete factual inerrancy was not really part of the historic orthodox position and that the Princetonians had got it wrong. Rather, it is better to say that the Bible is infallible in its message of salvation and that which is necessary to enable people to be saved.²⁸³ However, John Woodbridge, amongst other scholars, has argued this thesis contains major historical inaccuracies.²⁸⁴

The general foundationalist way of understanding the Bible has been a marked feature of evangelical theology and, in the context of a modernist understanding of the world, has been acceptable.²⁸⁵ As we have already seen, until recently, a foundational epistemology has been the most prevalent, and it could be argued that it was necessary to employ a foundational understanding of scripture for evangelical theology. However, the context of the debate over the authority of the Bible has drastically changed and new questions have been and are constantly being asked from a broadly postmodern perspective. According to Grenz and Franke, this new context means that the authority of scripture should now be viewed in a dynamic sense with the Holy Spirit appropriating the text in accordance with the community.²⁸⁶ This non-foundational way of viewing scripture contrasts with evangelical theology where the loss of biblical authority in the traditional sense is nothing short of catastrophic.²⁸⁷

Secondly, the trap that one can easily fall prey to is to have so many different interpretations of the Bible that any sort of authority is lost. This, again, undermines the attempt to stay within the parameters of evangelical theology. To fall into such hermeneutical subjectivism could certainly be a great problem when attempting to understand what the Holy Spirit is saying to the church through scripture. How do

²⁸³ See Rogers and McKim's, *Authority and Interpretation of the Bible* for their unpacking of this thesis.

²⁸⁴ See Woodbridge's *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers-McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).

²⁸⁵ Wayne Grudem, a contemporary evangelical theologian, is a case in point here. He writes, "There is nothing to prevent us from going to Scripture to look for answers to *any* doctrinal questions, considered in *any* sequence." See Grudem's *Systematic Theology*, 32. In response to this type of claim Vanhoozer writes, "the main task of evangelical theology is to determine what the 'whole Bible' says about particular topics of special concern and importance. The way forward would seem to be a 'whole Bible exegesis' in which biblical scholars could determine what the whole Bible teaches about a given subject...What does the whole Bible say about x, about y, about z? If theology is to be more than a rag-bag collection, it must demonstrate the deeper connections *among* x, y, and z... Rather than asking what the relevant parts of the whole Bible say about such and such an issue, evangelical theologians must seek to understand all the parts in the light of the Bible as a unified whole." Vanhoozer, 'The Voice of the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal about the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology', in *Evangelical Futures*, 62.

²⁸⁶ Although in a different sense to Grenz and Franke, Donald Bloesch advocates an appeal to the Holy Spirit when discussing biblical authority. See his *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration and Interpretation* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1994).

²⁸⁷ See the following theologians who would very clearly disagree with Grenz and Franke at this point, Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, 1985), Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987-1994). See David K. Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 59-98 for a detailed introduction to the role of biblical authority.

Grenz and Franke propose to guard against this approach? They argue that a theology of Word and Spirit can steer clear of the pitfall of subjectivism by avoiding an individualistic understanding of revelation. The individual must not be placed ahead of the community.²⁸⁸ The Bible remains objectively scripture because it is the book of the Christian community (the church).²⁸⁹ They write, “From its inception, the community of Christ—following the lead of the ancient Jewish community (e.g., Neh. 8:1-8)—has been a people who gather around the text to hear the Spirit’s voice speaking through it.”²⁹⁰ The text of the Bible is to be read by the community and interpreted as the Spirit speaks through it to the community.²⁹¹ It is this approach that minimises the possibility of individuals racing ahead and forming their own subjective conclusions from what they believe to be the Spirit’s communication through the text.²⁹²

Returning again to what Grenz and Franke call theology’s *norming norm*, they argue that it is actually the biblical message that performs this role. However, care must be taken “not to posit a nebulous, ethereal ‘something’ standing behind the text to which we have at best only limited access. Rather, the biblical message is in some sense bound to the canonical text itself”.²⁹³ In developing this they turn to a method of ‘text-interpretation’ which focuses on the sense of a particular text.²⁹⁴ That is to say, the aim is to read texts in order to understand what they are trying to convey as a whole (i.e. their general meaning).²⁹⁵ However, this understanding of the Bible which asserts that meaning is entirely bound up with intratextuality falls short of what Grenz and Franke would hope for in their quest for what they perceive to be a normative understanding of the Bible as scripture. As well as determining what God has spoken to the biblical communities it must be recognised that God acts and speaks now

²⁸⁸ Quite frankly, it seems that this is easier to assert in theory than to police in practice. Christian history is littered with individuals who have, contrary to warning, stepped out and believed that their version of revelation is the only authentic version and consequently taught heretical doctrine or formed heretical sects.

²⁸⁹ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 68.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 68.

²⁹¹ One can argue this is indeed what has been happening for years. In today’s context there are many examples of how different Christian communities interpret the Bible. For example, there are gay communities who interpret the Bible as allowing homosexual relationships, contrary to traditional interpretations. The role of women in the Church is variously interpreted. Matters over what may be seen as minor issues such as head covering in church are also given different and nuanced understandings.

²⁹² Having said that, as we shall see, this approach depends on what constitutes a community. The whole concept of community is a very slippery one, particularly when we add the concept of the ‘cyber community’ that has been born out of the technological advances in recent years.

²⁹³ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 72.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 72. The influence of Paul Ricoeur is evident here and later acknowledged, 74.

²⁹⁵ For a critique of this position see Wolterstorff, ‘The Importance of Hermeneutics for a Christian Worldview’ in *Disciplining Hermeneutics: Interpretation in Christian Perspective* (Leicester: Apollos, 1997) (ed.) Roger Lundin, 25-47.

through the Holy Spirit. To do this they turn to contemporary speech-act theory pioneered by J. L. Austin.²⁹⁶

There are three components that Austin identified in a total speech-act. They are the locutionary act (the enunciation of a sentence), the illocutionary act (what the speaker intends) and the perlocutionary act (what was achieved by speaking).²⁹⁷ They also turn to Wolterstorff for an explanation of how the Spirit engages in the illocutionary act of addressing Christians through the Bible. It is done by way of ‘double agency discourse.’²⁹⁸ That is to say, the Holy Spirit speaks through the authors of the biblical text. According to Wolterstorff this occurs in two ways. Firstly through ‘deputised’ speech, and secondly through ‘appropriated’ discourse. In other words, the Holy Spirit speaks by appropriating the discourse of the different authors of the Bible. However, Grenz and Franke believe that Wolterstorff falls prey to modernist tendencies when he appears to elevate the focus on the author of the text rather than the text itself.

The *norming norm* for theology is the appropriated biblical text spoken by the Spirit to the community. Therefore, the ongoing task of the community is to ask continually ‘What is the Spirit saying to the church?’²⁹⁹ “What illocutionary act is the Spirit performing in our midst on the basis of the reading of this scripture text?”³⁰⁰ This illocutionary act, it must be noted, does not come independent of the original meaning of the text. Careful exegesis is very important to try and ascertain what the original authors intended. However, the Holy Spirit is not bound by the internal meaning of the text alone. Once the author has put pen to paper, as it were, then there becomes a distance from what the author originally intended to the life the text takes of its own.³⁰¹ The goal of the Spirit is to appropriate the text to our own situation, a situation that, although possibly paralleling aspects of the ancient biblical communities, is nevertheless unique.³⁰²

²⁹⁶ See J. L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989). See particularly lectures 8-10.

²⁹⁷ Vanhoozer also employs speech act theory in his theological method although in a different way. See *Is There a Meaning in this text?* and *The Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005). See also *First Theology*, (Apollos: Leicester, 2002), 127-158.

²⁹⁸ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 73. See Wolterstorff’s *Divine Discourse* for his unpacking of this idea.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 74.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 74.

³⁰¹ See Ricoeur’s *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976).

³⁰² David Clark argues that despite the chronological distance between the author of the biblical text and today’s readership, we still can get near to what the author originally intended. He writes, “It is possible—in my view, necessary—for evangelical biblical interpretation both to retain the essential insight that meaning lies with the author’s illocutionary intentions and to express a proper humility about all human interpretation.” See *To Know and Love God*, 73.

Having established, thus far, that the Holy Spirit speaks to Christian communities today through the appropriated biblical text (the illocutionary act), what is the perlocutionary act? What does the Spirit seek to accomplish? For Grenz and Franke, the answer is that the Spirit creates ‘world’.³⁰³ What do they mean by this statement? They cite the sociologist Peter Berger, who argues that we are ‘world builders’. That is we inhabit a world in which we are constantly re-creating—a social-cultural world. Furthermore, the world that we inhabit “is a socially constituted reality, which an individual member of society learns to take for granted as ‘objective’ knowledge about the world.”³⁰⁴ However, to clarify matters in connection with how the Spirit creates ‘world’, we focus on the Bible and what the Spirit says through the text because it is this that constructs the ‘world’ in which the Christian lives. This is then the perlocutionary act that the Holy Spirit performs. The community in turn is created in the shape the Holy Spirit requires in the particular context in which it finds itself.

However, there are difficulties with this interpretation of Austin’s work. For example, as Vanhoozer notes, “Because Grenz abandons the authorial discourse model and embraces Ricoeur’s premise that the text takes on a life of its own he has difficulty specifying just what illocutionary acts the Spirit performs. Indeed the only *illocutionary* act they actually ascribe to the Spirit is speaking.”³⁰⁵ Speaking, however, is not an illocutionary act. Consequently it is unclear how ‘speaking’ *per se* can produce perlocutionary effects. The illocutionary act is more to do with what is done *in* speaking rather than plain speaking itself. Furthermore, while the Spirit does perform perlocutionary acts, this is done “only on the basis of the concrete textual illocutions—the content!—of Scripture.”³⁰⁶ To simply utter speech is a locutionary act. Therefore, if the Holy Spirit were simply to utter speech, as it were, then that would mean very little. It is what is contained within the utterance that gives such an act illocutionary status. Having said that, it has to be acknowledged that inasmuch as Grenz and Franke are clearly claiming that, when the Holy Spirit is speaking, there is always a purpose—there is an illocutionary element to what the Spirit is conveying to the particular community it is communicating with. The Spirit does not speak for the

³⁰³ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 75.

³⁰⁴ Berger cited in *Beyond Foundationalism*, 76. See Peter L. Berger *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990). Also Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Knowledge* (London: Penguin Books, 1991) for a detailed analysis of the sociology of knowledge.

³⁰⁵ Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 197-198.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 198.

sake of speaking. Therefore, for Grenz and Franke there *is* an illocutionary element to the speech. It is within the utterances of the Spirit that something takes place.³⁰⁷

Having said that, Grenz and Franke completely bypass the speech-acts available in scripture itself. As Caneday has argued, “While other evangelicals engage speech-act theory at its linguistic level (as crucial to interpretation of texts), Grenz and Franke merely summarize Austin’s concepts and then bypass the hermeneutical level of Scripture’s *objective speech-acts* to address instead the Spirit’s *subjective speech-acts* by using Scripture within the community of believers.”³⁰⁸ In other words, they have decided, knowingly or otherwise, to pass over the recorded speech-acts in the Bible (textually accessible) and instead focus upon the subjective speech-acts of what God (through the Holy Spirit) is saying today (textually inaccessible).³⁰⁹ This, of course, could be problematic, in that the Spirit’s acts in the world are seen to be outside scripture. That is, the Spirit’s perlocutionary act of world construction does not lie within the actual text of scripture. It is to be found in the subjectivity of the Spirit’s acts which are understood extra-textually.³¹⁰

Finally, Grenz and Franke reiterate the importance of reading the biblical text in a community setting.³¹¹ The text must be read theologically within its context. The text must be understood by a community that is conscious that it participates in the one faith community that spans the ages of the Christian faith. We are participants in a trajectory of faith.³¹² Not only this, but Christians are participants in the contemporary church and must also appreciate the attempts by other Christians to understand and hear what the Holy Spirit is saying in other ‘Christian communities’ as they discern the voice of the Holy Spirit themselves. This pragmatic and communitarian approach is vital for their thesis. The bottom line, it seems, is that Grenz and Franke have substituted the long taken for granted propositional view of scripture with a more functional understanding that is based upon experience. Of course, this view subsumes the traditional evangelical position of seeing the Bible to be authoritative in

³⁰⁷ In correspondence with Franke I raised this issue and he agreed that Vanhoozer’s criticism was technically correct, although missing the spirit of what they were trying to achieve. Franke also re-iterated that in future he would be more rigorous with his wording of such points. Correspondence dated 13.10.2005.

³⁰⁸ See A. B. Caneday, ‘Is Theological Truth Functional or Propositional? Postconservatism’s Use of Language Games and Speech-Act Theory’, in *Reclaiming the Center*, 153.

³⁰⁹ That is not to say that they do not perceive exegesis irrelevant. Both authors affirm the importance of such a discipline.

³¹⁰ However, Vanhoozer argues contrary to this: “For me, however, the most important contribution speech-act philosophy makes is to help us to break free of the tendency either to reduce meaning to reference or to attend only to the propositional content of Scripture.” *First Theology*, 163.

³¹¹ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 91.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 91.

itself (as the Word of God) into the understanding or recognition by Christian communities of the Bible being authoritative when accepted by them. However, it is contended here that until the Bible is accepted to be authoritative (by means of the Holy Spirit revealing it as God's Word), it cannot be considered to be authoritative. It is only after the latter can the Bible be considered to be authoritative for Christians.

The Role of Tradition

Tradition is the second of Grenz and Franke's three sources for theology.³¹³ After tracing what they understand to be the development of the role of tradition in Christendom, Grenz and Franke attempt to develop a non-foundational notion of tradition that goes hand in hand with the non-foundational concept of scripture that has been explored above. They maintain that in the present context tradition has been forced to take a back seat, mainly due to the modern evangelical suspicion regarding it.³¹⁴ Just as the authority of the Bible lies ultimately with the Holy Spirit, so it is the Holy Spirit that accounts for the formation of the Christian community, and it is the faith community that helps form traditions.³¹⁵ They argue that it is this observation that can help glean a clearer understanding of tradition and its role in theology.³¹⁶

To arrive at this understanding they contend that "tradition provides the hermeneutical trajectory through which theological construction that is truly Christian emerges."³¹⁷

What do they mean by this? Firstly, scripture is never interpreted without the influence of tradition. To be under the illusion that it is possible to interpret anything, not to mention scripture, from a totally neutral stand point is to function with a mindset that is "anti-traditional traditionalism", to cite Richard Lints³¹⁸ and is reminiscent of a rationalist approach.³¹⁹ For Grenz and Franke, it was the faith community who oversaw (directed by the Spirit) the formulation of the canon within

³¹³ Much of what is written here also appears in Franke's *The Character of Theology*, 154-163.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 94. Richard Lints cites three reasons why evangelicals have given tradition a back seat. They are the appropriation of inductive methods of Bible study, the parachurch form it has taken and its ahistorical devotional piety. See *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 92.

³¹⁵ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 115.

³¹⁶ David Kelsey is helpful in providing some illumination on this. Kelsey understands tradition as the process that helps develop Christian identity through the use of the Bible. See his *Proving Doctrine* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999) 89-91, for more detail.

³¹⁷ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 113.

³¹⁸ Lints in Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 113. Lints argues that a mistake many evangelicals have made is to be anti-tradition and therefore guilty of not taking tradition seriously enough. He writes, "No creed but the Bible" is the victory slogan inherited by much of modern evangelicalism from its eighteenth and nineteenth century ancestors." See Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology*, 93.

³¹⁹ Today virtually all scholars would answer in the negative to Bultmann's question "Is Exegesis without Presuppositions Possible?" in *Existence and Faith: Shorter Writings of Rudolf Bultmann*, (ed.) Schubert Ogden (London: Collins, 1964), 342-351.

particular contexts and who gave the canon its particular shape as they responded to different situations. Grenz and Franke go so far as to say that without the Christian community the Bible would not exist. Consequently, as far as they are concerned, the Bible is the product of the tradition of the Christian community. “Apart from the Christian community, the texts would not have taken their particular and distinctive shape. Apart from the authority of the Christian community, there would be no canon of authorised texts. In short, apart from the Christian community the Christian Bible would not exist.”³²⁰ This is overstated, but forcefully reiterates the point they want to make.³²¹ “The Bible represents the understanding of those members of the faith community who formed the enduring trajectory of that community.”³²²

Influenced by the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, who argues that a tradition begins with some sort of historical point,³²³ the following statement sums up what tradition is and its usefulness in the task of theology.

The Christian tradition is comprised of the historical attempts by the Christian community to explicate and translate faithfully the first-order language, symbols, and practices of the Christian faith, arising from the interaction among community, text, and culture, into the various social and cultural contexts in which that community has been situated.³²⁴

Here we see the fluid life-like quality of tradition that Grenz and Franke are positing. Tradition is dynamic and as such it develops and grows as new challenges confront the community. (It could almost be described as organic in this sense.) Tradition is characterised by both its continuity with the past and its ability to adapt to the contemporary context. Gabriel Fackre notes that the gift of the Christian community “comes to us in creed and council, catechism and confession, dialogue and proclamation... This common life and its wisdom, brought to us by the constant activity of the Holy Spirit, is a fundamental resource in our engagement with the biblical source.”³²⁵

³²⁰ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 115.

³²¹ I think many would disagree with this obviously exaggerated role of tradition. It is almost as if, in this interpretation, the community and not God has ultimate authority, which clearly would not be the case.

³²² *Beyond Foundationalism*, 115.

³²³ For an unpacking of this, see Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 349-369.

³²⁴ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 118.

³²⁵ Gabriel Fackre, *The Christian Story: A Narrative Interpretation of Basic Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 18.

It should be clear now how tradition is understood to function in theological construction: “the tradition of the Christian church serves as a source or a resource for theology, not as a final arbiter of theological issues or concerns but a hermeneutical context or trajectory for the Christian theological enterprise.”³²⁶ The Christian theologian can examine the history of Christian worship, theology, and ‘classical’ theological formulations and symbols in order to articulate to the contemporary Christian community the ‘belief mosaic’ that is relevant to that context. This leads into what Grenz and Franke call an ‘open confessional tradition’, which simply refers to the idea that Christian communities (denominations) must be careful not to hold on too tightly to their confessional statements and in doing so run the risk of placing them ahead of scripture with regard to authority. The term ‘open tradition’ is taken from Jack Stotts:

A closed tradition holds a particular statement of beliefs to be adequate for all times and places. An open tradition anticipates that what has been confessed in a formally adopted confession takes its place in a confessional line-up, preceded by statements from the past and expectant of more to come as times and circumstances change.³²⁷

This concept of an ‘open tradition’ illustrates how Grenz and Franke view the role of tradition generally when doing theology.

Furthermore, again, the Pannenbergian eschatological orientation is stressed. Through scripture and tradition the Holy Spirit is bringing the Christian community into a fuller understanding of the gospel message that will only reach its climax in the eschatological future. In the meantime, the Church must grapple with what the Spirit says through scripture in its varying contexts and situations. As it does so, tradition will adapt and change as necessary, always remaining in continuity with the past, but at the same time dynamically responding to the challenges ahead.

While these are important points, there is a danger of a too optimistic and indeed simplistic impression of tradition and its role. Certainly within evangelical theology

³²⁶ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 120.

³²⁷ See Jack L. Stotts, ‘Introduction: Confessing After Barmen’, in Jan Rohls, *Reformed Confessions: Theology from Zurich to Barmen* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), xi.

there has been a suspicion of tradition.³²⁸ And, of course, it needs to be recognised that not everything identified as tradition is good. Not all that is handed down or passed on is interpreted as it perhaps should be. Therefore, tradition should be handled not only with respect, as Grenz and Franke would have it, but also with care. A basic impulse of the Protestant Reformation was *sola scriptura*, in reaction to the Church's elevation of extra-canonical traditions.³²⁹ The return to a greater role for tradition, although a good thing, has to be tempered with the knowledge that there are possible problems with that tradition itself. As Vanhoozer puts it, "At its best, tradition can be a means of spiritual formation, a means of nurturing individuals in the virtues and practices of a particular community. Tradition helps shape Christian identity by initiating members into certain practices of biblical interpretation. At their worst, however, traditions can become self-glorifying instruments of corporate pride that turn a deaf ear to voices external to the community, be they from science, philosophy, culture, or other Christian groups."³³⁰ Consequently, extra care is needed to be taken when attempting to translate that which has been previously embraced by former generations of Christians into the climate of the day. As Trevor Hart argues,

The form of the tradition within which we stand will itself be the result of the integrative labours of others before us; those who, like us, were committed to this particular story, and deployed it in their own effort to fashion a coherent outlook from the materials available to them in their day. The intellectual product which they hand on to us, however, is already dated when we receive it. It offers yesterday's answers to yesterday's questions and concerns and the integrative process must be ever repeated afresh to keep pace with the latest changes and developments in thinking.³³¹

This point highlights the care needed to be taken with how tradition is handled by any community, not just the Christian community. At the same time, Grenz and Franke alert us to the opposite danger of neglecting tradition and throwing the baby out with the bath water.³³² Indeed, Grenz and Franke posit the thesis that scripture and tradition

³²⁸ See Lints, *The Fabric of Theology*, 81-101 for a useful introduction to some of the issues regarding the use and misuse of tradition in theology.

³²⁹ This is commonly referred to as the dual-source theory of tradition. Theology is based on two quite distinct and separate sources; that of the Bible, and unwritten traditions handed down and developed.

³³⁰ *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 163.

³³¹ Trevor Hart, *Faith Thinking* (London: SPCK, 1995), 193.

³³² The sixteenth century anabaptist movement, for example, was guilty of this anti-traditionalism. See Hans Joachim Hillerbrand, *Radical Tendencies in the Reformation: Divergent Perspectives* (Kirkville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1988).

are fundamentally inseparable: “if we must speak of a ‘foundation’ of the Christian faith at all, then we must speak of neither scripture nor tradition in and of themselves, but only of the triune God who is disclosed in polyphonic fashion through scripture, the church, and even the world, albeit always normatively through scripture.”³³³ While they seem to put tradition on a level with scripture (despite the closing words of the above statement that everything normatively goes through scripture), in the overall emphasis, it does not do enough to underline the priority of scripture in traditional evangelical thought. There is certainly some ambiguity in their assessment of the place of tradition and how it relates to scripture and this would be a worry for many evangelicals. A healthy suspicion regarding traditions handed on to evangelical faith communities should be employed in order that tradition remains subservient to scripture.

Last but not least, “one final aspect of the function of the hermeneutical trajectory in the task of theology remains to be noted. This dimension emerges through the metaphor of ‘performance’.”³³⁴ Tradition provides an interpretive context for the task of living out or ‘performing’ the deepest intentions of an established, historical community.”³³⁵ The purpose of theology is not only to establish right belief within a particular context, but also what should accompany this is the ‘performing’ or living out of the beliefs of a particular community. For Grenz and Franke “the goal of theology is to facilitate and enable authentic ‘performance’ of the Christian faith by the community in its various cultural locations. Tradition provides an essential component in this process.”³³⁶

N. T. Wright’s model of biblical authority is used to develop the point. Wright uses the analogy of a five act Shakespearean play, in which the first four parts are extant but the final act has been lost. The performance of the play is facilitated not by the writing of a new act five, but by employing experienced Shakespearean actors who can study the first four acts and then on the basis that they are familiar with them they can go on to construct and perform act five.³³⁷ The first four acts are the authority for the play,

³³³ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 118.

³³⁴ Grenz and Franke only briefly unpack the potential of ‘performance’ for their thesis. For a fuller unpacking of the metaphor of performance and different types of performance interpretation see Vanhoozer’s *The Drama of Doctrine*.

³³⁵ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 127.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, 127. The term ‘performance’ once again highlights the influence of J.L. Austin on Grenz and Franke’s work here.

³³⁷ N. T. Wright in *Beyond Foundationalism*, 128.

whereas the fifth is ‘worked out’, as it were on the basis of what has been learnt in studying the extant part of the play. The key for this understanding is tradition. The actors “were not only immersed in the...play, the textual authority, but also in the Shakesporean interpretive *tradition*, which also functions in an authoritative fashion, albeit a secondary one, in the performance of the final act.”³³⁸ For Grenz and Franke, the Christian tradition “provides a historically extended, socially embodied context in which to interpret, apply, and live out the communally formative narratives contained in the canonical texts.”³³⁹ Whilst this is an important point, again, it must be reiterated that in order to remain within evangelicalism—which is their intention—there must be more of an emphasis on the authority of scripture over tradition if they want to avoid being ostracised by evangelicals. Furthermore, without being too pedantic, calling tradition a ‘component’ is somewhat mechanical and detracts from the organic nature of tradition that they themselves would want to explicate.

The Importance of Culture

The role of culture in the task of doing theology has been and still is the subject of great debate amongst theologians. However, theology, or for that matter any other discipline, is not undertaken in a neutral environment but always within a particular cultural context. “Theologians, no less than other intellectuals, have come to view human beings as historical creatures located within the complex matrices of particular cultures and social worlds.”³⁴⁰ Grenz and Franke attempt to clarify the relationship between theology and culture, aware that there is much controversy in this area.

They are influenced by contemporary anthropology, and understand that culture should be connected with ‘meaning’.³⁴¹ That is to say, culture should be understood as a way of discussing the shared dimension of meaning making. But what does this mean, and what cultural commodities contribute to the construction of meaning?

Again, drawing on the work of Berger, they argue that because we live in a socially constructed world, the society in which we participate provides the interpretive framework through which we view and understand the world. As a consequence, a

³³⁸ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 128.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 128.

³⁴⁰ S. G. Davaney, ‘Theology and the Turn to Cultural Analysis’ in *Converging on Culture*, (eds.) D. Brown, S. G. Davaney, K. Tanner, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 5.

³⁴¹ Typically, Clifford Geertz, Ulf Hannerz and Anthony Cohen are among those to whom they look.

particular society will provide the cultural tools necessary for constructing the world in which we live. Grenz and Franke cite Paul Hiebert as a good example of a scholar who has developed Peter Berger's thesis and declares with reference to this type of social construction:

Culture is made up of systems of shared concepts by which people carve up their worlds, of beliefs by which they organize these concepts into rational schemes, and of values by which they set their goals and judge their actions. Viewed in this way, culture is the model that provides the people in a society with a description and an explanation of reality.³⁴²

Furthermore, these systems can be broken down to 'cultural schemas' or 'cultural models',³⁴³ and it is these that not only bring people into social groups but, also by means of these schemas, people are able to construct and internalise cultural meanings. Brought all together, the various schemas will constitute the world a person lives in.

Grenz and Franke then ask what the central contributors are to cultural meaning. Again taking their cue from contemporary anthropologists, they name four different sources, namely, 'language',³⁴⁴ 'things',³⁴⁵ 'images',³⁴⁶ and 'rituals.'³⁴⁷ All of these items together perform as symbols. That is to say they function as builders and bearers of meaning which lie beyond themselves. In summary then, culture includes the symbols that constitute the tools by which we understand ourselves and the world. A little reminiscent of Vanhoozer,³⁴⁸ they argue that, "drawing from the famous line of Shakespeare... we might say that the whole world is a stage, albeit a stage of our own construction. By participating in the making of meaning, we contribute to the

³⁴² Hiebert cited in *Beyond Foundationalism*, 139.

³⁴³ This idea is taken from Naomi Quinn and Dorothy Holland who summarise, "The prototypical scenarios unfolded in the simplified worlds of cultural models, the nestedness of these presupposed models one with another, and the applicability of certain of these models to multiple domains all go far to explain how individuals can learn culture and communicate it to others, so that they may come to share the same understandings." *Beyond Foundationalism*, 139.

³⁴⁴ 'Language' is the central cultural form that is involved in the making or constructing of 'world.' It is language that supplies the tools with which we construct the world in which we inhabit.

³⁴⁵ 'Things' represent important aspects of the world. Material objects are included in this.

³⁴⁶ Grenz and Franke adopt Michael Warren's definition of 'images' which is split into two types. Firstly there is the iconic (pictures we actually see with our own eyes) something which have the ability to move in some way the viewer. Secondly, there is the metaphoric-perceptual. These are images we look through. That is to say these are images that provide the lens through which we see, they provide or inform our sense of things. For an unpacking of this see Michael Warren, *Seeing Through the Media: A Religious View of Communication and Cultural Analysis* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1997).

³⁴⁷ 'Ritual' in this case refers to the foundation provided to societies that create and maintain order. Rituals are shared understandings of reality that are constituted ritually. That is to say different societies have different apprehensions of reality, and these understandings are performed ritually.

³⁴⁸ Vanhoozer has developed a theological methodology that is canonical-linguistic in which his method is unpacked using the analogy of acting and drama. See *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* for the latest and most extensive treatment of his subject.

creation of the context in which we act out our socially designed roles and gain our sense of identity.”³⁴⁹ Importantly, this socially constructed stage that life is played out upon is in a state of constant flux as our lives and how we perceive the world change.

Theology and Culture

Having briefly discussed Grenz and Franke’s understanding of culture, we now analyse the way they link it with theology. Returning to the symbols that constitute culture, they argue that one of the symbols, ritual, offers an important link to theology, as it links the temporal with the transcendent. How is this connection made? One aspect relates to religious artifacts and their relation to general cultural phenomena. “Religious forms provide one vehicle for the expression of the deeper sensitivities endemic to a particular people, sensitivities that manifest themselves in a variety of forms, which are therefore deemed ‘cultural.’”³⁵⁰ Conversely, cultural objects could also be understood to represent or give expression to an underlying religious ethos for a particular society. As might be expected, at this point they employ Tillich, who wrote, “religion is the substance of culture, culture is the form of religion. Such a consideration definitely prevents the establishment of a dualism of religion and culture.”³⁵¹ Proceeding from this understanding, they again follow Berger and the way he connects religion and society, noting that Berger’s sociological approach to constructing ‘world’ looks to religion as playing a decisive part in constructing and indeed maintaining ‘world.’ “Religion’s role is to legitimate the world endemic to any particular society by locating it and its institutions within a sacred, cosmic frame of reference.”³⁵² To put it succinctly, they argue that those cultural expressions in society that speak about what that society believes to be of ultimate value are necessarily deemed to be religious.

For Grenz and Franke, what Berger and company have succeeded in doing is to connect the religious with the construction and validation of society and its various institutions. This in turn has led to the notion of personal identity formation. That is to

³⁴⁹ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 147.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 148.

³⁵¹ See Tillich’s *Theology of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 42.

³⁵² *Beyond Foundationalism*, 148. See also Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* and Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*.

say religion plays an important part, not only in legitimating, but also in guarding the identity of the 'self' within the socially constructed world that it occupies.³⁵³

In attempting to chart a way through the troubled waters of linking culture and theology Grenz and Franke look at two previous attempts in recent times that have sought to do exactly that. Firstly, they examine the work of Tillich and his method of correlation³⁵⁴ and secondly, the 'contextualisation' method associated with some missiologists, notably, Schrieter and Kraft.³⁵⁵ They conclude, however, that both betray a form of foundationalism,³⁵⁶ and so, to avoid this, they advocate "a theological method which must employ an interactive process that is both correlative and contextual. Theology emerges through an ongoing conversation involving both 'gospel' and 'culture'".³⁵⁷

They suggest an approach to theology that does not presuppose the gospel or culture but instead sees them in an interactive partnership, as dynamic realities which "inform and are informed by the conversation itself."³⁵⁸ Hence, they advocate "a specifically nonfoundationalist, interactionalist theological method."³⁵⁹

What does this conversation with 'gospel' and 'culture' involve, and how does it serve the process of theological reflection? Firstly, they argue that we inhabit a socially constructed reality. Therefore, culture is a vital tool when engaging in theological method.³⁶⁰ For Grenz and Franke, the use of culture in doing theology involves three functions: 'hearing', 'listening' and 'responding'. Hearing involves

³⁵³ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 149

³⁵⁴ See Tillich's *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951).

³⁵⁵ See Charles Kraft, *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1979) and Robert Schrieter, 'Inculturation of Faith of Identification with Culture?' in *Christianity and Culture: A Mutual Enrichment*, (ed.) Norbert Greinacher and Norbert Mette (London: SCM Press, 1994).

³⁵⁶ Tillich is accused of foundationalism due to his search for a supposed universal general culture. See Paul Tillich's *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. For contextualisation, Grenz argues that its greatest fault lies with the failure to overlook the particularity of each and every particular understanding of the Christian faith. The Christian faith is presented in an almost 'universal' way, which functions as the foundation for the theological enterprise. In particular Grenz criticises the position of Charles Kraft, who posits such a contextualist stance.

³⁵⁷ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 158. Gordon Lynch in his work *Understanding Theology and Popular Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005) suggests four approaches to examining culture, one of which I suggest is very close to Grenz and Franke's position. The four are: the applicationist approach to culture; the correlationalist; a revised correlationalist approach (close to Grenz and Franke's position); and a praxis model. See 93-110. Lynch's 'revised correlationalist' (which employs elements of the praxis model) advocates "a more complex conversation between questions and answers offered both by religious tradition and popular culture." 110. It is somewhat surprising that Grenz and Franke also fail to make reference to Don Browning's, *A Fundamental Practical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), as this is a very important work in connection with a revised correlationalist approach. It is also odd that in their overview of some of the developments of theological cultural understanding they do not mention H. Reinold Niebuhr's seminal work, *Christ and Culture*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1951).

³⁵⁸ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 158.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 158.

³⁶⁰ Here Grenz and Franke are once again indebted to Berger and Luckmann.

being sensitive to and aware of the various voices that give culture its say in society. Included in these voices are literature, television, the arts, music and film etc. Furthermore, listening to contemporary culture and hearing what is being said, we must remember that we do not do this in a vacuum. We cannot view anything objectively and must realise that observers have their own cultural baggage. Observers bring their own understanding and meaning structures: “Just as there is no culture-free reading of the biblical text and no culture-free construction of Christian theology, so also there can be no ‘theology-free’ reading of culture and cultural artifacts. What we hear will come filtered through our particular Christian-theological hearing aid.”³⁶¹

Closely connected to hearing is ‘scrutinising’. This involves analysis of the various meaning structures that lie behind the cultural phenomenon. The purpose of this ‘scrutinising’ is to ascertain what people actually think and believe in the world they inhabit and also to determine what the principal influences on people are. In engaging with cultural phenomena they raise questions such as, “How does this cultural item disclose what people today believe about themselves, the world and the transcendent meaning?”³⁶² In short, they attempt to understand which cultural elements make people ‘tick’.

These two elements of ‘hearing’ and ‘scrutinising’ are incomplete however, without the important element of ‘responding’. The response will include a theologically informed assessment of the various meaning structures, beliefs and non-beliefs of particular communities that are expressed in particular cultures. In doing this, such responses will also include the ability to identify which aspects of culture lend themselves as points of contact or bridges to the Christian faith, if any at all.

This takes us back to the role of the Holy Spirit. For Grenz and Franke culture can be a conduit for the voice of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, they argue that culture can be spoken of as ‘the voice of the Spirit’. This type of claim, within evangelicalism, is

³⁶¹ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 159. Couched in more devotional language, Stone and Duke write something similar. “To engage in theological reflection is to join in an ongoing conversation with others that began long before we ever came along and will continue long after we have passed away... We are called only to do the best we can, given who and where we are. This is actually the best theologians manage, not only because as humans they are limited and fallible and because times change, but because the final word is God’s alone.” See H. Stone and J. Duke, *How to Think Theologically* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 4.

³⁶² *Beyond Foundationalism*, 160.

contentious. David Wells is particularly vociferous in his defence against employing culture in theological method. Commenting on the effect culture has had on evangelicalism, and how to some degree it has replaced theology, he writes, "...the Church's loss of preoccupation with theology goes a long way toward explaining its current weakness: it has inadvertently exchanged the sensibilities of modern culture for the truth of Christ."³⁶³ However, Lints offers a more moderate position with regard to culture. He realises that culture influences our understanding of the biblical message, but this must not be construed as letting in relativist assumptions and conclusions.³⁶⁴

So on what grounds do Grenz and Franke argue their case? Because the Spirit speaks in specific times and places culture and its context are absolutely vital to the hermeneutical task.³⁶⁵ Drawing on the work of Douglas John Hall,³⁶⁶ they advocate that doing theology is determined in no small way by the worldly context it inhabits. Grenz and Franke note, "Because the life-giving Spirit is present wherever life flourishes, the Spirit's voice can conceivably resound through many media, including the media of human culture."³⁶⁷ Therefore, because the Spirit operates through and in culture, it is reasonable to assume that within cultural phenomena traces of the Spirit's presence can be found. As a result there should be an intent listening to the cultural climate as to what the Spirit is saying to the Christian community—the church.

This elevation of culture is very problematic for many evangelicals. Not only are they giving great prominence to culture but this is almost implicitly ensuring that it is practically on a par with scripture with regards to authority. Furthermore, their insistence that the Holy Spirit can speak through culture is ambiguous, to say the least. It is commonly acknowledged by many Christians that the Holy Spirit can communicate through many media, including culture. However, we are faced once again with the spectre of subjectivity and how what is interpreted can be adjudged genuine. This type of subjectivity is, of course, a trait of postmodern times. Perhaps culture should be used as a tool for theology, rather than a full-time partner in the

³⁶³ David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology*, 217.

³⁶⁴ Lints, *The Fabric of Theology*, 115.

³⁶⁵ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 161.

³⁶⁶ See Douglas John Hall, *Thinking the Faith: Christianity in a North American Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991) for his ideas in this area.

³⁶⁷ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 162.

theological conversation. To infer that gospel and culture are equal partners in the theological conversation is problematic. The root of the problem for Grenz and Franke is that they do not engage critically enough with postmodern culture. There seems to be a 'bowing down' to postmodern culture, which puts Grenz and Franke in danger of theological accommodationism to this culture. This leaves them open to that very same criticism to which they subjected those theologians who absorbed traits of enlightenment thought. Archie Spencer agrees with this, he writes, "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... But this response must be recognised as a theological response in culture and not a responsibility of theology to culture."³⁶⁸

One final element with regard to the relationship of theology and culture is the Christian community. Grenz and Franke understand the church to be a distinct social group.³⁶⁹ The 'church' is a social group with its own 'unit awareness' that is both theological and ethical and because of this shares, to a varying degree, beliefs and values. In this particular respect the church is its own social group. However, it is a unique group that views all things in its theological conversation in connection with the God found in the Bible. It is this that "marks the connection between the Christian communal culture and the theological enterprise."³⁷⁰

Theology's Focal Motifs

The unifying element of Christian theology in Grenz and Franke's methodological proposal is that all 'truly' Christian theology is trinitarian in content, communitarian in focus, and eschatological in orientation.³⁷¹ It is these three specific aspects that Grenz and Franke name as being the focal motifs for Christian theology which shall now be examined.

Theology's Structural Motif: The Trinity

³⁶⁸ Archie Spencer, 'Culture, Community and Commitments: Stanley J. Grenz on Theological Method', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 57: 3 (2004), 347.

³⁶⁹ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 163.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 164.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 166.

According to Grenz and Franke, the chief inquiry for any theology focuses on the identity of God. This question then leads to the doctrine of the Trinity. Because of the triune nature of God, theology in its structure should “reflect the primacy of the fundamental Christian confession about the nature of this God. Because the structuring motif of the Christian confession of God is trinitarian, a truly Christian theology is likewise necessarily trinitarian.”³⁷² In short, they see the Trinity as the centre-piece of Christian theology; it is the structural motif for theology. It is their goal to “make the case for the centrality of the Trinity in the explication of theology...”³⁷³

They explain that, although not explicitly mentioned in the Bible, the doctrine of the Trinity emerges out of the biblical narrative. Moreover, it is also the theological heritage of the church that has been developed over the centuries as Christians have sought to understand, and indeed defend, the triune God of the Bible. As well as highlighting the rationalist dislike for the Trinity during the Enlightenment period, Grenz and Franke briefly unpack the development of the doctrine, and how it has informed and even shaped theological conversation through the centuries of theological progress. They conclude that the doctrine is not the result of speculative philosophical theology but “the outworking of communal Christian reflection on the narratives of scripture, which call for coherent explanation.”³⁷⁴ Furthermore, the centrality of the Trinity in the biblical narrative gives a trinitarian shape to theology which is demanded by the text. Christian theology must be trinitarian for the simple reason that the biblical narrative which unfolds the history of God to the reader focuses on the triune nature of God.

Despite the loss of interest in the Trinity during the Enlightenment,³⁷⁵ the twentieth century has seen a resurgence of interest in trinitarian thought. For example, David

³⁷² Ibid., 170.

³⁷³ Ibid., 170. See also Grenz’s *Rediscovering the Triune God* for a more detailed analysis of Trinitarian issues. Also, see the following as good examples of this trend: Miroslav Volf, *After our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and the Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1992); Ted Peters, *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993); David S. Cunningham, *These Three are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998); John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in the Personhood of the Church*.

³⁷⁴ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 177

³⁷⁵ Of course some will correctly argue that trinitarian thought was still being developed during this time (Grenz himself names Hegel as an important figure for such unpacking of trinitarian issues. See his *Rediscovering the Triune God*, 24-32.). However, it is important to note that Grenz’s analysis is very broad and he is generalising the effect the Enlightenment had on theology (although in this case not with great success).

Cunningham notes that, “Once threatened by its relative scarcity in modern theology, the doctrine of the Trinity now seems more likely to be obscured by an overabundance of theologians clustered around it.”³⁷⁶ Indeed, Grenz and Franke see it as the chief hallmark of the Christian faith.³⁷⁷ For them then, “faithful Christian theology should thus be ordered and structured in such a way as to reflect the primacy of this fundamental Christian confession.”³⁷⁸ This does not mean that the doctrine remains static, far from it. Re-evaluation should constantly take place in relation to the particular contexts in which Christian communities find themselves. Once again this highlights the idea seen earlier that the Christian tradition provides the hermeneutical trajectory for contemporary theology. Furthermore, they add the proviso that a truly Christian theology is faithful to a trinitarian hermeneutical trajectory.³⁷⁹

In advocating a trinitarian theology in the contemporary context, they turn to Barth to explicate more fully its centrality for theology.³⁸⁰ Also important for them is the centrality to Barth’s theological program of the notion “that the revelation of God that provides the basis for theology is a trinitarian event in which the divine self-disclosure involves three moments: Revealer, Revelation and Revealedness.”³⁸¹ These correspond to Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and helped Barth to form the conclusion that the doctrine of the Trinity is a logical necessity. Barth, in placing the doctrine of the Trinity at the beginning of his theological system, interestingly acknowledges that, “In putting the doctrine of the Trinity at the head of the whole of dogmatics we are adopting a position which, looked at in view of the history of dogmatics, is very isolated.”³⁸²

³⁷⁶ Cunningham, *These Three are One*, 19.

³⁷⁷ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 187.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 187.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 187.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 188 and in sharp contrast to Schleiermacher. The difference in emphasis is easily seen when a brief examination is made of the amount of work each theologian has done on the Trinity. In Schleiermacher’s *The Christian Faith* there are barely 6 pages at the end of his *magnum opus* spent on the Trinity. On the other hand Barth spilled much ink in developing his understanding of the importance of the Trinity for Barth’s unpacking of the Trinity see his *Church Dogmatics* I/1. Part I of Barth’s doctrine of revelation is entitled ‘The Triune God’ and is found in *CD* I/1 § 8-12. It is interesting to note that Barth departs from many of his forebears by making the doctrine of the Trinity the key to understanding the concept of revelation and also by placing it in his prolegomena.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 188. See Barth, *CD* I/1: 339 where he writes, “God’s Word is God Himself in His revelation. For God revealed Himself as the Lord and that according to Scripture signifies for the concept of revelation that God Himself in unimpaired unity yet also in unimpaired difference is Revealer, Revelation, and Revealedness.” Elsewhere, Grenz writes, “Barth offers what might be characterised as a *thoroughgoing* theological revelationism. According to Barth, the triune God stands behind and within the actual event of revelation.” See Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 35.

³⁸² Barth, *CD* I/1, 345.

For Barth, the Trinity is deeply embedded within the biblical witness and, contrary to the work of Schleiermacher, for example, is a primary Christian symbol.³⁸³ Grenz and Franke point out that it is Barth's Christocentric approach to his theology that leads the way to unpacking the Trinity. The Christian understanding of God has its starting point with the Son, who reveals the Father, and it is through the revelation of the Son that God himself is known as triune.

One of Barth's central theses was that the Christian concept of revelation is trinitarian, and for Grenz and Franke, the doctrine of the Trinity "is a logically necessary component of the early Christian experience and confession of Jesus Christ as Lord and revealer of God."³⁸⁴ What Barth achieved was to avoid separating different elements of Christian experience that had been received by the respective early communities. Consequently, the connection between Christology, pneumatology and theology was maintained.³⁸⁵

It is not only Barth's thought that is important for Grenz and Franke. Interestingly, as noted above, they look to Hegel's work on the Trinity. "Building from Barth, we would add that a truly trinitarian theology is one in which all of the theological loci are informed by and, in turn, inform the explication of the Trinity that, following Hegel, stands at the heart of the constructive systematic-theological enterprise."³⁸⁶ As to why Hegel is important here, for Grenz and Franke, he reopened interest in trinitarian thought during the Enlightenment when there was a great deal of scepticism surrounding the doctrine. Whereas theologians such as Schleiermacher struggled to hold on to the Trinity, Hegel developed an understanding that was central to his philosophical system.³⁸⁷ For Hegel, God is the Absolute Spirit who, in order to determine himself, has to distinguish himself.³⁸⁸ This is done via a dialectical process through three determinations, which are the three members that constitute the Trinity. Despite the many shortcomings that this interpretation of the Trinity has, this

³⁸³ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 189. See Barth's *CD I/1*, 339-440.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 189.

³⁸⁵ Their assessment of Barth is fair. However, there is little evidence of them going to Barth's work. Instead, they rely too heavily on secondary sources to argue their case.

³⁸⁶ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 190.

³⁸⁷ See Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (ed.) Peter C. Hodgson, trans. R. F. Brown, P. C. Hodgson, and J. M. Stewart, 3 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984-1985). See also H. S. Harris, *Phenomenology and System* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995), 61-89.

³⁸⁸ See Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J. B. Baillie (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co Ltd., 1910) for the unpacking of his ideas on the Trinity. See in particular 759-799.

affirmation of the trinitarian concept of God helped pave the way, according to Grenz and Franke, for resurgence in the doctrine.³⁸⁹ They are broadly right in their understanding of Hegel. However, it must be reiterated that Hegel's understanding falls short of an orthodox understanding of the Trinity. Hegel's concept of God is of a God that is an absolute, eternal and dynamic Idea, a process of thought that consists of three stages. In short, firstly, God is infinite Spirit, a process that comes to self-consciousness. In the second stage the Spirit descends into finite forms of social expression. Finally, in the third stage the Spirit's separation is ended and the Spirit returns to itself. This is a reconciliation to itself within its own unity in the Absolute Spirit. Here we have Hegel's thesis, antithesis and synthesis. It is important to note that God is portrayed here not in a personal sense, but as a process.³⁹⁰

Karl Rahner is also acknowledged as a theologian who has articulated the importance of trinitarian thought for theology, with 'Rahner's Rule'³⁹¹ being an important addition to a trinitarian understanding of theology. 'Rahner's Rule', as it became known, is based on the statement: "The 'economic' Trinity is the 'immanent' Trinity and the 'immanent' Trinity is the 'economic' Trinity."³⁹² This basically refers to the notion that the work of the Son and the Holy Spirit in the economy of the Trinity corresponds to the eternal originations of that same Son and Holy Spirit in the immanent Trinity. What Rahner was attempting to do (Barth was doing the same from a Protestant perspective) was re-address what he perceived to be the decline of focus on Trinitarian thought. In a section of his volume, *The Trinity*, entitled 'The Isolation of Trinitarian Doctrine in Piety and Textbook Theology', he writes, in damning fashion, "All these considerations should not lead us to overlook the fact that, despite their orthodox confession of the Trinity, Christians are, in their practical life, almost mere 'monotheists'. We must be willing to admit that, should the doctrine of the Trinity have to be dropped as false, the major part of religious literature could well remain

³⁸⁹ The work of Hegel certainly inaugurated a revival in trinitarian thought in the nineteenth century. However, it was a form of the doctrine that blurred the classical distinction between God and the world. Consequently, the distinction between Jesus and humanity is abandoned and Jesus is seen to be little more than a generally accessible human divinity.

³⁹⁰ Hegel thought that Christian beliefs were little more than primitive conceptions of reality which need to be re-interpreted through his own philosophical system. Moreover, Hegel had a high opinion of his idea, as Barth interestingly notes, "It is well known that Hegel was of the opinion that his philosophy, unlike that of his predecessors from Descartes to Fichte, should be understood not as a stage, a particular period in the development of the course of the history of philosophy in general, leading to heaven knows where, but as the final culmination of this history, uniting and doing away with all previous knowledge within itself." *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, 384.

³⁹¹ See Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970) for a full explication of his position on the Trinity.

³⁹² Rahner, *The Trinity*, 22.

virtually unchanged.”³⁹³ The importance of Rahner’s trinitarian thesis leads Grenz and Franke to announce that “Hegel, through his connection of the Trinity and the unfolding historical process; Barth, through his insistence on the connection between the Trinity and revelation as the basis for all theological assertions; and Rahner, through his connection of the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity as one identical reality, set the context for the discussion of Trinitarian theology in the twentieth century.”³⁹⁴

While, of course, many theologians have attempted to develop trinitarian thought subsequently, in Grenz and Franke’s opinion it is once again Pannenberg³⁹⁵ who develops the most sophisticated statement on the doctrine, one that follows in the footsteps of the three thinkers above and concentrates on the relational aspects of the Trinity. In a similar way to Jurgen Moltmann,³⁹⁶ Pannenberg focuses on the idea that it is the one God who is three, with the emphasis being on the ‘Tri-unity’ of God rather than the one God above the three. It is the relationship between the three beings that is reiterated.³⁹⁷ The work of Rahner and Pannenberg is important because together they “provide assurance that the explication of the triune God in God’s self-disclosure in and to creation is at the same time the explication of the triune God in the divine reality.”³⁹⁸ The bringing together of these two aspects, for Grenz and Franke, re-unites so-called theology from ‘above’ to theology from ‘below’.

Methodologically, this means that trinitarian-theological explication runs in two directions. On the one hand, it moves *from* the self-disclosure of God in and to creation, centered on the coming of Christ and the ongoing work of the Spirit, *to* the eternal life of the triune God. Viewed from this perspective theology (proper) is dependent on Christology and pneumatology. On the other hand, theological construction moves as well *from* the eternal reality of the triune God...*to* an understanding of trinitarian persons in the creative and

³⁹³ Ibid., 10-11.

³⁹⁴ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 191. This is an odd statement to make in as far as Hegel’s work was completed in the nineteenth century and Barth and Rahner developed their thought through early to the mid twentieth century. It would be better for them to state that these three helped pioneer trinitarian thought for those in the latter part of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century.

³⁹⁵ Grenz and Franke acknowledge other theologians at this point, including Moltmann, Jüngel and Robert Jenson, although their work is not explicated. For a brief overview of Moltmann and Jenson see Grenz’s *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 41-46. See also Jenson’s *Systematic Theology: The Triune God*, vol.1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) for his analysis on the Trinity. For Grenz’s interpretation of Moltmann’s work on the Trinity see his *Rediscovering the Trinity*, 73-88.

³⁹⁶ See Moltmann’s *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (London: SCM Press, 1977).

³⁹⁷ See Pannenberg’s *Systematic Theology 1*: 259-336 for his unpacking of this area. Also see Grenz’s *Reason for Hope*, 46-54, 71-75, for his summary of Pannenberg’s discussion on the Trinity.

³⁹⁸ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 192.

redemptive work of the one God. In this sense, Christology and pneumatology can only be ventured in the light of theology proper.³⁹⁹

In short, a trinitarian theology is comprised of the interrelationship of Christology, pneumatology and theology (proper). However, there is one further aspect that they wish to bring into the theological equation, an element that provides the link between theology and anthropology and which is connected to the concept of humanity as being the *imago dei*. This aspect is the idea of ‘relationality’. Indeed Grenz writes elsewhere, “... the specifically theological context in which theological anthropology must be developed is that of confession of the triune God. Hence, Christian theological anthropology is *trinitarian* theological anthropology.”⁴⁰⁰

Relationality

The role of relationality in connection with trinitarian thought has gathered pace in the last couple of decades.⁴⁰¹ Indeed, it is probably one of the most important developments within trinitarian thought in recent years. Cunningham writes, “If we had one single issue on which recent trinitarian theologians have achieved the greatest degree of consensus, we might well point to their collective enthusiasm for the category of ‘relationality’.”⁴⁰² The traditional language of ‘substance’ in connection with the essence of God and his attributes has receded, in that it is understood to be terminology that is not ultimately helpful in unpacking God’s internal relationality. Substance was seen as being part of God’s essence as opposed to his relational attributes which did not affect his identity in the same way a change in ‘substance’ would.⁴⁰³ However, with the development of contemporary trinitarian thought that has focussed on relationality, this has changed.⁴⁰⁴ Grenz and Franke rightly acknowledge this and, influenced by Catherine Mowry LaCugna and John Zizioulas among others, they argue that *person* rather than *substance* is now the primary ontological category

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 192.

⁴⁰⁰ See Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 23.

⁴⁰¹ The metropolitan. John Zizioulas, is acknowledged to be at the forefront of this area. Indeed, Miroslav Volf notes that “Zizioulas is considered one of the most influential Orthodox theologians of the present. This reputation is not undeserved... No less a theologian than Yves Congar called Zizioulas ‘one of the most original and profound theologians of our age,’ who had presented a ‘penetrating and coherent reading of the tradition of the Greek fathers on that living reality that is the church.” See Volf’s, *After Our Likeness*, 73.

⁴⁰² Cunningham, *These Three are One*, 25.

⁴⁰³ Greek Patristic thought is responsible for such developments. For example, the Nicene Creed, with its very specific reference to *homoousios*, majors on the unity of substance in the Trinity. However, as we will briefly see, John Zizioulas’ thesis, in part, contradicts this argument.

⁴⁰⁴ See also the works cited previously in the overview of Grenz’s work.

for theology.⁴⁰⁵ LaCugna notes that “person, not substance, is the ultimate ontological category... the ultimate source of all reality is not a ‘by-itself’ or an ‘in-itself’ but a person, a ‘toward-another’”⁴⁰⁶ Robert Jenson and Elizabeth Johnson are two other examples of scholars who are adopting an approach to trinitarian thought that critiques the classical singleness or oneness of God and gives priority instead to relationality within the trinitarian discourse.⁴⁰⁷ Moltmann also raises this issue: “The concept of God’s unity cannot in the trinitarian sense be fitted into the homogeneity of the one divine substance, or into the identity of the absolute subject either; and least of all into the one of the three Persons of the Trinity. It must be perceived in the *Perichoresis* of the divine Persons.”⁴⁰⁸

At the centre of this move toward relationality, Grenz and Franke argue, is the apostolic witness that God is love. The notion of love provides a clear conception as to the reality of God understood in Christian thought. “Throughout all eternity the divine life of the triune God is aptly characterised by the word *love*, which, when viewed in the light of relationality, signifies the reciprocal self-dedication of the trinitarian members to one another.”⁴⁰⁹ Of course, it is the relational concept that love brings to subject and object that helps illustrate the relational reality within the triune God. “For this reason, when viewed theologically, the statement ‘God is love’ refers primarily to the eternal, relational, intratrinitarian fellowship among Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who together are the one God.”⁴¹⁰ In this way the Trinity is social, inasmuch as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are in close relationship with one another in a community of love.

For Grenz and Franke, there are two cardinal influences on this change in direction toward relationality in trinitarian thought. Firstly, there is the recovery of aspects of Eastern or Greek theological tradition in respect to the emphasis of ‘relation’ over

⁴⁰⁵ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 194. See also LaCugna’s *God for Us: The Trinity and the Christian Life* and John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*. See also Grenz’s *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 53-57 for more on LaCugna’s proposal.

⁴⁰⁶ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 14-15.

⁴⁰⁷ See Robert Johnson, *The Triune Identity: God According to the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982). Also Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992). Cunningham makes an interesting point in connection with Jenson and Johnson, and the general consensus on ‘relationality’, when he writes, “The breadth of consensus on this point is underscored by the fact that...Elizabeth Johnson and Robert Jenson are not usually for being in close agreement with one another.” See Cunningham, *These Three are One*, 26.

⁴⁰⁸ Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (London: SCM Press, 1981), 150.

⁴⁰⁹ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 195.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 195.

‘substance’.⁴¹¹ However, despite their naming such an influence as cardinal, they do not clearly develop the importance of such thinking. John Zizioulas, the pre-eminent thinker in the area, is barely examined.⁴¹² This is an important oversight, as Zizioulas has much to offer in connection with the idea of relationality.⁴¹³ Re-examining the Greek fathers, Zizioulas argues that it was the Cappadocians who laid the groundwork for an ontology of persons. What the Cappadocians did was re-identify ‘hypostasis’ with ‘person’. That is to say, they attributed a concept with something which, prior to this, had no ontological content in this school of thought.⁴¹⁴ Zizioulas goes on to argue (using this breakthrough), that God the Father is not only the source, but also the cause of the Son and the Spirit. The being of the triune God is a result of God’s personal freedom. “God does not exist because He cannot but exist.”⁴¹⁵ Furthermore, it is through his trinitarian existence that God confirms his being. It is the personal existence of God that constitutes the divine substance. “The Holy Trinity is a *primordial* ontological concept and not a notion which is added to the divine substance or rather that follows it.”⁴¹⁶

The second influence toward the concept of ‘relationality’ is the contemporary conception of personhood and the ‘self’ that has developed in the current intellectual, postmodern climate. Having substantially unpacked the ideas surrounding the ‘postmodern self’ earlier, we will briefly examine what Grenz and Franke perceive to be the major impact of such thinking.

Over the centuries, humankind has constantly attempted to fathom the depths of its own identity and selfhood. However, since the demise of the Enlightenment, this quest now takes place within the new intellectual climate of postmodernity. The Enlightenment quest tended to understand the ‘self’ through ‘reason’ and built an understanding of the ‘self’ that was able to disengage from influences around (natural and social) and consequently become autonomous. The ability to create one’s own

⁴¹¹ Vladimir Lossky and John Zizioulas are particularly influential in this sphere. See Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*. For an engagement with Zizioulas’ work from a Protestant perspective see Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*.

⁴¹² Grenz does unpack the thinking of Zizioulas in a little more detail in *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 51-55. Also see his work on Zizioulas in *Rediscovering the Triune God*.

⁴¹³ Writing in 1985, Zizioulas argues that, “although the person and ‘personal identity’ are widely discussed nowadays as a supreme ideal, nobody seems to recognize that *historically* as well as *existentially* the concept of the person is indissolubly bound up with theology.” See Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 27.

⁴¹⁴ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 27-35.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

'self' was therefore made possible. "In this manner, the modern self became self-created and self-sufficient, the highly centered 'true inner person' persisting through time and standing above the vacillations and shifting relationships that characterise day to day living."⁴¹⁷

They acknowledge that this approach has been highly criticised in recent times. The deconstruction of this modern self is well underway. Instead, rather than an isolated, autonomous self, it must be recognised that the human self is constructed by social relationships. As we have seen earlier, this also leads to the postmodern self being in a constant flux of different relationships that are constantly changing within specific contexts. This in turn can lead to a vulnerability and instability that is quite opposite to the stability (although false) induced by Enlightenment ideals.

For Grenz and Franke though, the answer to this problem is to be found in the Christian teaching that humankind is created in the image of God, the concept of the *imago dei*.⁴¹⁸ There are two important concepts that help move this discussion forward, 'relationality' and 'destiny'.⁴¹⁹ Relationality refers to humans' special standing before God, while the idea of destiny looks to the link between the concept of God in the Bible and humankind's future destiny. "This link introduces a dynamic dimension into the concept of the divine image. The image of God is a destiny toward which human beings are moving and entails what they are en route to becoming."⁴²⁰ Daniel Migliore concurs with this view. "Being created in the image of God is not a state or condition but a movement with a goal: human beings are restless for a fulfilment of life not yet realized."⁴²¹ Furthermore, "Humanity is created with a radical openness to the future, to the not-yet, to a fullness of life beyond every personal, social, or cultural achievement."⁴²²

This combination, they argue, offers an understanding of the self that can speak to the postmodern context. They turn to the biblical texts to support their argument. Reading Genesis 1 and 2, they argue that the divinely given destiny of humanity starts with a

⁴¹⁷ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 196.

⁴¹⁸ See Grenz's *Theology for the Community of God*, 168-180 for a fuller unpacking of this. Also *The Social God and the Relational Self*, for Grenz's understanding of the *imago dei* as an eschatological concept that is tied in with community, 223-264.

⁴¹⁹ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 198.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁴²¹ D. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 147.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, 148.

special standing before God. Humans are the recipients of God's commands. The concept of 'dominion', mentioned in Genesis 1 and explicated further in the second chapter, holds the key. Here, there is the mandate for humans in their role with creation. Drawing on Gerhard von Rad, they advocate that humanity has a special task in that the race is created in the image of God, which means that it shares in the human *telos*.⁴²³ This concept of 'image' carries with it a sense of 'representation'. The *imago dei* means that humankind represents God on earth. The task is to represent God in creation and reflect his intentions for it as his representatives. To sum up, Grenz and Franke write that "the entire biblical panorama may be read as presenting the purpose of God as that of bringing into being a people who reflect the divine character and thus are the *imago dei*. At the eschaton, God will complete what the divine intention from the beginning and has from the beginning been set before us as our human destiny."⁴²⁴

The trinitarian concept of God that they argue for leads, they believe, to "a truly relational anthropology, a fully theological ecclesiology, and a completely trinitarian eschatology, as systematic theology from start to finish becomes, as Pannenberg notes, the explication of the Christian declaration that God is love."⁴²⁵

We now turn our attention to the second of theology's focal motifs that Grenz and Franke highlight, namely that of 'community.'

Community: Theology's Integrative Motif

Following on from their conclusion that the triune God is a social God, Grenz and Franke maintain that a Christian theology that is trinitarian will also be completely communitarian. This reflects the work of Zizioulas, who, as we have seen, argues for relationality over substance in his approach to the Trinity.⁴²⁶ They contend that "theology, with its trinitarian structure, finds its integration through the concept of

⁴²³ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 199. See also von Rad's, *Genesis*, trans. John H. Marks (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972) for von Rad's position on this.

⁴²⁴ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 200

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, 202. Pannenberg actually writes, "On the way to this goal of world history, from creation to the eschatological consummation, the distinctive features of the trinitarian persons, of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, will emerge more clearly, so that the course of systematic theology up to its conclusion in the treatment of eschatology may be expected to offer us a more nuanced understanding of what it means to love God." See his *Systematic Theology* 1: 448.

⁴²⁶ See Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* for his unpacking of this thesis. It is important to note that his book actually focusses on ecclesiology rather than on the doctrine of the Trinity.

community. Community forms the theme that integrates the various strands of theological reflection into a single web or mosaic.”⁴²⁷

After sketching an overview of the development of thought concerning the idea of community, they outline what they perceive to be the ‘new communitarianism’,⁴²⁸ and the influence thinkers associated with this movement have generally had on communitarian thought. Alasdair MacIntyre,⁴²⁹ Michel J. Sandel,⁴³⁰ Charles Taylor,⁴³¹ and Michael Waltzer⁴³² are acknowledged by Grenz to be the progenitors of this ‘new communitarianism’. Essentially, what these thinkers have tried to do is counter a radical individualism that held that the autonomous, self-reflective individual was the focus for the knowing process. Instead, the community is integral to the epistemological enterprise.⁴³³ This approach helps them further to undermine the modernist understanding of knowledge and, in addition, provides them with the tools to engage more effectively with the postmodern climate. “This critique forms the basis for the replacement of the individualistic, foundationalist rationalism of modernism with an understanding of knowledge and belief that views them as socially and linguistically constituted...”⁴³⁴ It is this ongoing debate surrounding the concept of community that offers, what Grenz and Franke perceive to be, valuable assistance in mapping out a theological methodology that is itself ‘communitarian’.⁴³⁵

They acknowledge that the concept of community is a very slippery one which is notoriously difficult to pin down (in this respect it is similar to the problems faced in trying to define postmodernism).⁴³⁶ However, they posit that there are three aspects that are crucial to understanding the concept of community.⁴³⁷

⁴²⁷ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 204. For an introductory book on community see Grenz’s own *Created for Community*.

⁴²⁸ As we have seen earlier, ‘New communitarianism’ refers to the movement pioneered by scholars such as MacIntyre, Sandel, Taylor and Walzer, and was a sustained attack upon the modernist ideal of the ‘self’. Individual atomism linked to political liberalism came under severe scrutiny and the wrenching of the individual away from society and the so-called ‘radical individualism’ that this produced found itself making way for the reintroduction of communitarian understandings of the self.

⁴²⁹ See MacIntyre’s *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* and *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*.

⁴³⁰ See Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*.

⁴³¹ Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*.

⁴³² See Waltzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defence of Pluralism and Equality*.

⁴³³ Etzioni writes, “In the 1980’s a group of political philosophers—Charles Taylor, Michael J. Sandel, and Michael Waltzer—challenged individualist liberal opposition to the concept of a common good, although all have been uncomfortable with the label ‘communitarianism.’ See Etzioni (ed.), *The Essential Communitarian Reader* (Oxford: Rowan and Littlefield, 1998), ix. For a good introduction to communitarianism see Henry Tam’s *Communitarianism: A New Agenda for Politics and Citizenship* (London: MacMillan Press, 1998).

⁴³⁴ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 209.

⁴³⁵ Again, Franke regurgitates most of what is written here in his *The Character of Theology*, 166-188.

⁴³⁶ Amitai Etzioni writes, “As I see it... communities are webs of social relations that encompass shared meanings and above all shared values.” *The Essential Communitarian Reader*, xiii.

⁴³⁷ They are indebted to scholars such as Robert Bellah, Derek Phillips, Etzioni and, of course, those listed as the new communitarians for these ideas.

Firstly, community consists of a group of people who are aware that they “share a similar frame of reference.”⁴³⁸ In a nutshell, this equates to the idea that people within certain social groups have similar outlooks and values in life. They see the world with their own particular set of communal spectacles. Furthermore, particular communities will use particular linguistic and symbolic materials to construct the world which they inhabit.

Secondly, there is the group focus. Citing what they interpret to be the ‘standard definition’ of community contained in Robert Bellah, *Habits of the Heart*, community is “a group of people who are socially interdependent, who participate together in discussion and decision making, and who share certain *practices*...that both define the community and are nurtured by it. Such a community is not quickly formed. It almost always has a history and so is a *community of memory*, defined in part by its past and its memory of its past.”⁴³⁹ This awareness of group focus in turn evokes a sense of group identity. Furthermore, this aids in identifying common communal tasks. However, it is important to note that this collective sense of purpose and task does not necessarily result in unanimous agreements. What happens is that within particular social groups there is ongoing discussion as to the direction of the group or actions it takes. In other words, within the community a whole plethora of views are debated and cogitated, and this shared interest in issues is developed within the life of the group, thereby allowing healthy debate to have a place within the community.⁴⁴⁰ Bellah writes in connection with this,

a good community is one in which there is argument, even conflict, about the meaning of shared values and goals, and certainly about how they will be actualized in everyday life. Community is not about silent consensus; it is a form of intelligent, reflective life, in which there is indeed consensus, but where the consensus can be challenged and changed—often gradually, sometimes radically—over time.⁴⁴¹

Thirdly, there is the ‘person focus’ of a group. This refers to the idea that members of social groups/communities draw their own sense of personal identity from the

⁴³⁸ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 216.

⁴³⁹ Robert Bellah (ed.), *Habits of the Heart*, 333.

⁴⁴⁰ This seems to me to be a very utopian ideal that in practice never really works for any length of time.

⁴⁴¹ Bellah, in *Beyond Foundationalism*, 217.

community to which they belong. Thus, the community has a very important role in helping the individual members of the group form their own identity.

Having now noted three important aspects that constitute the make-up of a community, Grenz and Franke contend that the central function of community is its role in identity formation.⁴⁴² The connection between identity formation and the context of the community will provide the link between community and theological method.

They then raise the idea of ‘reference groups’ in connection with the identity-forming aspect of communities. Drawing on MacIntyre⁴⁴³ and George Stroup⁴⁴⁴ they posit that a reference group refers to the social group/community that has the most influence on a particular individual. It must be noted that there can be more than one reference group that an individual refers to for identity, as most people are members of a number of social groups. However, only a select few operate as specific ‘reference groups’ in the life of an individual. Grenz and Franke write, “...lying beneath the various competing conceptions we derive from the manifold communities in which we are members is a deeper sense of identity for which we are dependent on one such group (or at most a select few groups). This community functions as our primary reference group and is what we might call our ‘community of reference’.”⁴⁴⁵

Influenced by Josiah Royce,⁴⁴⁶ they note that a community has both a past and a future. In particular, other contemporary communitarians have drawn on Royce’s insights on the concept of community and have picked up on the emphasis on history of a community. Indeed, in an important sense each community is constituted by its own history. Royce’s most detailed understanding of community is contained in the second volume of his *The Problem of Christianity*, which is cited in full:

Our definition presupposes that there exist many individual selves. Suppose these selves to vary in their present experiences and purposes as widely as you will. Imagine them to be

⁴⁴² Ibid., 218.

⁴⁴³ Particularly *After Virtue*. MacIntyre ties narrative theory in with personal identity formation. He writes, “A central thesis then begins to emerge: man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his frictions, essentially a story-telling animal. He is not essentially, but becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth.” *After Virtue*, 216.

⁴⁴⁴ See Stroup’s *The Promise of Narrative Theology* for his unpacking of this.

⁴⁴⁵ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 220.

⁴⁴⁶ See Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity*, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1913) for his own explications on the subject.

sundered from one another by such chasms of mutual mystery and independence as, in our natural social life, often seem hopelessly to divide and secrete the inner world of each of us from the direct knowledge and estimate of his fellows. But let these selves be able to look beyond their present chaos of fleeting ideas and of warring desires, far away into the past whence they came, and into future whither their hopes lead them. As they thus look, let each one of them ideally enlarge his own individual life, extending himself into the past and the future, so as to say of some far off event, belonging, perhaps, to other generations of men, "I view that event as a part of my own life." "That former happening or achievement so predetermined the sense and the destiny which are now mine, that I am moved to regard it as belonging to my own past." Or again: "For that coming event I wait and hope as an event of my own future."

And further, let the various ideal extensions, forwards and backwards, include at least one common event, so that each of these selves regards that event as a part of his own life.

Then, *with reference to the ideal common past and future in question, I say that these selves constitute a community.* This is henceforth to be our definition of a community.⁴⁴⁷

Grenz and Franke argue that, although Royce has many keen insights into the nature of community, he is a man of his times, and still retains a strong individualist and foundationalist flavour to his understanding. What Royce did do, and what consequently has been taken up by others, was to emphasise the historical element of community. This sense of history is referred to as the 'constitutive narrative'.⁴⁴⁸ A community should not forget its past but instead draw upon it, recalling certain milestones in its development. Furthermore, looking to the past "recalls the constitutive past for the sake of personal and communal life in the present."⁴⁴⁹ This makes the community a community of memory, as it draws on its past and reconstitutes it for the present. This memorial aspect is not the only one. There is also a future orientation. There is anticipation as to the future role and function of the community—which, for Grenz and Franke, is its 'eschatological' outlook.⁴⁵⁰ This future perspective serves as an ongoing incentive to community members, which then can act as a 'community of hope' for its members.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁷ Royce, *The Problem of Christianity*, 2:58-60.

⁴⁴⁸ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 222.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 222.

⁴⁵⁰ I really don't think this can be said of all 'reference group' communities'. Grenz and Franke are generalising too much in regard to religious communities that do not figure in everyone's communal collection.

⁴⁵¹ Stanley Hauerwas argues that every community requires a narrative and that communities are narrative formed. See his *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

There are two important aspects to a community's constitutive narrative. There is the community that looks to its past, its memory, and there is the future or eschatological aspect. This 'cosmic story', as Grenz and Franke like to refer to it, provides the basis for the here and now of a community.

Having established the basic parameters of what constitutes community, they turn their attention to the church, and attempt to assess its character and constitution and indeed in what sense, if any, the church is a community. Viewed with some of the findings already noted above, they understand the church "as the fellowship of those persons who gather around the narrative of God as inscripturated in the Bible."⁴⁵² Furthermore, it is the God described in this biblical narrative that actually constitutes the church itself. Indeed, as we have seen, Grenz and Franke argue the church is formed by the Holy Spirit who speaks in the contemporary context to the reader or hearer, who then consequently lives in the world that God is creating. The result of this process is that the Spirit brings into fruition new communities or fellowships who look to Jesus Christ as saviour. "Consequently, the church is more than the aggregate of its members. It is a particular people imbued with a particular 'constitutive narrative.'"⁴⁵³ They argue that here we can see how the notion of a community of memory and hope can help us understand this. The church can look to its past and build upon that which has been achieved and learnt and look to the eschatological future, a future of hope of "a new heaven and earth."⁴⁵⁴ As this process develops the church becomes what Migliore calls an "alternative community."⁴⁵⁵

It is important to note, at this juncture, that Grenz and Franke are trying to be careful not to allow insights from sociology to degenerate into another form of foundationalism. There is no generic reality called 'community' that is discovered or worked out in order to establish the credibility or authenticity of any other community. Sociology is not to be viewed as an objective science that is drawn upon to provide indubitable data that will assist in determining the genuineness of a particular community. For example, John Milbank is quoted to this effect: "no such fundamental

⁴⁵² *Beyond Foundationalism*, 225.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁴⁵⁴ NIV: Rev 21:1.

⁴⁵⁵ D. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 254. See the section, 248-273 for his explication on this area. Migliore is influenced by David J. Bosch's *The Church as Alternative Community* (Potschefstroom: Instituut vir Reformatoriese Studie, 1982).

account, in the sense of something neutral, rational and universal, is readily available.”⁴⁵⁶ Milbank argues that Christian social theory “is first and foremost an *ecclesiology*, and only an account of human societies to the extent that the Church defines itself, in its practice, as in continuity and discontinuity with these societies. As Church is *already*, necessarily, by virtue of its institution, a ‘reading’ of other human societies, it becomes possible to consider ecclesiology as also ‘sociology’.”⁴⁵⁷

What must emerge is that theology and not any type of sociology, should provide the ultimate basis for describing the church as community. “More specifically, talk about the Christian church as a community takes its cue from the particularly *Christian* conception of God that informs a specifically Christian ecclesiology.”⁴⁵⁸ Furthermore, this conception of God must be reflected in the Christian community. At the core of what the church should be is the understanding that the human call is to reflect God’s character. Of course, because of the triune nature of God, and the relationship within the trinity, humans are called upon to replicate this same relationship. The *imago dei* that we have seen earlier should consist of persons in relationship as per the trinitarian model.

Again, Grenz and Franke remind us that at no time should we think of the concept of community as in anyway generic. This is particularly important here. Within Christianity there are many different communities, with different understandings of what it means to be Christian within various specific contexts. Here, for Grenz and Franke, the advantages of a non-foundationalist approach to theological method are found. A non-foundationalist approach is able to do away with foundationalist models and concentrate on particular communal habits, practices and constitutions in order fully to explicate the particular beliefs of a faith community. Hence, for them, Christian theology is concerned with, and also formed by, specific Christian understandings of community.

In asking *why* Christian theology should be communitarian, they once again turn to the Reformed epistemologists, Plantinga and Wolterstorff. As we have seen, they show

⁴⁵⁶ Milbank cited in *Beyond Foundationalism*, 227. Milbank is one of the leading thinkers of what is termed the ‘radical orthodoxy movement’. Also counted amongst such thinkers are Graham Ward and Catherine Pickstock.

⁴⁵⁷ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 380.

⁴⁵⁸ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 228.

that to be human is to be situated in a specific context and community, which means that the traditions in our communities play an indispensable role in forming our outlooks on life, our beliefs and rationality. It is this interpretation that makes the philosophy of Reformed epistemology so appealing to Grenz and Franke, because it provides them with a framework within which to argue for the necessity of a communitarian theology.

They give three reasons for this. Firstly, it is because it is linked to a particular community, i.e. the Christian community. James McClendon writes, “Theology is always theology of the community, not just of the individual Christian.”⁴⁵⁹ Indeed, our faith is formed and developed and is dependent on the community in which we are situated. Theology is not just *fides quaerens intellectum*, ‘faith seeking understanding,’ it is also the community seeking to understand that faith which they all share. Secondly, they argue that theology is communitarian because it is the understanding and unpacking of the Christian conception of God. Again they reiterate that this understanding is never generic, therefore attempting to avoid any foundationalist pitfalls. It is the understanding of God as per community setting.

The only true God, Christians declare, is none other than the triune one, the fellowship of the trinitarian persons. Hence God is social, communal ... community. Christian theology is therefore inherently communitarian, therefore, because it is the explication of the Christian understanding of God, and this God is the Triune God.⁴⁶⁰

Finally, theology is inherently communitarian because Christians find their identity through the biblical text. In this text is found the narrative of God who fulfills his divine purposes, which includes the establishment of community. For Grenz and Franke, it is this reason that makes Christian theology communitarian.

The communitarian nature of theology leads very naturally, for Grenz and Franke, to the concept stated at the beginning of this section, namely that community is theology’s integrative motif: “The focus on the communal nature of theology as an activity of the faith community brings us finally to *community* as theology’s

⁴⁵⁹ McClendon, *Systematic Theology: Ethics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 36.

⁴⁶⁰ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 232.

integrative motif, that is, as the central, organizing concept of theological construction, the theme around which a systematic theology is structured.”⁴⁶¹ From the very first narratives of the Old Testament they argue that the plot of scripture is concerned with community. From the moment God claimed that it was not good for man to be alone (Gen 2), God’s purpose was to see community being established. At the heart of the Bible is the idea that God was to be amongst humans in fellowship. Indeed, for Grenz and Franke, the biblical narratives are scattered with allusions to this purpose and end. It is this vision of community and fellowship with God that they contend lies at the heart of the biblical narrative.

Christian theology is the explication of the interpretation of God and the world around which the Christian community finds its identity. Theology engages in the task for the purpose of facilitating the fellowship of Christ’s disciples in fulfilling their calling to be the image of God and thereby to be the biblical community God destined us to become. For this reason, theology is by its very nature communitarian.⁴⁶²

However, as Grenz and Franke write, “The fundamental question still remains: Why give primacy to the world-constructing language of the Christian community?”⁴⁶³ On what grounds can they legitimately make such a claim without being inconsistent in their own methodological approach? They suggest the best solution is to wed communitarian and pragmatist insights. The Christian community is rooted in the triune nature of God, and this reflects the nature of God’s character, and as a consequence Christian theology is concerned with and formed by the specific Christian understandings of community which are informed by the Bible. They acknowledge that all human religious traditions help to contribute in some way to social cohesion and consequently to the building up of a particular society or community. In Grenz’s own work, published in the same year, he asks, “Which religious vision carries within itself the ground for community in the truest sense?”⁴⁶⁴ The Christian message does not stop with the quest for community in general. “We believe that Christian theology, focused as it is on God as the triunity of persons and on humankind as the *imago dei*, sets forth a helpful vision of the nature of the kind of

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., 234.

⁴⁶² Ibid., 238.

⁴⁶³ Ibid., 54.

⁴⁶⁴ Grenz, ‘The Universality of the ‘Jesus Story’ and the ‘Incredulity Toward the Metanarrative’, in *No Other Name Before Me?* (ed.) John G. Stackhouse Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 108.

community that all religious belief systems in their own way and according to their own understanding seek to foster.”⁴⁶⁵ Furthermore, “Evangelicals firmly believe that the Christian vision sets forth more completely the nature of community that all human religious traditions seek to foster...No other religious vision encapsulates the final purpose of God as they understand it. Other religious visions cannot provide community in its ultimate sense, because they are *theologically* insufficient. They do not embody the fullest possible understanding of who God actually is.”⁴⁶⁶ So, it is on the grounds that the Christian religious vision of community is the best possible vision to employ that its claims should take precedence over any others.

Moreover, Christians declare that the goal of human existence has been revealed most completely in Jesus Christ, the Son, who in his life, death, and resurrection modelled the divine principle of life, namely, the life in intimate fellowship with his heavenly Father by the Holy Spirit who indwelt him, and consequently life in fellowship with and for the sake of others and indeed with and for all creation.

Viewed from this perspective, evangelical adherence to the finality of Christ means that Jesus is the vehicle through whom humans come to the fullest understanding of who God is and what God is like. The incarnate life of Jesus reveals the truest vision of the nature of God, namely that God is the triune one and hence inherently social.⁴⁶⁷

This approach is problematic. To claim that the Christian vision should have primacy over other religious visions is one that would not find any sympathy from other religious perspectives. For example, putting this argument to a Muslim scholar would be refuted on the same basis as those made by Grenz and Franke, only this time the *Qur'an* would be employed as the ‘norming norm’ and not the Bible. The Islamic idea of *ummah* is variously translated as ‘people’ or ‘community’, and although somewhat fragmented today, is still an ideal intrinsic to the interpretation of community that is sought by many Muslims. In the modern Muslim world the notion of *ummah* is an integral part of religious, political and ideological discourses on Islam. Its foundation is constructed on the basis of the *Qur'anic* revelation and the collective memories of Islamic history. Indeed, there is a consensus among Muslim scholars that the *ummah* refers to a spiritual, non-territorial community distinguished by the shared beliefs of its

⁴⁶⁵ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 54.

⁴⁶⁶ ‘The Universality of the ‘Jesus Story and the ‘Incredulity Toward the Metanarrative’, 109.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 109.

members.⁴⁶⁸ This is entirely overlooked by Grenz and Franke, who clearly would need to embark on a thoroughgoing study of other faiths before they could legitimately come to any sort of conclusion in this regard.

Despite their protestations that they have avoided any foundationalist conception of community, this claim is untenable. Yes, they acknowledge that there are a variety of Christian communities, which, guided by the Holy Spirit, interpret how the Christian faith should be 'lived out' (this is their non-foundationalist twist). Furthermore, they argue for an eschatological concept of truth, which means that all truth claims are provisional until the *eschaton*. However, we are faced with a major inconsistency here. Their claim that the Christian community is the most complete seems to be a type of foundationalism, despite their disagreement over such a claim. The grounds they give for this claim simply do not stand up outside the Christian community. Moreover, to claim that at the *eschaton* all will be revealed by God is itself a 'truth' claim, that is a form of 'eschatological realism'. If this can be known, then why cannot other truths be gleaned? Why is it that only this one 'truth' is available? Put succinctly, Grenz and Franke attempt to defend a non-foundationalist, non-realism in the here and now, whilst advocating an eschatological realism. This, it is suggested, seems incoherent.

Their attempt to go beyond Lindbeck's thesis by employing an eschatological realism flounders in the face of their non-foundationalist, anti-realist stance. This inconsistency is a serious weakness in their thesis. Unless they find another approach that is consistent in method and can get beyond the Christian community to the 'outside' world, in an ontological sense, they are faced with the same criticisms that Lindbeck faced. The claim that they go beyond Lindbeck's 'intratextual' understanding of theology to an 'extratextual' theology does not hold. In this sense, they are really only advocating a slightly different form of a Lindbeckian/Wittgensteinian methodological construction. Their insistence on proclaiming a non-foundational epistemology that understands knowledge to be interpreted through the Christian community is basically a form of Wittgenstein's 'language games'. Christian communities understand and live according to how they interpret what the Holy Spirit is saying through the biblical text. Theological authority

⁴⁶⁸ See Abdullah al-Ahsan, *Ummah or Nation? Identity Crisis in Contemporary Muslim Society* (Islamic Foundation, 1992) and *Introduction to Islamic Civilization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976) (ed.) Roger Mervyn Savory for explication of the concept of *Ummah*.

is simply located in the linguistic practices of the believing community. Doctrinal statements, in the Lindbeckian sense, function as rules of grammar, and as such are second-order assertions. The similarity of Grenz and Franke's proposal subjects them to much the same criticism as that of Lindbeck. Their methodological proposal here, in some way, limits theology to a form of cultural anthropology. Indeed, critiquing Lindbeck's proposal, Vanhoozer notes,

Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic model, by seeing theology's task as describing the grammar of the community's culture and language, ultimately runs the risk of reducing theology to cultural anthropology, in which talk about God *just is* talk about the community. Such reduction amounts to a failure to speak of God... and hence to a failure to preserve the reality of God, together with his divine initiatives. Failure to refer to the divine initiatives results, in turn, in the loss of the central point of the good news, which is to say, in the loss of the gospel itself.⁴⁶⁹

Vanhoozer's critique could be applied equally to Grenz and Franke's proposal.

Eschatology: Theology's Orienting Motif

The last piece of the methodological jigsaw lies with the concept of eschatology. Eschatology orientates the theological program. That said, it is important to know exactly what Grenz and Franke mean by 'eschatology'.

They develop their understanding of eschatology with reference to the work of Jürgen Moltmann,⁴⁷⁰ who, along with Pannenberg,⁴⁷¹ is responsible for the rehabilitation of a 'futurist' understanding of eschatology.⁴⁷² This is in sharp contrast to the 'this-worldly' concept as proposed by many theologians in the twentieth century and particularly Rudolph Bultmann.⁴⁷³ More specifically, what lies at the heart of Moltmann's proposal is the notion that the Bible contains the promises of God, which

⁴⁶⁹ Vanhoozer, 'The Voice and the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal About the Ministry and the Minstrelsy of Theology,' in *Evangelical Futures*, 100.

⁴⁷⁰ See Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* for his full explication of this area. See also *God Will be All in All*, (ed.) Richard Bauckham (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990) for more on Moltmann's eschatology. See also Bauckham's *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995).

⁴⁷¹ See Pannenberg's *Systematic Theology*, 3:527-646.

⁴⁷² For an unpacking of some of Moltmann's ideas in eschatology see Bloesch's, *The Last Things: Resurrection, Judgement and Glory* (IVP: Downers Grove, 2004). Bloesch is in broad agreement with Moltmann and very sympathetic to his views. See also Pannenberg's *Systematic Theology* 3: 527-646. Also Christian Mostert, *God and the Future: Wolfhart Pannenberg's Eschatological Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2002).

⁴⁷³ See Bultmann's *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (London: SCM Press, 1964).

in turn inspire hope for Christians in the present.⁴⁷⁴ Here, they argue, “is the interpretation of the promissory history found in the Bible, articulated for the sake of providing an understanding of the present-day mission of the church in the world. In this sense, theology is by its very nature eschatological.”⁴⁷⁵ Christian hope is a future hope and not something that is derived from the present.⁴⁷⁶ “rather than being its fulfilment, the future contradicts the present; the kingdom of God comes from beyond and negates the present evil situation.”⁴⁷⁷ These ideas originate from Moltmann’s understanding of the concept of ‘promise’. In *Theology of Hope*, Moltmann writes, “A promise is a declaration which announces the coming of a reality that does not yet exist. Thus promise sets man’s heart on a future history in which the fulfilling of the promise is to be expected.”⁴⁷⁸ The promises of God are a future reality that are only present in the proclaimed word about such a future. It is the promise that the future holds that galvanises the present and inspires the mission of the church. In this way the future breaks into the present and helps shape it.

Hope, of course, lies at the core of eschatology for Moltmann.⁴⁷⁹ However, Grenz and Franke argue that there is a danger of sliding into a foundationalist understanding of hope. Moltmann’s theology of hope is deeply influenced by Ernst Bloch⁴⁸⁰ who posited the idea that the human person was intrinsically hopeful because of a not-yet realised utopia.⁴⁸¹ Grenz and Franke argue that this could re-introduce the foundationalist danger that lies beneath the surface of his thought. This anthropologically-based hope, as they see it, must be avoided at all costs, as it can lead to a “‘de-actualizing’ of the future and result in the demise of hope. In this anthropological schema, an actual, particular future is not ultimately crucial to the production of personal identity.”⁴⁸² Instead, what takes its place is any kind of future

⁴⁷⁴ Bauckham argues that at the very core of Moltmann’s work on eschatology, *Theology of Hope*, is the resurrection of Jesus. He argues, “For what makes Christian faith eschatological, for Moltmann, and what determines the nature of Christian eschatological hope is the raising of the crucified Jesus from the dead by God.” See Bauckham’s *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, 32. Grenz and Franke don’t make this clear enough in their outline of Moltmann’s eschatology.

⁴⁷⁵ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 245.

⁴⁷⁶ Moltmann has been criticised for his emphasis on the ‘future’ hope because little attention is given to the present experience of God.

⁴⁷⁷ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 246.

⁴⁷⁸ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 103.

⁴⁷⁹ Moltmann writes, “From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present.” See *Theology of Hope*, 16.

⁴⁸⁰ Bauckham writes regarding Bloch that “Bloch’s great work, *The Principle of Hope*, was not only a powerful atheistic philosophy of hope, but one which aimed to inherit biblical eschatology in a non-religious form, taking the biblical God of hope to be a symbol of hope, a projection of the immanent power of history to transcend itself into the future. See *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, 44.

⁴⁸¹ Bloch exerted much influence over Moltmann, particularly his earlier thought. See *God Will be All in All*, 103-112 for some insight into this.

⁴⁸² *Beyond Foundationalism*, 248.

that is able to generate a type of hopeful response that is needed to aid in constructing identity in the here and now. Because of the lack of a particular future in which to hope, hope itself becomes just a psychological tool for producing identity. This interpretation of Moltmann is somewhat exaggerated. The hope Moltmann argues for is a radical Christian hope, which is not a general part of some inherent hopefulness within humanity such as Bloch may argue for. Hope, as Bloch understands it (in a foundationalist way), does not have sufficient ground within itself to overcome all the adversities of the world. As Bauckham puts it, “Bloch’s catchphrase, ‘transcending without transcendence’, neatly puts the difference between him and Moltmann... Is real transcendence possible without divine transcendence?”⁴⁸³ The answer is clearly ‘no’ for Moltmann. “Hence, for Moltmann, the significance of the fact that biblical eschatology arose precisely at the point where immanent possibilities of hope run out, as hope in the God who creates out of nothing and gives life to the dead. Hence, precisely the point which Bloch’s principle of hope cannot reach—the resurrection of the dead—is the foundation of Christian eschatology.”⁴⁸⁴ This hope is particular, and something Grenz and Franke are seeking, as we shall see. However, they overlook this and wrongly interpret Moltmann as having a foundationalist concept of hope in general.

If hope is understood as something that is generic to all humanity, then, of course, it succumbs to the foundationalist trap that Grenz and Franke are keen to avoid. Hope, and with it eschatology, need to steer clear of this type of understanding in order to be part of a non-foundationalist approach to theology. Confidence cannot be placed in such anthropological foundationalism.

A non-foundationalist understanding of hope sees it as a *particular hope*. To do so, is to move away from the generic conception common in a foundationalist model.

“Hence, *Christian* theology speaks of the particular hope *Christians* anticipate, which hope is articulated in the Bible.”⁴⁸⁵ The biblical hope is specific, and it looks to and anticipates a particular future. Of course, this biblical hope is seen as a certainty, a future certainty that is assured.

⁴⁸³ Bauckham, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, 44-45.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁴⁸⁵ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 249.

Christian hope is directed toward the future, which has its consummation in God's purpose for creation. In this sense, Grenz and Franke call this Christian hope 'transfinite'.⁴⁸⁶ That is to say, the "Christian hope is linked to our *telos*, to the goal, purpose, or end of our existence—not viewed in isolation, however, but within the context of the divine purpose for all creation."⁴⁸⁷ Hope then, is connected to the entire universe, which is a destiny that humankind shares. "Consequently, eschatology is teleology, the teaching about the *telos* of creation."⁴⁸⁸ Christian hope is generated by God's promises to bring to completion that which the Bible expresses.

They add one caveat: drawing again on Moltmann's thesis that hope arises out of, and draws upon the divine promises, they comment that "the object of Christian hope is not the future itself but the God of the future; not our creaturely destiny but the God who destines; not the *telos* of our existence but the God who is leading us toward that glorious goal. In short, our hope is in the God who declares, 'I am making all things new' (Rev. 21:5)."⁴⁸⁹ The Christian focus should be completely upon God.

Grenz and Franke bring out one further aspect in regard to hope. Such a hope should be pessimistic and not optimistic. This may seem strange, but they explain that many foundationalist theologians view hope as a virtue that is intrinsically optimistic, that everyone possesses, and that only needs to be triggered within the human psyche in order to produce a future with potential and real possibilities.⁴⁹⁰ They argue that, when compared to such an understanding, the Christian hope is hopelessly pessimistic. This is because the Christian hope does not look within humanity for such a hopefulness that is supposed to be inherent within. Instead, it looks to the God of the Bible and what that God will do. The Christian hope lies secure in the promises of God, which, when examined from a human perspective can seem unrealisable. It is to hope in the God of the Bible, to hope in something outside humanity and its finite capabilities that is the key. They cite the resurrection, an eschatological promise, as an example of something very much out of the range of human possibility. "Eschatology is the study of 'last things' as *telos*. Consequently, eschatology fosters a theology that becomes the

⁴⁸⁶ This expression is borrowed from Andrew Lester, who draws a distinction between two different types of hope, the other being finite. See his *Hope in Pastoral Care and Counseling* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

⁴⁸⁷ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 250.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 250.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 250.

⁴⁹⁰ They do not actually name any theologians to whom this claim is made toward.

teaching about the God who promises to bring creation to its divinely given *telos* in the eternal community that God will bring—and is already bringing—to pass.”⁴⁹¹
Viewed this way theology must always be seen as eschatological.

Having established this, they can focus more closely on the manner in which eschatology directs theology. Firstly, they give primacy to the biblical narrative when outlining an eschatological theology. The biblical story is directed toward a *telos*.⁴⁹² The biblical narratives recount the stories of God’s dealing with creation and how this God is bringing it to the divinely intended goal. It is argued that a *telos*-directed narrative is one of the most important contributions of the biblical communities within the text. In illustrating their case, they broadly sketch how they believe the ancient community of Israel understood the concept of time as linear, rather than cyclical, as the ancient Greeks and other ancient near east communities did. It was the development of an historical consciousness that is of significance here. This linear basis came from Israel’s theological understanding that developed as they experienced Yahweh’s saving acts through their history.⁴⁹³

Moreover, a linear understanding of time led to a ‘future consciousness’ that was influenced by the prophets who foretold future events by referring and linking them to former events. An ‘eternal consciousness’ also developed as a result. This consciousness understood that eschatological reality already existed in the heavens. Furthermore, the prophets saw the eschatological narratives being ‘universal’ in scope.⁴⁹⁴ This was due mainly to the failings of the Israelite nation who could not seem to live their lives according to the divine wishes of their God. Consequently, the prophets began to see history as the activity of the one true God, who imposed or asserted the divine rule over all nations. The point is that it is this understanding of the development of these eschatological perspectives that informs their view.

To summarise thus far, Grenz and Franke argue that eschatology and hope are not in any sense generic, that they cannot be found, so to speak, beneath the skin of humankind, as part of the human make-up. On the contrary, eschatology (and hope) is

⁴⁹¹ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 252.

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*, 253.

⁴⁹³ See also Grenz’s essay ‘The Universality of the Jesus Story’ for a similar unpacking of this.

⁴⁹⁴ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 256.

particular to the community in which it is embedded. This, coupled with the idea that time is linear, connected to the *telos* of creation, provides an eschatology for the Christian community that is “related to the narrative of God’s creative work.”⁴⁹⁵ Furthermore, eschatology “speaks about the goal of a narrative that spans the ages...it is the explication of the *meaning* of the entire narrative of God at work throughout the ages.”⁴⁹⁶ Of course, for Grenz and Franke the biblical narrative per se is eschatological. Consequently, because this eschatological narrative forms the Christian community, all theology is thoroughly eschatological.

Having delineated the basic claims for an eschatological theology, Grenz and Franke finally outline the methodological considerations for such an eschatologically oriented theology. They emphasise that a “method in which the eschatological trajectory of the biblical narrative is central leads to a theology that is theocentric, not anthropocentric as in much foundationalist theology.”⁴⁹⁷ In positing this, they once again return to the concept of time unpacked earlier. However, this time Grenz and Franke contrast the biblical, linear understanding of time as understood by ancient Israel to Western thought that emerged during the Enlightenment. They argue that for the first thousand years after the Roman emperor Constantine, the distinctively eschatological vision of the biblical narrative dominated Western understanding of both time and history.⁴⁹⁸ This way of understanding views God as being the “acting subject of history.”⁴⁹⁹ However, the arrival of humanistic thinkers which separated this linear understanding of time, with God as the Alpha and Omega of history, from its theological anchor, led to an anthropocentric version. Ultimately, humankind deposed God as the subject of historical narrative, with the notion of human progress replacing it. Grenz and Franke write, “What formerly had been the account of God bringing creation to its *telos* became the story of the rise and advance of ‘civilisation’.”⁵⁰⁰

This understanding reached its zenith in the modern era with science placed at the pinnacle of humankind’s march to progress. Through science humankind can liberate itself through its expansion of knowledge. Modern theologians in turn picked up the

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., 258.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., 259.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., 259.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., 260.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., 260.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., 260.

baton of such developments, particularly within liberal Protestantism, the anthropocentricity of which traces back to Schleiermacher and is heavily criticised by Barth and neo-orthodoxy.⁵⁰¹

However, not only has this thesis been attacked by Barth, but for different reasons it has come under severe scrutiny by postmodern scholars. From a Christian perspective they acknowledge that postmodern theorists have simply laid bare the bankruptcy of the modern, anthropocentric mind. The ‘incredulity to metanarratives’ advocated by Lyotard undermines any proposed universal narrative that, as Grenz and Franke argue, “begins and ends with humanity.”⁵⁰² They argue that the biblical narrative is one that sharply contrasts the mythological progressivism with its anthropological centre developed by modernists that has also been devastatingly attacked by postmodern theorists. History is not the story of humankind but the realisation of God’s purposes for creation. The ongoing debate between thinkers both modern and postmodern provides the possibility of a ‘third way’ for Christian theology. As Christian theology returns once again to a theo-centric position and becomes thoroughly theological, Christian theology is simply becoming a genuinely *Christian* theology once more.

Furthermore, an eschatological theology is not only thoroughly theo-centric but also thoroughly eschatological. To clarify this position, Grenz and Franke mean that central to this is a theology that is fully orientated to the future consummation and towards eternity. This does not mean that in a construction of Christian systematic theology eschatology is placed at the front, because this does not guarantee an eschatological theology. “A theology is not thoroughly eschatological because eschatology appears first but because it is orientated at every turn.”⁵⁰³ Again, “Theology is thoroughly eschatological when at every turn the theological construction finds its orientation from the perspective of our human *telos* together with the *telos* of creation as a whole.”⁵⁰⁴ Rather, in accordance with Pannenberg’s methodology, it means that all theological enquiries are from the perspective of the future consummation.

⁵⁰¹ Adolf Von Harnack, George Tyrrell and Albrecht Ritschl are good examples of this approach.

⁵⁰² *Beyond Foundationalism*, 261. This does seem to represent a change in attitude by Grenz of what a metanarrative actually is. Here a Lyotardian understanding seems to be more adhered to. However, I think this remains ambiguous in light of Grenz’s work elsewhere published the same year. In his essay, ‘The Universality of the Jesus-Story and the Incredulity Toward Metanarratives’, he writes, “Must the Christian community be content with viewing the Jesus-narrative as nothing more than one local story among others? Finding an answer to this question necessitates a return to the specific metanarrative that Christians espouse.” In, *No Other Gods Before Me?* John G. Stackhouse (ed.), 95-96.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*, 263.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 263.

This is in sharp contrast to those theologians that orientate their respective theology toward the past. It is distinct from those who raise theological questions and make constructions from the “perspective of God’s eternal past.”⁵⁰⁵ They cite some Reformed scholastic theologians as those who adhere to this approach, with Charles Hodge being a typical example of this type of thinker.⁵⁰⁶ In contemporary theological thought, Millard Erickson is singled out as a theologian whose approach is based upon such an understanding.⁵⁰⁷ But they argue that the great weakness with the above is that it too easily becomes disconnected from the biblical narrative and the eschatological goal which should take precedence.⁵⁰⁸ All that history does is act as that which reveals God’s sovereign decisions made in eternity past. Consequently, it relegates eschatology to the final event of a chain of divine decrees, known already to God from eternity past.

The question that for Grenz and Franke still remains to be answered is, “What are the implications of this *telic* focus, this orientation toward the new creation, for our understanding of reality?”⁵⁰⁹ To understand this they examine what they refer to as the ‘actuality’ of the future.⁵¹⁰ Raising this particular question of ‘actuality’ leads them into the realm of metaphysics, and in particular ontology. To help in their quest to unravel this issue, they again explore the work of Pannenberg. Not too dissimilar to process thought, Pannenberg contends for the ontological priority of the future.⁵¹¹ He envisions a “new definition of the concept of substance, one that would consider the viewpoint of time and becoming as the medium that constitutes the whatness of things.”⁵¹² At the end of all history is not ‘nothingness’ but eternity which, for Pannenberg, leads to an eschatological ontology. This is summed up by Pannenberg as follows: “It is from the standpoint of this end that the essence of each individual thing, the manner in which it has anticipated eternity, will be decided.”⁵¹³

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., 263.

⁵⁰⁶ See Hodge’s *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1872).

⁵⁰⁷ This is perhaps a little unfair on Erickson. I don’t think he could be described as a reformed scholastic. See Erickson’s *Christian Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1983).

⁵⁰⁸ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 265.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., 266.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., 266.

⁵¹¹ See Pannenberg’s *Metaphysics and the Idea of God* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988) for his explication of this. Mostert writes in regard to this, “The notion of an ‘eschatological ontology’ is unusual but it accurately describes what Pannenberg set out to achieve.” See *God and the Future*, 56.

⁵¹² Pannenberg, *Metaphysics and the Idea of God*, 107.

⁵¹³ See Pannenberg, *Metaphysics and the Idea of God*, 109. Putting this into context I will quote Pannenberg at length. He writes, “The connection between being and time makes it possible to forge a much closer connection between philosophical reflection

Moving on, they tie in the understanding of personal identity formation to narrative. Returning to the role of community outlined earlier, they note that a community contributes toward the development of the ‘self’ “by mediating a communal narrative.”⁵¹⁴ This narrative as well as having a past history also, of course, looks toward the future. In this way the future becomes a narrative reality, so to speak. “Our lives are ultimately orientated toward a communal future from which our identity—our essential nature—is derived. Consequently, that future comprises the ultimate defining moment in one’s ongoing personal narrative.”⁵¹⁵ The Christian community is bound up with its particular biblical vision that is eschatological and looks to the consummation of God’s purpose for creation. The contemporary task is to construct personal identities in the present time in accordance with the Christian community and its particular eschatological understanding of the future. They cite 2 Cor. 5:17, which in their view speaks about being a new creation as being an actual eschatological reality.⁵¹⁶

Furthermore, they argue that this vision is cosmic in scope. This leads them to argue for an ‘eschatological realism’. The actuality of the universe, of creation lies, before us. Our world is in the process of being created. We can experience this development as we anticipate and engage with the world around us. Moreover, “because of the role of language in the world-constructing task, this mandate has a strongly linguistic dimension.”⁵¹⁷ We live in a linguistic world that looks to all reality from a future perspective. According to Grenz and Franke, the eschatological world finds its connection with the divine *logos*, Jesus Christ. The eschatological realm transforms the present when the Holy Spirit breaks into our contemporary context. “The ultimate purpose of theology is to speak about the actual world for the sake of the mission of the church in the present, anticipatory era. And for this to occur, theology must be orientated toward the future; it must be eschatological.”⁵¹⁸

and the biblical experience of reality. This same connection can be achieved through the understanding of being as the anticipation of the truth concerning its essence, a truth that is revealed only at the end of its course of development. In view of the fact that all events and forms are intertwined within the context of the world as a whole, this course of development cannot merely culminate with the end of an individual life... But the end of time is not nothingness. The end of time (as we saw in Plotinus) is eternity. It is from the standpoint of this end that the essence of each individual thing, the manner in which it has anticipated eternity, will be decided.” *Metaphysics and the Idea of God*, 109.

⁵¹⁴ *Beyond Foundationalism*, 270.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 270.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 270.

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 272.

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 273.

Conclusion

Grenz and Franke have constructed an imaginative and complex theological methodology that seeks to engage with the postmodern climate in which we find ourselves. They have attempted to formulate a non-foundational theological methodology that stays within the so-called perimeters of evangelical theology. This has been met with some fierce criticism, some of it warranted and some of it unnecessary. Incorporating elements of Lindbeck's Wittgensteinian influenced proposal, Grenz and Franke have set out an understanding of Christian theology that has its roots in the triune nature of God. From this point, they focus on the Christian community and its role in understanding, unpacking and experiencing what it means to be Christian through the specifically Christian theological interpretive framework which is basic for theology. This framework is made up of scripture, tradition and culture and aids in forming the mosaic of beliefs that Christian communities share. From this communitarian perspective all theological assertions are second-order and provisional. Indeed, knowledge is constructed, interpreted and understood from within the community. Following in the footsteps of Pannenberg, truth claims will only be validated in the *eschaton*, until then communitarian understandings of the Christian faith should be held lightly. For Grenz and Franke, it is this distinctly non-foundationalist approach that is appropriate in postmodern times.

However, it is contended here that such a theological methodology cannot be termed evangelical. The non-foundational understanding of scripture does not allow this methodological approach to stay within such parameters. The relegation of the Bible to second-order and interpreted through the community is a step away from the traditional evangelical perspective.⁵¹⁹ This is not to say that this approach has nothing good to contribute to an evangelical theological methodology. On the contrary, their explication of a thoroughly trinitarian, and 'relational' understanding of theology, although now common across many Christian denominations, is of value to evangelicalism. Their criticism of evangelicalism's adoption of modernist and

⁵¹⁹ There are any amount of systematic theologies that posit the traditional view that the Bible is of first-order. The following three are good examples: C. H. Hodge's *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols., Millard J. Erickson, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols., W. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, C. F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6 vols., Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demerest, *Integrative Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987-1994).

rationalist tendencies is apt, and should be given careful consideration if evangelicalism is to progress and develop in the postmodern paradigm.

In the final chapter, we shall see in more detail their failure to stay within a traditional evangelical framework, and also suggest how it may be possible to move forward from some of their proposals whilst adhering to a more flexible evangelical understanding of theological method.

An Evangelical Theological Methodology for Postmodern Times.

Grenz wants to stay within the boundaries of evangelicalism. Indeed, his work with Franke, although appealing beyond the evangelical community, is still a proposal which is intent upon this aim, while at the same time engaging with developments in postmodern thought: an attempt to go 'beyond foundationalism'. However, it is this foray into epistemology that has left their project ontologically wanting. This is magnified due to their desire to remain within the evangelical camp, which is known for its realist stance.¹ The knock on effect of abandoning a realist approach in their theological program is the creation of a cluster of problems from an evangelical perspective. Also, their use of tradition and culture as sources for theology has caused further consternation among evangelicals. Furthermore, the Bible being understood as 'second-order' further undermines their ability to remain within evangelicalism.

In this final section a number of issues will be addressed. In attempting to engage with postmodern thought and to overcome what they interpret to be a major epistemic problem with modern epistemology, Grenz and Franke have opted for a nonfoundationalist approach to theological methodology. I will argue that a critical realist approach best serves the theological enterprise in these postmodern times. I will then briefly examine Plantinga's 'basic belief in God' to supplement this. This, in turn, will lead into various other strands of thought that Grenz (and Franke) has adopted. In particular, the way the Bible is used will be examined with the use of speech-act theory being an important tool to help guard against deconstructionism. Also, the importance of the community will be highlighted as an excellent point from which to do theology in a postmodern era. The work of Alasdair MacIntyre will be suggested as providing an important contribution with regard to communitarianism that aids in promoting the communitarian turn. Finally, I will argue that a 'soft' appropriation of some of Wittgenstein's ideas will benefit an evangelical theological methodology and will give a sense of 'family resemblance' to that which is suggested.

¹ See, for example, D. Groothuis, 'Truth Defined and Defended', in Erickson, Helseth and Taylor (eds.) *Reclaiming the Center*, 59-70. Grudem's *Systematic Theology* is another example of a thoroughly realist approach.

Before the above is embarked upon, it is first necessary to deal briefly with an issue that was highlighted earlier. In the first section three important traits of postmodern thought were analysed and posited as having implications not just for contemporary thought in general, but also for evangelical theology. The idea of the ‘metanarrative’ was regarded as being significant not only because of the possible problems it posed for aspects of modernist thought, but also for the poor way in which some scholars had defined it, especially within evangelicalism. Grenz was one such scholar. He, along with others,² has misinterpreted what Lyotard meant by the term ‘metanarrative’. It has been clearly shown earlier, that Lyotard’s definition does not include the ‘Christian story’ (the so-called ‘biblical metanarrative’).³ This nullifies the apparent confusion associated with such misunderstandings. Thus, for the purpose of this thesis, the particular problems surrounding the implications for Christian theology are deemed to be irrelevant to this debate and will not be discussed further as they rest on an erroneous reading of Lyotard’s work.

Nonfoundationalism to Critical Realism

Grenz and Franke’s caricature of modern foundationalism has led them to overlook variations of modest versions of this strand of epistemology. As a consequence, they advocate a nonfoundationalist perspective that combines elements of coherentism and pragmatism, and which sees all knowledge as being socially constructed from within the community. They submit that beliefs resemble a belief mosaic or web, and are justified by how they fit in with other beliefs. As a consequence they adhere to a constructionist view of the world. They state that “The simple fact is, we do not inhabit the ‘world-in-itself’; instead, we live in a linguistic world of our own making.”⁴ This is a mistake that follows a similar path to Lindbeck’s thesis discussed earlier. Moreover, it is argued that from an evangelical perspective some form of realism is necessary in order to construct a methodology that has an ontological point upon which to anchor its claims and can stay within the parameters of evangelicalism. What is ironic is that they admit to a form of

² Middleton and Walsh in their work, *Truth is Stranger Than It Used To Be* is a good example of a misinterpretation of Lyotard’s work, as is Grenz’s own interpretation. See previous section on Grenz for analysis of this problem.

³ In email correspondence Franke admitted that this is one place in which he differed from Grenz. See his *Character of Theology*, 18.

⁴ Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 53.

realism just before they state their view that knowledge is socially constructed. "There is, of course, a certain undeniable givenness to the universe apart from the human linguistic-constructive task."⁵ What we have on the one hand is 'language' and 'world' intrinsically bound together, and on the other, the acknowledgement that there is a world beyond a so-called 'social construction' of the world. The apparent dichotomy is denied by Grenz and Franke who maintain that it is not possible to get beyond or outside of our linguistic constructions to the world 'in itself'. This obvious contradiction is a consequence of their attempt to argue for a communitarian understanding and reception of knowledge that is tied to an erroneous interpretation of foundationalism. Ultimately they seem unable to advocate a thorough-going linguistic understanding of the world (although this is what they argue for), while at the same time they are unable to jettison completely the ability to see or understand the 'world as it is'.

Many theorists today readily admit that knowledge is bound up with the social circumstances of the subject.⁶ All knowledge is corrigible and contextually observed. Theorising is socially located. As a consequence, naive realism is not seen to be epistemologically tenable.⁷ Reality does not directly impact on the human mind without some form of mediation between the knower and that which is to be made known. However, many theorists, and particularly theologians, want to hold on to the idea of the possibility of truth and rationality, and the ability to view the universe objectively. One such scholar is John Searle. Searle argues that our perception of the world can broadly be split into two types of 'facts'. Firstly there are institutional facts. "Institutional facts are so called because they require human institutions for their existence."⁸ Secondly, there are noninstitutional or 'brute facts'. These do not require human agreement to ratify them, they simply are just there. For example, Mount Everest has snow and ice near its summit. This is totally independent of human opinion. In a different way, Bhaskar illustrates the difference between what he calls 'two sides of knowledge' when he writes, "Any adequate philosophy of science must find a way of grappling with this central paradox of

⁵ Ibid., 53.

⁶ We have already seen this with the thought of Wittgenstein. This will also be evident in the work of Alastair MacIntyre, who we shall examine later. Richard Rorty, Hilary Putnam and Lyotard are just a few of the many scholars who emphasise the social nature of knowledge.

⁷ The majority of scholars would now argue that naive realism is a position that is no longer credible.

⁸ John Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (London: Penguin, 1996), 2.

science: that men in their social activity produce knowledge which is a social product much like any other, which is no more independent of its production and the men who produce it than motor cars, armchairs or books... This is one side of 'knowledge'. The other is that knowledge is 'of' things which are not produced by men at all: the specific gravity of mercury, the process of electrolysis... None of these 'objects of knowledge' depend upon human activity. If men ceased to exist sound would continue to travel and heavy bodies fall to earth in exactly the same way, though ex hypothesi there would be no-one to know it."⁹ Of course it is argued that language is used to convey such objects of knowledge, but as Searle points out, "in order to *state* a brute fact we require the institution of language, but the *fact stated* needs to be distinguished from the *statement of it*."¹⁰ Grenz and Franke have not attempted to examine these possibilities which could have helped alleviate their dichotomy shown above. Furthermore, the examples above would be more sympathetically accepted from an evangelical perspective due to their disposition toward a realist stance. Instead, they adopt a sort of neo-Kantian outlook on knowledge.

The postmodern climate that we inhabit has meant that the way knowledge is understood and the provisionality of it have come under scrutiny. There seems to be much uncertainty as to what postmodernism actually refers to. One scholar has remarked that "the term post-modern is employed so broadly that it seems to apply to everything and nothing at all at once."¹¹ For our purposes, as has already been intimated, this has a serious knock-on effect for evangelical theology. However, it must be stated at this moment that, despite the fact that Grenz's work steps outside the boundaries of evangelicalism, it has at least called attention to evangelicalism's reliance upon modernist methods. Indeed, Grenz and Franke should be commended for their engagement with postmodern theorists and their ideas.¹² They have resolutely challenged the traditional evangelical way of doing theology and the inherent dangers that are incurred when adopting certain philosophical premises (i.e. modernist). The mistake they have made is

⁹ Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science*, 21. Bhaskar refers to these two sides of knowledge as 'intransitive' and transitive objects of knowledge.

¹⁰ Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, 2.

¹¹ Pauline Marie Rosenau, *Post-Modernism and the Social Sciences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 17.

¹² We have already seen that Grenz has consistently attempted to engage with postmodern ideas and theorists since the early 1990's. Again, see his *Primer on Postmodernism* for a prime example of such an engagement.

in seeing little wrong with another philosophical climate (postmodern), and uncritically adopting some of its traits. However, they at least have attempted to address the issues of how to do theology in today's intellectual climate. This is something that many theologians fail to do. As Stephen Wellum notes, "Theology and theological method does not have the luxury of merely repeating slogans from the past; it must be done afresh...to address current issues."¹³ Certainly, what is apparent is the need for evangelicals to move away from some of the modernist traits that it has picked up along the way.¹⁴ Whether evangelicalism was created by the Enlightenment or just adopted many of its features is not an argument that will be discussed here.¹⁵ However, evangelicalism needs to throw off the shackles of Enlightenment thought in order to attempt to be relevant to contemporary society.

The central question in the light of such developments, and taking into consideration the modernist influence upon the evangelical tradition, concerns what is a possible methodological way forward? If Grenz and Franke's proposal in incorporating such postmodern developments is outside the boundaries of what can be considered evangelical, then what may be construed as an alternative?

It is argued here that critical realism¹⁶ is a promising way through the morass of theories that span the spectrum between modernism and postmodernism. Originally developed in conjunction with scientific research, critical realism acknowledges that what is known is understood via a variety of influences and is also fallible. Potter and Lopez note that

critical realism accepts most (if not all) of the significant differences between the respective subject matters of social and natural science. It understands as essentially correct all the peculiarly human features of the objects of social scientific knowledge which, according to the hermeneutic tradition, renders it not susceptible to scientific explanation. It accepts that human society is much more like a language than a mechanical machine. It accepts the full significance of the manner in

¹³ See Wellum's 'Postconservatism, Biblical Authority, and Recent Proposals for Re-Doing Evangelical Theology: A Critical Analysis', in *Reclaiming the Center*, 183.

¹⁴ See Introduction to this thesis for a description of the way evangelicalism has been influenced by Enlightenment thought.

¹⁵ See Garry J. Williams 'Was Evangelicalism Created by the Enlightenment', *Tyndale Bulletin* 53 (2002), 283-312, for an interesting argument that posits that evangelicalism was in fact a product of the Reformation and Puritanism.

¹⁶ Van Huysteen writes, "'Realism' in 'critical realism' thus refers to the attempt at reliable cognitive claims about domains of reality that lie beyond our experience, but to which interpreted experience is our only epistemic access." See *Essays in Postfoundationalist Theology*, 44.

which theorising is socially located. It accepts the significance of the 'language-born' nature of theory. It accepts the socially constructed nature of knowledge. It accepts the fallibility of human knowledge and its sociological determinations. But it argues that those very differences, the differences between the objects of knowledge of the human and natural sciences that are alleged to make scientific study of the former impossible, which on the contrary actually make social science possible. Indeed it goes so far as to argue that it is in fact those very peculiarities of the human condition which not only make it amenable to scientific study but actually make social life possible at all.¹⁷

In view of the fact that scientific theories are no longer considered to be indubitable, critical realism does not treat its findings as absolute truth. John Polkinghorne is a good example of a scientist/theologian who recognises such a way forward.

I believe that the advance of science is not just concerned with our ability to manipulate the physical world, but with our capacity to gain knowledge of its actual nature. In a word, I am a realist. Of course, such knowledge is to a degree partial and corrigible. Our attainment is verisimilitude, not absolute truth. Our method is the creative interpretation of experience, not rigorous deduction from it. Thus I am a critical realist.¹⁸

For our purposes, some of the attributes mentioned above fit a theological critical realism that can be taken forward positively as a cogent alternative to the Scylla of naïve realism and the Charybdis of nonfoundationalism. The recognition that knowledge is partial and corrigible is becoming increasingly acknowledged within evangelicalism. Indeed, for many Christians, not just evangelicals, 'The Fall', as told in Genesis 3, illustrates why humanity is noetically limited. That is to say, knowledge is finite. We do not have a God's eye view of the world and all that is within it. Thus, to reiterate Polkinghorne's words, "our attainment is verisimilitude, not absolute truth."¹⁹ Furthermore, this outlook lends itself well to utilising Pannenberg's eschatological realism that Grenz and Franke adopt. What we know is partial, and will only be revealed in full in the *eschaton*. Until then, as Grenz and Franke argue, all truth is provisional.²⁰

¹⁷ Gary Potter and Jose Lopez, *After Postmodernism: An Introduction to Critical Realism* (London: Athlone Press, 2001), 9

¹⁸ John Polkinghorne, *Belief in God in an Age of Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 104.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 104.

²⁰ We have seen that Grenz's understanding here is a result of the influence of Pannenberg's eschatological ontology.

One of the great advantages of critical realism of a theological kind is that it presupposes ontological reality. “The existence of an external reality is not a position to be argued towards, but a position from which argument proceeds. Instead of being a matter of discovery or the result of argument, it is seen as a pragmatic.”²¹ It is a pragmatic presupposition upon which to base any enquiry. The advantage of this is that it maintains a fallibilist epistemology. This is of utmost importance in light of the demise of foundationalism in its classical (Cartesian) sense. The weakness of this position is that it allows for a weak form of epistemological relativism. However, its strengths far outweigh this weakness. Indeed, an epistemological theory should always be employed as that which is the best available, with the possibility that something may supersede it. Indeed, Wolterstorff, writing about the way philosophers are more aware of the importance of stepping back from epistemology, notes that, “among the most significant of these developments is the rise of metaepistemology. Rather than just plunging ahead and developing epistemological theories, philosophers have stood back and reflected seriously on the structural options available to them in their constructing of such theories.”²²

To reiterate a point made earlier, it is important to note that critical realism should be understood as an *a posteriori* tool that does not set the agenda for doing theology, as the Enlightenment did for much theological construction. Instead, the critical realism adopted here functions as an aid that is used for sustained engagement and dialogue within theological discussion.²³ In this way, the danger mentioned earlier, in this thesis, that many aspects of Christian theology had, in the main, unwittingly (sometimes knowingly) adopted elements of the philosophical traditions of the Enlightenment movement can be avoided. This also helps in correcting Grenz’s over-reliance on postmodern theory in his own theological methodology.

Finally, although critical realism has been suggested as a possible alternative, other forms of ‘modest’ or ‘soft’ foundationalism could also be investigated in order to help develop a

²¹ Brad Shipway, ‘Critical Realism and Theological Critical Realism: Opportunities for Dialogue?’, *Alethia* 3: 2 (2000), 30.

²² See Wolterstorff, ‘Introduction’ in Plantinga and Wolterstorff (eds.), *Reason and Belief in God*, 1.

²³ See McGrath’s explanation of this approach in *Scientific Theology* 2:200-202.

theologically methodological way forward. Indeed, the work of the philosopher Alvin Plantinga, whose notion that belief in God is properly basic, is a form of 'soft' foundationalism and could perhaps complement a critical realist position. We will briefly examine this below.

Plantinga argues for a basic belief in God by bringing three streams of thought together. Firstly, he refutes the evidentialist argument against belief in God that posits that belief in God is unreasonable and irrational due to a lack of sufficient evidence. Secondly, he reflects upon Thomas Aquinas' view of faith and reason and concludes that both this and the evidentialist reasons for refuting belief in God are rooted in classical or strong foundationalism. For the evidentialist, there must be sufficient evidence for a belief to be warranted as basic. It will be recalled that a basic belief forms part of the foundations for a noetic structure in a classical foundationalist sense. Similarly, Aquinas holds that a proposition can be understood as properly basic if and only if it is either self-evident or evident to the senses. Philosophically, this is a classical foundationalist position. In relation to the question of why belief in God should not be considered properly basic, the answer from a classical foundationalist perspective is because there is insufficient evidence for such a claim.

For Plantinga, classical foundationalism is incoherent. He examines more closely the fundamental principal of classical foundationalism as follows:

(32) A proposition p is properly basic for a person S if and only if p is either self-evident to S or incorrigible for S or evident to the senses for S .²⁴

This statement contains two claims. Firstly, a proposition is basic if it is self-evident, that is to say incorrigible, or if it is evident to the senses. Secondly, a proposition is only considered properly basic if it meets this condition. As Plantinga observes, the first seems clearly true enough. However, he questions the validity of the second and asks why the foundationalist, or indeed, the theist should accept it. Plantinga notes that if the above

²⁴ Ibid., 59.

claims are true then vast amounts of what we believe are irrational. Most of the beliefs that form our “everyday lives are not probable—at any rate there is no reason to think they are probable.”²⁵ Many things that we take for granted, such as there are enduring physical objects or that that the universe has existed for more than five minutes, are, in Plantinga’s view, no more probable than not with regard to what is self-evident for him. Furthermore,

Suppose we add to the foundations propositions that are evident to the senses... Then propositions entailing the existence of material objects will of course be probable with respect to the foundations, because included therein. But the same cannot be said either for propositions about the past or for propositions entailing the existence of persons distinct from myself; as before, these will not be probable with respect to what is properly basic.

And does not this show that the thesis in question is false? The contention is that
(33) *A* is properly basic for me only if *A* is self-evident or incorrigible or evident to the senses for me.²⁶

Plantinga argues that many propositions that do not meet these conditions are properly basic for him. For example, he may believe that he had lunch at noon. This is not believed on the basis of some other proposition, it is taken as basic and, as a consequence, it is in the foundations of his noetic structure. Moreover, despite the fact that this may not be incorrigible it is entirely rational to think this. Plantinga develops this argument with other examples and concludes that classical foundationalism is indeed bankrupt.²⁷

He argues that, as with some Reformed theologians,²⁸ belief in God can be considered properly basic. However, just because this belief can be accepted, it does not therefore mean that just any belief can be. Furthermore, one may claim that belief in God is properly basic without accepting that it is also groundless. Plantinga suggests we take perceptual beliefs, memory beliefs and beliefs that account for the mental states of others.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 59.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 60.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 71-73.

²⁸ Plantinga cites Herman Bavinck, John Calvin and Karl Barth as examples of Reformed thinkers who would differ with the classical foundationalist thesis, and would see that belief in God could be considered properly basic.

For example, the belief that ‘I see a tree’, or ‘I had breakfast this morning’ or ‘That person is in pain’,²⁹ although these beliefs can be seen as basic, it would be an error to understand them as being groundless. In each case these beliefs are taken to be properly basic because “there is some circumstance or condition that confers justification; there is a circumstance that serves as the *ground* of justification.”³⁰

For Plantinga, a similar argument may be made about belief in God. There are conditions and circumstances that elicit belief in God.³¹ There are beliefs that (i) God is speaking to me, (ii) God has created all the universe, (iii) God forgives me. These all are properly basic in the right conditions. Plantinga recognises that technically, from this point of view, “it is not wholly accurate to say that belief in God is properly basic; more exactly, what are properly basic are such propositions” as (i)-(iii), “each of which self-evidently entails that God exists.”³²

In conclusion, Plantinga convincingly argues that it is reasonable to have a properly basic belief in God. Furthermore, these *grounds* are not groundless but are actually grounded in justification-conferring conditions. We saw above that an advantage of critical-realism is that it presupposes an ontological reality around which epistemic theories are developed and revised. It is possible that Plantinga’s approach may complement a theologically critical-realist understanding of the world by positing a properly basic belief in God that can act within a specifically Christian understanding of the world. This would seem to be advantageous when working within the parameters of evangelical theology. Having God as the ontological basis for understanding the universe can certainly be considered evangelical. Indeed, this is the best starting point.

Grenz, Evangelicals and Scripture

²⁹ Ibid., 78.

³⁰ Ibid., 79.

³¹ Plantinga, in particular cites Calvin’s belief that reading the Bible can trigger feelings of guilt, repentance, inadequacy or indeed feelings of gratitude toward God. Or perhaps a person may be in great danger and call to God for help and protection. These represent some of the many conditions that call forth belief in God.

³² Ibid., 81.

Evangelicals are known for their emphasis on the authority of scripture. Indeed, almost by definition, a high view of scripture inheres in evangelicalism. Moreover, many evangelicals still insist on scripture as being inerrant.³³ In recent years what has certainly become apparent is that the Bible is being understood in a variety of ways in contemporary evangelicalism.³⁴ More focus is being put upon the role of the Holy Spirit when attempting to construct an evangelical understanding of scripture. For example Donald Bloesch, influenced by Barth, emphasises the dynamic relation between the Word of God and the Bible. Bloesch advocates a more spiritually orientated evangelicalism that understands the Bible as “the divinely prepared medium or channel of divine revelation rather than revelation itself.”³⁵ Turning to Grenz’s view of scripture, it is argued here that, it is problematic when examined from an evangelical perspective.³⁶ Grenz, influenced by Lindbeck, does not see scripture as being ‘first order’. Scripture is intertwined with the Christian interpretive framework. Grenz and Franke write,

The cognitive framework that is ‘basic’ for theology is not a given that precedes the theological enterprise; it does not provide the sure foundation on which the theological edifice can in turn be constructed. Rather, in a sense the interpretative framework and theology are inseparably intertwined. Just as every interpretive framework is essentially theological, so also every articulation of the Christian cognitive framework comes already clothed in a specific theological understanding. In fact, every such articulation is the embodiment of a specific understanding of the Christian theological vision; each embodies a specific understanding of the world as it is connected to the God of the Bible.³⁷

To illustrate further the point regarding the ‘second order’ nature of scripture, Grenz and Franke, when defining the role of tradition, write, “The Christian tradition is comprised

³³ J. Brogan writes, “I would argue that inerrancy is a modern construct that is somewhat alien to the biblical world. The biblical authors and church fathers spoke in terms of the *trustworthiness* of Scripture rather than its inerrancy.” See his ‘Can I have your Autograph?’ in V. Bacote, L. C. Miguez and D. Okholm (eds.), *Evangelicals and Scripture: Tradition, Authority and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), 107. Further, J. R. Wilson argues that within the context of a foundationalist epistemology, biblical inerrancy is entirely suitable. “As appeals to reason and sensory data were used by a foundationalist epistemology to challenge the truth of the gospel, theologians were right to counter with the doctrine of inerrancy.” See his ‘Toward an Evangelical Paradigm of Biblical Authority’ in T. R. Phillips and D. L. Okholm (eds.), *The Nature of Confession*, 154. See also Harriet Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) for a discussion on this subject.

³⁴ See, for example, the different viewpoints in the essays contained in *Evangelicals and Scripture*.

³⁵ Donald Bloesch, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration and Interpretation* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1994), 27.

³⁶ A good example of an evangelical view of scripture that still holds today is Carl Henry’s position, as outlined in his magisterial, *God, Revelation and Authority*.

³⁷ Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 49-50.

of the historical attempts by the Christian community to explicate and translate faithfully the first-order language, symbols, and practices of the Christian faith, arising from the interaction among community, text and culture, into the various social and cultural contexts in which that community has been situated.”³⁸ What is first-order is not the Bible. The way the community interacts with scripture, culture and its context results in a distinctive first-order language with its symbols and explicitly Christian practices.

Because the Bible is part of this interpretative framework, it is relegated to ‘second order’. Many evangelicals understand the Bible as nothing less than God’s word. It is divinely conceived and the product of God’s action directly through the Holy Spirit, who inspired the authors of the biblical texts so that they could write exactly what God intended. In view of this it is inerrant, or at least considered ‘first-order’. Further, the Bible serves this role, not because it has been decided by the Christian community that it is their book but because it is God’s written word. What Grenz and Franke argue for is very much reminiscent of neo-orthodox approaches to scripture. God is only indirectly identified with human mediums of revelation, which includes the Bible. Essentially, the text of the Bible is seen to be a witness to revelation and not revelation itself. It is the Holy Spirit who reveals to the Christian community what the Bible says in a particular context. This is where they are advocating a nonfoundational understanding of the Bible that is in keeping with the postmodern climate.

We have seen that this understanding can lead to a subjective interpretation of the Bible. Who decides what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Christian community or even if the Holy Spirit has actually spoken? The result could be the creation of a world that is independent of what the Bible means. This is a bone of contention for many evangelical theologians who would want to experience the Holy Spirit always *speaking* the scriptures, rather than an independent understanding being offered.³⁹ Grenz and Franke become open to the accusation of hermeneutical subjectivism, and as a consequence, biblical authority is undermined.

³⁸ Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 118.

³⁹ Millard Erickson, D. A. Carson and Wayne Grudem are three scholars who understand scripture in this way.

In a postmodern world, with its pluralistic outlook, this is seen as favourable. However, what makes evangelicalism distinct is its view of the Bible. What Grenz and Franke propose is decidedly post-evangelical. This may not be a bad thing, inasmuch as, in the pluralistic world we inhabit, diverse voices are (supposedly) given equal volume in the cacophony of worldviews. This means that, in theory, evangelicalism should be taken as seriously as any other. The problem for many evangelicals is that they want to hold on to rationalist traits whilst engaging with a paradigm that has reacted against such traits. A prime example of this is given in a statement by Wellum, who writes with regard to Grenz and Franke's work, "as creative as their proposal is, at the end of the day, what I find surrendered is biblical authority—i.e., a text that is first-order and God given through human authors which is our basis for how we interpret the world, ground our beliefs, and live our lives. Without that solid grounding...in Scripture itself, we have, in terms of theological method, surrendered the very transcendental condition for the possibility of doing theology in any normative fashion."⁴⁰

In order to strengthen their case they look to speech-act theory which, it is argued here, is an excellent way of steering a middle course between a simple correspondence between language and reality, and postmodern deconstruction. However, their understanding of speech-act philosophy poses some difficulties when examined in the light of their methodological proposal.

In advocating this approach David Clark notes that, "on the one hand modernist empiricism and positivism erred in making description the key function (or only task) of meaningful language, and they disparaged language that does other things.... Contrary to this, the nondescriptive functions of language are perfectly in order. Speech act theory preserves these other functions by shifting the focus away from the view that all utterances *say* something."⁴¹ Moreover, Vanhoozer notes, "speech act philosophy

⁴⁰ Wellum, 'Postconservatism, Biblical Authority, and Recent Proposals for Re-Doing Evangelical Theology: A Critical Analysis', in *Reclaiming the Center*, 193.

⁴¹ Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 412.

commends itself as perhaps the most effective antidote to certain deconstructive toxins that threaten the very project of textual interpretation and hermeneutics.”⁴²

We saw earlier that to understand language as simple one to one correspondence with reality was thoroughly inadequate. On the other hand, deconstruction theory as pioneered by Derrida results in a loss of any substantive meaning and ultimately ends in relativism. Indeed all interpretation is open to indeterminacy. Speech-act theory helps avoid such interpretations. It is not the purpose here to develop a full blown theory of how speech-act philosophy aids hermeneutics. However, some points will be made as to how Grenz and Franke’s proposal could be altered in order to be more acceptable within evangelicalism.

Embracing Ricoeur’s understanding that a text takes on a life of its own places Grenz and Franke in deep postmodern water. For them, the advantage is that it allows for a nonfoundationalist understanding of the biblical texts, which are interpreted within particular community contexts. The problem, from an evangelical stance, is that the Bible is not inherently authoritative. It is only when the Holy Spirit appropriates the biblical texts to the community that it becomes authoritative.

Vanhoozer’s analysis of speech-act theory is helpful at this point. In brief, he notes that “The Westminster Confession of Faith...accords supreme authority to ‘the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.’ Much depends on how we parse this phrase; ‘the Spirit speaking.’”⁴³ (It will be recalled that Grenz and Franke’s interpretation of the Westminster Confession allows for the priority of the Spirit speaking to the various Christian communities.) Vanhoozer argues that there are two methods of interpretation that cause confusion between the divine communicative act, the Bible, and the communicative act of the community: “(1) performance interpretation, where the reader assumes the role of the author, and (2) perlocutionary interpretation, where the illocutionary act is bypassed or eclipsed in favour of achieving a predetermined effect

⁴² Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 164.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 196.

other than understanding.”⁴⁴ Grenz and Franke’s proposal falls in the latter category. What is of especial concern here with the above is the way each appeals to the role of the Holy Spirit. As we have seen, what counts for Grenz and Franke is how the Spirit performs the role of speaking to the church (perlocutionary act). This resides not in what the original authors of scripture intended but is connected to how the Spirit appropriates the text to a particular community. In effect this makes the intention of the original authors almost redundant. “The Spirit’s address is not bound up simply and totally with the text’s supposed internal meaning. Indeed, as certain contemporary proponents of ‘textual intentionality’ (e.g., Paul Ricoeur) remind us, although an author creates a literary text, once it is written, it takes on a life of its own... In a sense, the text has its own intention, which has its genesis in the author’s intention but is not exhausted by it.”⁴⁵ So for Grenz and Franke, it is the performance interpretation of the Holy Spirit that is important. “If the final authority of the church is the Holy Spirit speaking through scripture, then theology’s norming norm is the message the Spirit declares through the text. The Spirit does not address this message to us by means of a double discourse... Rather—to push Wolterstorff’s own terminology further—the Spirit speaks by ‘appropriating’ the text itself.”⁴⁶ In doing this, “What illocutionary act is the Spirit performing in our midst on the basis of the reading of the text? What is the Spirit saying to us in appropriating this text?”⁴⁷ As noted earlier, it is the creation of ‘world’.⁴⁸

We have seen that Grenz and Franke technically come adrift at this point by confusing the locutionary and illocutionary in speech-act philosophy. Moreover, in their haste to get to what they really deem important—the perlocutionary act—they overlook the mechanics of how the perlocutionary act is reached. Illocutionary acts are already inscribed within the text of the Bible, they are not new acts generated by the Spirit. As Vanhoozer points out, “The Spirit does indeed perform perlocutionary acts... Yet the Spirit does so only on the basis of the concrete illocutions—the content!—of Scripture.”⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Ibid., 196.

⁴⁵ Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 74.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 74.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 74.

⁴⁸ Vanhoozer prefers to explain this “theologically in terms of the Spirit’s ministry of the Word, and philosophically in terms of perlocutions supervening on illocutions.” See his *First Theology*, 198.

⁴⁹ Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 198.

Grenz and Franke point to the perlocutionary acts of the Spirit without any illocutionary basis from which these perlocutionary forces depend. Perlocutionary acts have by nature to follow illocutionary acts. Grenz and Franke do refer to such acts but these are not the concrete illocutionary acts of the Bible, as received from the authors therein. Instead they are drawn from the Spirit, who acts independently of the authors' intentions in scripture because, in a Ricoeurian sense, there is a semantic autonomy from the original authorship. Drawing on the work of Alston, Vanhoozer asserts that perlocutions depend upon illocutions. As such the biblical illocutionary content should be referred to before any perlocutionary effects can be drawn. "This is also, I believe, how the Holy Spirit works through biblical interpretation to form the people of God: not by producing effects unrelated to the text's communicative action but precisely by ministering the divine communicative action, in all its canonical unity and variety."⁵⁰

This understanding of the way speech-act theory works is more beneficial from an evangelical perspective. Unlike Grenz and Franke's proposal that has the real possibility of degenerating into textual indeterminacy, Vanhoozer's suggestions allow for maintaining the divine authority of scripture, while at the same time making room for the Holy Spirit appropriating the text for contemporary Christians. The Spirit takes the textual illocutions and communicates with perlocutionary force to the community. In this way the spectre of deconstructionism is also dealt with. With the acceptance of divine authorship, the deconstructionist notion of the 'death of the author' is nullified. Instead of textual indeterminacy, what we have is the acknowledgement of divine authorship of the scriptures, through the human writers.

In summary, speech-act theory is an excellent way of navigating between a purely referential understanding of language and deconstructionism. Language is not just about reference, nor is it open to an interpretive free-for-all. Language should be understood holistically. From an evangelical perspective, we have seen that there are a number of reasons to follow this route and change Grenz and Franke's proposal. Firstly, the concrete illocutions of the biblical text are to be taken seriously. This is in contrast to Grenz and

⁵⁰ Ibid., 200.

Franke, who bypass the illocutionary acts in order to press home their nonfoundationalist agenda of calling for the perlocutionary acts of the Holy Spirit. However, the major weakness is that they do away with the actual illocutions of the biblical authors in favour of the subjective appropriation by the Spirit of the texts apart from those authors. It is suggested here that instead of doing away with Wolterstorff's 'double agency discourse', as Grenz and Franke do, this approach could be re-introduced.⁵¹ It is true to say that biblical interpretation remains partly ambiguous due to human inability to discern meaning perfectly. It does not, however, mean that we cannot determine, to a degree, the original intention of what a particular author meant, the illocutionary intent. Clark notes, "Locating meaning in authorially intended communication does *not* commit us to a modernist assumption that we can know a text's meaning either with *complete objectivity* or with *absolute certainty*. It is possible... for evangelical biblical interpretation both to retain the essential insight that meaning lies within the author's illocutionary intentions and to express a proper humility about all human interpretation."⁵²

This rendering is open to accusations of foundationalism, and is precisely why Grenz and Franke opted to develop their understanding of speech-act philosophy further. They state regarding Wolterstorff's attempts that "Although Wolterstorff is on the right track, at one crucial point his proposal comes up short. Perhaps against his own intentions, he also appears at times to fall prey to the modern tendency to elevate some other reality above the Bible as text. Wolterstorff appears to remain—at times—too closely focused on the author who produced the text, rather than the text as itself being canon."⁵³ However, as we have seen already, their understanding is an unsatisfactory nuance of speech-act theory, which is an attempt to cut methodological corners in order to press home a nonfoundationalist agenda.

In order to be more 'evangelically' orientated Grenz and Franke must take the biblical illocutions more seriously. Following a Ricoeurian interpretation of the autonomy of the text is a move in the wrong direction. It must be acknowledged that, despite the influence

⁵¹ See Wolterstorff's, *Divine Discourse*, for his unpacking of this thesis. For a brief critique of Wolterstorff's position see Brevard Childs, 'Speech-act Theory and Biblical Interpretation', *Scottish Journal of Philosophy* 58: 4 (2005), 375-392.

⁵² Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 73.

⁵³ Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 74.

of deconstructionist detractors, the meaning of the biblical authors can be tentatively understood, although never fully. It is the role of the Holy Spirit to take the illocutions within the text and appropriate them, which is essential in order for the Christian community to understand what the text means for today.

Finally, Grenz and Franke view the Bible as the ‘norming norm’ for theology. However, as has already been pointed out, when viewed in their overall theological proposal, it seems to be that tradition and culture are seen as almost equal partners as sources for theological reflection. Theology’s ‘norming norm’ must be given more emphasis in the theological pantheon. However, it is contended here that it remains second-order due to our limited ability to unpack its content (locutionary and illocutionary) and because it is the Holy Spirit who ultimately reveals (the perlocutionary force) God’s will. This distinction will not please some evangelicals. Nevertheless, it is contended here that this best suits the intellectual climate which we inhabit, without becoming shackled to it.

Grenz and the Communitarian Turn

We have seen that during the course of Grenz’s academic career the role of the community has played a huge part. It is integral to his theology. Indeed, it is theology’s *intergrative motif* and is tied into his trinitarian understanding of theological thought. “Theology, with its trinitarian structure, finds its integration through the concept of *community*. Community forms the theme that integrates the various strands of theological reflection into a single web or mosaic.”⁵⁴ Furthermore, he wrote in his *Primer on Postmodernism* that,

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

⁵⁴ Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 204.

must address the human person within the context of communities in which people are embedded.⁵⁵

For Grenz, all theology should be communitarian. The concern here is whether such an understanding, and the related issues pertaining to this, fit within an evangelical framework.

The social understanding of the Trinity tied into the communitarian nature of theology is certainly a move in the right direction, because of how it combats the modernist tendency toward the autonomous self. Moreover, as we have already seen, it also provides a more sensible route through some of the radical postmodern tendencies to de-centre the self. Integrating the concept of community into the centre of theology is a promising move that will appeal to many evangelicals. With the revival of trinitarian theology, Grenz's social God acts as the model upon which the Christian community is based. In *Renewing the Center*, Grenz wrote that "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."⁵⁶ In a later work, Grenz states that "More specifically, I present a social personalist reconceptualising of the *imago dei* that views the divinely given human calling to be the image of God as a social reality."⁵⁷ The disadvantage that this approach has, as we have seen, is that the social nature of God seems to be too heavily indebted to anthropological influences. That is to say, the social Trinity is modelled on a human understanding of what community is like.⁵⁸ In defence of Grenz, we are humans and we can only produce such analogies from a human perspective. More importantly, this negative is far outweighed by the positive contribution such an understanding offers.

⁵⁵ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 168.

⁵⁶ Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 213.

⁵⁷ Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei*, 15.

⁵⁸ We have seen how they have taken a rather Barthian approach to their understanding of scripture, however, such an anthropologically influenced approach to the Trinity and community would certainly be refuted by Barth. See Spencer's comments in 'Culture, Community and Commitments: Stanley J. Grenz on Theological Method', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 57: 3, (2004), 338-360.

Community forms the basis from which theology is undertaken. Through the distinctively Christian interpretive framework the various strands of thought are woven into the 'web of belief' that forms as different communities understand how to live and practice the Christian faith. Moreover, the central role of community is found in its formation of personal identity.⁵⁹ Indeed, at this point it is worth citing Berger who writes, "It is within society, and a result of social processes, that the individual becomes a person, that he attains and holds onto an identity, and that he carries out the various projects that constitute his life. The person cannot exist apart from society."⁶⁰

This exploration into personal identity formation has led Grenz to examine the ideas from a group of thinkers known as the 'new communitarians'.⁶¹ The 'new communitarians' have reacted to modernist understandings of the individual and provide alternative communitarian proposals as to how we understand humanity. Moreover, the importance of tradition and culture is interwoven into such accounts. Indeed, for scholars such as Stanley Hauerwas and Alasdair MacIntyre,⁶² narrative becomes an important theme in building the character of communities. MacIntyre argues in *After Virtue*, that a central thesis is the notion that "man in his actions and practices, as well as in his fictions, essentially is a story-telling animal."⁶³ For our purpose, this narrative is the biblical story which helps form the Christian community, which in turn helps with the development of personal identity.

At this point, an examination of MacIntyre's work in this area will be undertaken, as this provides some excellent insights into the role of community, and also offers an understanding than can be adapted within an evangelical methodology that is preferred to aspects of Grenz and Franke's account.

MacIntyre's work is mainly situated in the realm of ethics. Indeed, much of his initial investigations have focussed upon what he understands to be the ethical and moral

⁵⁹ Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 218.

⁶⁰ See Berger's *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, 3

⁶¹ See subsection on 'Community' in section on Grenz's methodology.

⁶² Two major works by MacIntyre cited in this work are *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* 2nd ed. (London: Duckworth, 1992) and *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (London: Duckworth, 1988).

⁶³ MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 216.

confusion in the western world. For our analysis, his work is important for three reasons. Firstly, it recognises that the Enlightenment quest for universal reason was simply a 'mythical quest'. Indeed, he argues that "facts, like telescopes and wigs for gentlemen, were a seventeenth-century invention."⁶⁴ Secondly, it shows the need for a communitarian understanding with regards to rational discourse which is tradition based. Finally, this approach 'fits' well within the critical-realist position that is advocated here.⁶⁵

In view of the demise of Enlightenment ideals, MacIntyre asks,

Is there, then, such an alternative mode of understanding? Of what did the Enlightenment deprive us? What the Enlightenment made us for the most part blind to and what we now need to recover is, so I shall argue, a conception of rational enquiry as embodied in a tradition, a conception according to which the standards of rational justification themselves emerge from a history in which they are vindicated by the way in which they transcend the limitations of and provide remedies for the defects of their predecessors within the history of that same tradition.⁶⁶

MacIntyre contends that four considerations must be borne in mind when attempting to undertake rational inquiry within such traditions. Firstly, any form of enquiry is essentially historical. "To justify is to narrate how the argument has gone so far."⁶⁷ Secondly, tradition-constituted and tradition-constitutive enquiry is always a matter of how far it is actually advanced, how successful it is in staking claims. Thirdly, on the face of it, proponents of such tradition-based rationalities may be criticised for offering a diversity of traditions, "each with its own specific mode of rational justification."⁶⁸ However, MacIntyre retorts that "once the diversity of traditions has been properly characterised, a better explanation of the diversity of standpoints is available than either the Enlightenment or its heirs can provide; and that the acknowledgement of the diversity of traditions of enquiry... does not entail that the differences between rival and

⁶⁴ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 357.

⁶⁵ For an interesting paper that compares MacIntyre's work with T. F. Torrance see P. M. Achtemeier, 'The Truth of Tradition: Critical Realism in the Thought of Alasdair MacIntyre and T. F. Torrance' in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 47: 1, 355-374.

⁶⁶ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 7.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 8

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

incompatible traditions cannot be rationally resolved.”⁶⁹ Finally, it is crucial that the idea of tradition-constituted rational enquiry cannot be illustrated without its exemplifications.

In place of a so-called universal rationality we now have tradition-mediated rationalities. The tradition-based rationality posited by MacIntyre nullifies individual rationalism as exemplified by Kant⁷⁰ and Locke.⁷¹ What is crucial for our understanding is that traditions are intrinsic to communities. Traditions are shaped by how their particular communities mould them. In turn, communities are living entities that develop and are shaped themselves by such traditions. In other words, rationality is internal to a tradition. “A living tradition then is an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition.”⁷²

In a further development, MacIntyre argues that traditions are constantly being modified or even discarded as communities grapple with what is necessary within their particular context. Indeed, this is the advantage that MacIntyre’s thesis has over those who wrongly claim that his position leads to relativism.⁷³ The accusation from a relativist point of view is that different tradition-based rationalities are unable to debate with each other. It is not possible to do so because each tradition is internally responsible for its own development. MacIntyre argues that this approach is a hangover from Enlightenment thinking. Both relativist and perspectivist positions invert “central Enlightenment positions concerning truth and rationality.”⁷⁴ Arguments from these positions, according to MacIntyre, claim that if particular truths cannot be guaranteed by typical Enlightenment rational methodology, then their own brands are the only possible alternative to take. “Post-Enlightenment relativism and perspectivism are thus the negative counterpart of the Enlightenment, its inverted mirror image.”⁷⁵

⁶⁹ Ibid., 9-10.

⁷⁰ See, for example, Immanuel Kant’s, *Critique of Pure Reason* trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martins Press, 1929).

⁷¹ See John Locke’s, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, (ed.), P. Niddich (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

⁷² MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 222.

⁷³ MacIntyre is also aware of the ‘perspectivist’ challenge to his thesis. That is to say, he is aware that his position could be interpreted as suggesting that if each tradition argued that its own position is true, then who is to say which one is true. See *Which Justice? Whose Rationality?*, 352-356.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 353.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 353.

With this in mind, MacIntyre sets about positing reasons for a defence against such challenges.

The rationality of a tradition-constituted and tradition-constitutive enquiry is in key and essential part a matter of the kind of progress which it makes through a number of well-defined types of stage. Every such form of enquiry begins in and from such condition of pure historical contingency, from the beliefs, institutions, and practices of some particular community which constitute a given. Within such a community authority will have been conferred upon certain texts and certain voices.⁷⁶

From a Christian perspective, authority has been given to the Bible which guides the community in its life and practice. Practices and doctrines are developed as a variety of situations are met. Furthermore, incoherences within established beliefs which need to be addressed may come to the forefront. The responses given by those inhabitants of a particular community (in our case the Christian community) determine how such a community grows along with its tradition-constitutive rationality.⁷⁷ MacIntyre notes that traditions develop in different directions and that they sometimes abandon previously held beliefs. It is even the case that some join together to form new traditions. The close-knit understanding of tradition and community is useful to the Christian community. Not only does it support the value of tradition that is something handed down through generations, but it is intrinsically bound up with the community and how it uses such traditions. This is very similar to the concept of 'open tradition' that was examined in the previous section.⁷⁸ To put it succinctly, what we have with MacIntyre is the notion that a tradition which a community adheres to is the best available at that particular time and place thus far. In effect it is open-ended, that is, open to the possibility that new understandings may be developed that will increase the effectiveness of it. "No one at

⁷⁶ Ibid., 354.

⁷⁷ Good examples of such developments are the early church creeds that were formulated to defend and articulate beliefs that were coming under attack. MacIntyre suggests there are three developments in a tradition: "first in which the relevant beliefs, texts, and authorities have not been put in question; a second in which inadequacies of various types have been identified, but not yet remedied; and third in which response to those inadequacies had resulted in a set of reformulations, reevaluations, and new formulations and evaluations, designed to remedy inadequacies and overcome limitations." *Which Justice? Whose Rationality?*, 355.

⁷⁸ McGrath links it to 'living tradition' as advocated by John Henry Newman. See *A Scientific Theology* 2:67. McGrath argues that an important element of MacIntyre's contribution is that it "rehabilitate(s) the notion that Christianity possesses a distinct yet rational understanding of reality—a coupling which the Enlightenment regarded as illegitimate or inconsistent." *A Scientific Theology* 2: 70.

any stage can ever rule out the future possibility of their present beliefs and judgements being shown to be inadequate in a variety of ways.”⁷⁹

A final point needs to be made. This is with regard to whether one particular tradition is more adequate than another. MacIntyre argues that in order to understand another position rationally it is necessary to get ‘inside’ that particular tradition. “When they have understood the beliefs of the alien tradition, they may find themselves compelled to recognise that within this other tradition it is possible to construct from the concepts and theories peculiar to it what they were unable to provide from their own conceptual and theoretical sources.”⁸⁰ To do this it is necessary to learn the language of the alien tradition to the degree that it becomes a second first language.⁸¹ This application can be brought to bear in two ways. Firstly, this tradition-interaction can help lead to improvement in the development of practice and doctrine between Christian denominations. In our case this would help in articulating the ‘belief mosaic’. Secondly, and more importantly for its benefits over Grenz and Franke’s thesis, it offers, at least in theory, a better approach to giving a form of primacy to the Christian community over other religious beliefs. In practice, the ‘getting inside’ of other religions to learn their language, and see how they formulate their understanding of their particular faith is not easy. Furthermore, it would be harder still to argue that the Christian faith is superior to other faiths on the grounds of such findings. It will be re-called that Grenz justifies the suitability of the Christian faith over others on the basis that the notion of community that the Christian faith presents is better than those which any other belief system has to offer. MacIntyre offers a better methodology with regards to the nature of community and tradition and how it develops. Also, his thesis, more than Grenz’s, has a cogent rationale as to how it is possible for traditions to be better placed than others with regard to their viability. That is not to say that MacIntyre’s notion is not difficult to achieve, but it is a more viable option than simply to state, on what can be construed as a foundationalist understanding of community, that the Christian community is preferred.

⁷⁹ *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 361.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 365

⁸¹ *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 364.

Finally, MacIntyre's understanding of tradition-based inquiry within the community lends itself very well to a critical-realist position. The way traditions are constantly critically examined for improvements is very much a critical-realist trait. Furthermore, the transformation of traditions always comes in the form of what he calls 'epistemological crises'.⁸²

At any point it may happen to any tradition-constituted enquiry that by its own standards of progress it ceases to make progress. Its hitherto trusted methods of enquiry have become sterile. Conflicts over rival answers to key questions can no longer be settled rationally. Moreover, it may indeed happen that the use of the methods of enquiry and of forms of argument, by means of which rational progress had been achieved so far, begins to have the effect of increasingly disclosing new inadequacies, hitherto unrecognised incoherences, and new problems for the solution of which there seem to be insufficient or no resources within the established fabric of belief.⁸³

It is the 'epistemological crises' that a particular tradition faces that determines if it dies, flourishes, or is defeated by another. This epistemological tentativeness and openness to the possibility that ideas can supervene the current position acknowledges the humility of knowledge, and recognises that it is within particular communities that such developments take place. Being constantly critically aware, with a dialectically orientated approach toward traditions, and an awareness of the possible deficiencies within a tradition is critical-realist in spirit.

To summarise briefly, MacIntyre's thesis not only opens the way for adopting a critical-realist approach, but also takes seriously the value of tradition for the community in the light of the demise of the Enlightenment program. This is superior to Grenz's position because it offers a more robust understanding of community and how particular communities come to understand themselves. It also avoids presuming, as Grenz does, that a tradition is preferable to another simply because from an 'outsider' viewpoint it has a superior understanding of what it considers community to be. This is a very weak position which cannot be defended because it fails to give good grounds for such a

⁸² Ibid., 361.

⁸³ Ibid., 362.

stance. MacIntyre's 'insider' argument at least has a rationale as to why a tradition takes precedence over another.⁸⁴

It is argued here that it is right to hold on to the Christian interpretive framework that Grenz and Franke adhere to. As MacIntyre has pointed out, communities usually look to a text or something of significance upon which to base their understanding of what is around them. For the Christian community this is the Bible. This guides particular communities in their particular contexts (in conjunction with the Holy Spirit). Furthermore, the notion of tradition-based enquiry that MacIntyre argues for is ideal for the way the Christian faith, and particularly evangelicalism, sees the role of tradition. It is a source for theological methodology. Thus, we also still have a very much Lindbeckian flavour to the way theology is done, in as much as Lindbeck argues for a religious framework that precedes religious experience.

Having argued that MacIntyre's communitarian approach is appropriate for theological methodology, one further addition will be incorporated. This addition is the use of Wittgenstein's 'language games' and 'forms of life,' in a limited capacity.

The Appropriation of a Soft Wittgensteinianism

It will be recalled that language takes on meaning when it is actually part of a 'language game'.⁸⁵ Indeed, as McGinn has noted, "Wittgenstein's concept of a language-game is clearly to be set over and against the idea of language as a system of meaningful signs that can be considered in abstraction from its actual employment."⁸⁶ We should think about language within its given situation. This is consistent with the view posited here that language should be treated holistically and not purely referentially. Language games are governed by rules that act as the grammar for that particular game. Furthermore, these rules are set by a particular community that uses language in a specific way which is determined by the actual practices of that community. Moreover, form(s) of life is the

⁸⁴ See MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 349-369.

⁸⁵ See Part Two, 'Ludwig Wittgenstein's Linguistic Turn in Philosophy' in this thesis.

⁸⁶ McGinn, *Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations*, 44.

concept that language games fall under. We have seen how this influence has been used in theology, with Lindbeck being a prime example of a scholar who has employed certain aspects of Wittgenstein's thought, particularly with his notion that doctrine should be employed as the grammar that governs the first-order practices of the Christian community.⁸⁷

It is argued here that Christian communities are regarded as constituting forms of life.⁸⁸ That is to say, the practice of conforming to the Christian religion is living according to a number of forms of life in general terms. This is contrary to religion being understood as a form of life. Using the term 'forms of life' in this way is not necessarily the same as Wittgenstein intended,⁸⁹ but is more in keeping with what can only be described as the general speculation which many scholars postulate with regard to this idea.⁹⁰

Wittgenstein certainly never meant his expression 'form of life' to entail something as big as religion, despite what Norman Malcolm or other scholars may suggest.⁹¹

Wittgenstein wrote, "It is easy to imagine a language consisting only of orders and reports in battle. Or a language consisting only of questions and expressions for answering yes and no. And innumerable others. And to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life (*eine Lebensform*)."⁹² Indeed, Fergus Kerr acknowledges the difficulty with attempting to define, with any accuracy, what a form of life constitutes, when he writes that "neither Wittgenstein nor any of those influenced by him have given any clear indication of how a form of life is to be identified."⁹³

⁸⁷ See Part Two, 'George Lindbeck's Cultural-Linguistic Approach to Theology' in this thesis.

⁸⁸ I do not want to hypothesise too much on the concept of 'forms of life' because Wittgenstein himself wrote very little on this idea in regard to religion, and it would be dangerous to make more of this idea than Wittgenstein actually intended. It will be recalled that Norman Malcolm thought that it would be dangerous to place too much emphasis on 'forms of life'. See subsection one in section on Wittgenstein in this thesis.

⁸⁹ This is because Wittgenstein never referred to religion in any form as a 'form of life.' The nearest he came to it was when he stated, "Why shouldn't one form of life culminate in an utterance of belief in the Last Judgment?" Cited in Sherry, *Religion, Truth and Language-Games*, 22.

⁹⁰ 'Form of life' has been subject to various interpretations. Sherry thinks much depends upon whether religion is understood as a 'form of life', or whether it contains 'forms of life'. He prefers the latter. See Patrick Sherry, *Religion, Truth and Language Games* (London: MacMillan Press, 1977). See Joseph Incandela, 'The Appropriation of Wittgenstein's Work by Philosophers of Religion: Towards a Re-Evaluation and an End', *Religious Studies* 21, 457-474, for the view of how form of life has been misinterpreted in philosophy of religion.

⁹¹ See section on Wittgenstein for detail of Malcolm's position.

⁹² Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 19.

⁹³ Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein*, 29.

Within such forms of life there are language games. It is posited here that Christian communities operate within their own sphere of language games, but these are not self-contained. These different language games form the complex 'belief mosaic' that Grenz refers to.⁹⁴ There are numerous Christian language games that are used and which have different degrees of overlap with each other. Indeed, if such an approach was illustrated then it could be likened to a picture of the Olympic rings, only with countless more rings related in different ways to one another. Evangelical Christianity itself would have a huge amount of overlapping language games that not only reflects an evangelical approach to the Christian faith, but also reflects the differences within that which is termed evangelical. What language games within an evangelical Christianity have in common would be understood, in a Wittgensteinian sense, as 'family resemblances'.

Understanding religion and the Christian faith in particular, as being part of 'forms of life' which have many countless language games, it must be made clear, will not result in a Wittgensteinian fideism. This is where the 'soft' application of Wittgenstein's thought is emphasised. Religion should not be considered a self-contained unit. Rather, because religion consists of different forms of life, they can be located in the wider sphere of human responses and activities. Of course, this would allow the role of culture to have an input into the formation of such language games, which is very different from the work of a Wittgensteinian philosopher of religion such as D. Z. Phillips, who argues that religion is a 'form of life'.⁹⁵ This leads to the problem that Keightley notes, that "If religion is a form of life, then religious belief in its totality is 'the given' which must be 'accepted'. That is, religion is not placed in a wider context of 'agreement', and forced to justify itself according to the canons in that wider field."⁹⁶

Summary

What has been presented in this thesis is a detailed analysis of the developments of the thought of Stanley Grenz in regard to theological methodology. We have seen how his

⁹⁴ The continued use of a belief mosaic illustrates that a form of coherentism is still applicable to the theological methodology posited here. That is, it is not in any way contradictory to the critical realism argued for but compliments it.

⁹⁵ See for example Phillips', *Religion Without Explanation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1976).

⁹⁶ Alan Keightley, *Wittgenstein, Grammar and God* (London: Epworth Press, 1976), 33.

engagement with postmodern thought has led him to jettison much of the Enlightenment legacy, especially in regard to epistemology. He advocates a theological methodology that is sympathetic to postmodern influences. Indeed, it has been argued that too much of that which is considered postmodern has simply taken the place of that which he criticised as being influenced by the Enlightenment. An approach that he considered to be in decline because of rational tendencies has simply become shackled to the next philosophical development. A caricature of foundationalism has been replaced with non-foundationalism. A correspondence theory of truth has been overlooked in favour of a non-realist approach. This has resulted in ontological difficulties which, it is argued here, mark a break from evangelical thought. Moreover, Grenz's use of the Bible, heavily influenced by a neo-Barthian approach, falls short of a traditional evangelical view, even *in the most generous sense*.

Some alterations to his methodological proposal have been suggested here that would not only enable such an approach to stay within the boundaries of evangelical methodology, but also fruitfully engage with the postmodern climate without, at the same time, becoming shackled to it.

Critical realism provides a far more resilient account of how knowledge is understood than Grenz's nonfoundationalism. The critical element of this realist understanding acknowledges that there is a reality 'out there', but is always prepared to revise such accounts. Truth claims, although provisional, represent the best available. Indeed, the influence of Pannenberg is very much resonant here, because if a 'truth' does exist then it rests with the *eschaton*. Truth will not be known in its fullness until the final judgement of God. To paraphrase the apostle Paul with regard to understanding, we see in a mirror only very dimly.⁹⁷

Grenz is to be applauded for his communitarian understanding of theology. Clark highlights this positive contribution by Grenz, noting that "only occasionally do self-professed evangelicals spotlight community. One such exception is Stanley Grenz, who

⁹⁷ 1 Cor. 13:12.

built a systematic theology around the integrative motif, the community of God.”⁹⁸

Bringing the ideas of MacIntyre to the theological table strengthen Grenz’s communitarian turn. Moreover, MacIntyre’s work on the importance of tradition and how it evolves is a great asset to all evangelicals who traditionally want to value previous theological contributions.

In setting out some of the revisions that have been suggested it is claimed that a ‘family resemblance’ runs through the core of the theological methodology suggested. Through Wittgenstein’s understanding of language, to Austin’s speech-act philosophy and on to Lindbeck and MacIntyre’s accounts of, on the one hand theology being the grammar that regulates talk about God, to, on the other, traditions being understood and developed within particular community contexts, a thread weaves its way through. That is, the need to treat language in an holistic sense, and within the community and not to treat it in the typically enlightenment way of purely referentially.

⁹⁸ Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 249.

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