

Grenz, Stanley J. *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000. 366 pp. Hardcover, \$23.99.

With the publication of *Renewing the Center* and a supporting study *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (with John R. Franke), Stanley Grenz, Professor of Theology and Ethics at Carey/Regent College, British Columbia, and author of more than twenty other books, must be regarded as a major evangelical thinker. This is a landmark study that surveys the trajectory of evangelical theology in historical perspective and brings it face-to-face with the challenges of postmodernism.

In spite of the fact that at least half a dozen systematic theologies by evangelical thinkers have been published since Millard Erickson's three-volume *Christian Theology* appeared in the mid-1980s, there is ongoing debate regarding the essence and parameters of evangelicalism. A pressing question is whether the challenges of postmodern thought have been given adequate attention, and if so, what the implications are. In the midst of all of this, the significance of *Renewing* lies in the clarity with which Grenz traces the trajectory and development of evangelical thought during the latter half of the twentieth century, in the delineation of the theological issues occasioned by the demise of epistemological foundationalism and realism, and in pointers toward alternate evangelical theological approaches. Grenz is convinced that evangelicalism cannot simply remain satisfied with the *status quo* of neo-evangelical thought and must come to grips with postmodern sensitivities.

The first two chapters are foundational, describing the theological matrix in which evangelicalism developed. Emphasis on the centrality of the gospel is traced from Luther through Calvin, the Puritans, Pietism, Wesleyan Arminianism, and the great awakenings to classical evangelicalism. This is followed by an analysis of the nature and uses of Scripture from Luther's *sola* and Calvin's "accommodation," via the Puritans, Turretin, and Princeton inerrantism to the centrality of scriptural authority in evangelical thought.

In the following three chapters, the trajectory of evangelical thought from the mid-1940s to the present is dramatically explicated by three pairs of opposing thinkers. First, the presuppositionalist apologetics of founding father Carl F. H. Henry is compared and contrasted with the evidentialist accommodation of theology and science by Bernard Ramm. Next, the views of the establishment theologian Millard Erickson are compared to those of the "theological pilgrim" Clark Pinnock in his turn toward pietism and the Spirit. The following chapter, "Evangelical Theology in Transition," employs terms like "ferment," "crossroads," and the "demise of evangelicalism" in contrasting the work of Wayne Grudem on the right and John Sanders on the left. These five chapters constitute the clearest exposition of the trajectory and contemporary shape of evangelical theology of which I am aware.

The second half of the book amounts to a call for a critical appropriation of postmodern insights in the evangelical theological task. Grenz seeks to maintain the primacy of Scripture as the norm of theology and to uphold evangelicalism's theological heritage, while going beyond to outline the highlights of a theology that accepts the demise of foundationalism and the transition from critical realism to the social construction of reality. He builds a case for a nonfoundationalist

theology that is internally and externally coherent on the basis of eschatologically defined realist metaphysics that bears similarity to the theology of Pannenberg. He draws together the various avenues of thought into a widely functioning ecclesiology in which the confessing community, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, experiences the depth and meaning of Scripture with a directness going beyond that of an earlier metanarrative approach. The focal point of truth for this community is historical in nature and looks forward to eschatological confirmation in the fulfillment of God's purposes. In this he moves beyond epistemological foundationalism and hard realism in the direction of a "chastened and softer" rationality that borrows selectively from postmodern epistemology.

Grenz does not go far beyond sketching what this emergent theology might look like, and it remains to be seen what shape these initiatives will take in a more fully developed theology. In the meantime, this reader feels constrained to ask whether Grenz perhaps follows the sensitivities of postmodern philosophers too closely. For instance, are the implications of a hard nonfoundationalist methodology for the functions of Scripture in theology dealt with seriously enough? How far should the demise of realism and the linguistic construction of reality be pushed in light of the undeniable givenness of created reality? Is there a danger that following postmodern sensitivities too closely may result in a theology that does not do justice to divine revelation and is too thin to satisfy the human need for assurance?

Notwithstanding, this book stands as a significant signpost between the evangelical theologies of two different eras. It looks backwards with unparalleled clarity, identifies key issues on the contemporary horizon, and indicates some possible avenues of approach. It may very well come to be regarded as a landmark study of the trajectory and crisis of evangelical theology, and it cannot be ignored by anyone seeking to understand the history, present shape, and current challenges faced by contemporary evangelical theologians.

Andrews University

RUSSELL STAPLES

Guder, Darrell L. *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, Gospel and Our Culture Series, vol. 6. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000. xvi, 222 pp. Paperback, \$20.00.

In this book, Guder calls upon the North American church to throw off its cultural captivity, to rethink its theology and practice of evangelism, and to allow the gospel to continue its work of conversion both within the church and outside it.

Part I, "Foundations: The Church's Calling to Evangelistic Ministry," argues for a renewed focus on mission as witness. But when Guder and others speak of mission they mean much more than cross-cultural outreach, for mission is really the *missio Dei* involving the very nature and heart of God in all that he has done throughout salvation history to bring people into relationship with himself. The church is an instrument of that mission, but too often it has viewed mission and witness in a reduced form, seeing salvation in terms of personal benefits rather than as a corporate responsibility.

Guder suggests the use of the word "evangelization" instead of "evangelism" since evangelism for many has come to mean merely methods and programs. Evangelization suggests a process of witness in which the church not only fulfills