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REVISING EVANGELICAL THEOLOGICAL METHOD
IN THE POSTMODERN CONTEXT:
STANLEY J. GRENZ AND KEVIN J. VANHOOZER AS TEST CASES

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
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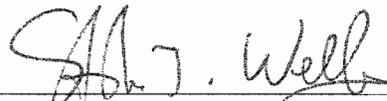
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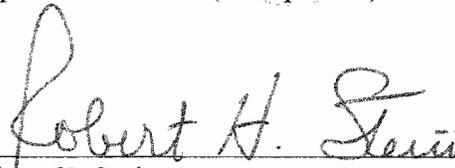
STANLEY J. GRENZ AND KEVIN J. VANHOOZER AS TEST CASES

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ABQ</i>	<i>American Baptist Quarterly</i>
<i>ATJ</i>	<i>Asbury Theological Journal</i>
<i>BETS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>BibSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CSR</i>	<i>Christian Scholar's Review</i>
<i>CT</i>	<i>Christianity Today</i>
<i>CTJ</i>	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
<i>EvQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
<i>GTJ</i>	<i>Grace Theological Journal</i>
<i>JAAR</i>	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>PTR</i>	<i>Princeton Theological Review</i>
<i>RelS</i>	<i>Religious Studies</i>
<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
<i>SBET</i>	<i>Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology</i>
<i>SBJT</i>	<i>Southern Baptist Journal of Theology</i>
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
<i>SR</i>	<i>Studies in Religion</i>

TrinJ *Trinity Journal*

TToday *Theology Today*

TynBul *Tyndale Bulletin*

WesTJ *Wesleyan Theological Journal*

WTJ *Westminster Theological Journal*

PREFACE

Despite the fact that this dissertation bears my name, it could not have been completed without the ongoing support of many others. First and foremost, the one who deserves all honor, glory, and praise is my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. His grace and strength have sustained me through all the challenges I have faced in the doctoral program. Through all my shortcomings, he indeed has proven to be faithful to me.

Next, I must acknowledge the ongoing encouragement and acceptance I have received and continue to have from my family. With regard to my wife, words are insufficient to describe how priceless Tabitha has become in the years that the Lord has allowed me to be her husband. Throughout this program, I have tested her patience, drawn from her kindness, been sharpened by her character, and had the joy of sharing both a daughter, Elaina, and a son, Brian, with her. Likewise, my parents, Stan and Betty Taylor, and in-laws, Dick and Shirley Burch and Jerry Blaxton, have offered consistent prayers, loving words, and even financial aid in times of need. I also cannot thank my family without mentioning my loving grandparents, Leslie and Alma Lindsey, who both went to be with the Lord just prior to my move to Louisville.

Alongside my family, I must take the time to note the support I have received from my spiritual brothers and sisters in Christ. I am grateful for the love and wisdom my home pastor, Greg Adams, as well as his wife, Lisa, have offered in my years of spiritual growth. I also express my appreciation to my fellow brothers in the ministry, Guy Boyd, Ronnie Smith, and Darron Chapmon, for their ongoing encouragement. In addition, the people of Utica Baptist Church have been patient and understanding as I have worked through this project and I offer to them my heartfelt thanks.

Finally, I am compelled to express my gratitude for the numerous professors who have offered their insights during my time at Southern Seminary. First, I am indebted to Dr. Craig Blaising and Dr. Bruce Ware for their guidance and instruction that I received during my initial years in the doctoral program. I am also thankful for Dr. Stephen Wellum, who graciously agreed to supervise the dissertation stage of my program. His patience and interaction with me have been crucial to the evolution of this thesis. Alongside Dr. Wellum's contributions, I wish to thank Dr. Robert Stein and Dr. Chad Brand for their willingness to participate on my doctoral committee as well as Dr. Michael Horton, who consented to be my external reader during his sabbatical at Westminster Theological Seminary. Finally, I thank Dr. Stanley Grenz and Dr. Kevin Vanhoozer for their work, which gave warrant to this dissertation, and their considerate replies to me during my research.

Chauncey Everett Berry

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CHAPTER 1

DEFINING EVANGELICAL THEOLOGICAL METHOD AND ITS CULTURAL DESPISERS

Although past expressions of evangelicalism have been distinguished by their adherence to the Christian gospel and Protestant tradition, many today are concluding that certain factors prevent its current status from being confined to one precise definition.¹ The response to this deduction is to ask why this is the case. Certainly, the dilemma is not caused by a lack of historical continuity. Many historians including George Marsden have traced the development of evangelicalism from its initial momentum during the evangelistic revivals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to its later affinity with and gradual departure from twentieth-century American fundamentalism.² Likewise,

¹For example, almost a decade ago one observer suggested that evangelicalism was easier to describe than define. See Robert K. Johnston, "Varieties of American Evangelicalism," in *Southern Baptists and American Evangelicals: The Conversation Continues*, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1993), 47-49. In harmony with this assessment, one contemporary evangelical theologian asserts that today "the very word evangelical is patient of at least half a dozen definitions, and some of those are hotly contested by interested parties within and without any particular form of evangelicalism." John Stackhouse, Jr., *Evangelical Landscapes: Facing Critical Issues of the Day* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 163.

²See George M. Marsden, ed., *Evangelicalism and Modern America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984); Marsden, "From Fundamentalism to Evangelicalism: A Historical Analysis," in *The Evangelicals*, ed. David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 142-62; idem, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism 1870-1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980); idem, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987); idem, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991); idem, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

other contemporary works have surveyed the evolution of evangelicalism and highlighted major segments of its outgrowth within American culture.³ Therefore, the definitive fog that hovers over evangelicalism must originate elsewhere.

Upon examining how evangelicalism has progressed from the latter twentieth to the early twenty-first century, it appears that the immediate source of this identity crisis derives from disputes over “boundary-setting.” This phrase is used to describe the act of determining what limits must not be violated in order for a church, organization, or individual to be considered in harmony with evangelical theology. More specifically, the primary focus of this enterprise is upon delineating the doctrinal boundaries that characterize or are intrinsic to the evangelical tradition.⁴ So stated positively, this task searches for a corpus of beliefs that a party must affirm in order to be deemed evangelical, while negatively, it demands an answer to what a party must denounce. The problem evoked from this challenge, however, is that evangelicals offer opposing responses

³Consult Randall Balmer, *Blessed Assurance: A History of Evangelicalism in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999); Mark Ellingsen, *The Evangelical Movement* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988); Millard Erickson, *The Evangelical Left: Encountering Postconservative Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 16-31; D. G. Hart, *That Old-Time Religion in Modern America: Evangelical Protestantism in the 20th Century* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002); Jon R. Stone, *On the Boundaries of American Evangelicalism: The Postwar Evangelical Coalition* (New York: Saint Martin’s Press, 1997); Leonard Sweet, ed., *The Evangelical Tradition in America* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984); R. V. Pierard, “Evangelicalism,” in *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 379-82.

⁴For example, see Darrell Bock, *Purpose-Directed Theology: Getting Our Priorities Right in Evangelical Controversies* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 37-51; Stanley Grenz, “Die begrenzte Gemeinschaft (‘The Boundaried People’) and the Character of Evangelical Theology,” *JETS* 45 (2002): 301-16; R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “Reformist Evangelicalism: A Center Without a Circumference,” in *A Confessing Theology for Postmodern Times*, ed. Michael S. Horton (Wheaton: Crossway, 2000), 131-50; Wayne Grudem, “When, Why, and for What Should We Draw New Boundaries?” in *Beyond the Bounds*, ed. John Piper, Justin Taylor, and Paul Kjoss Helseth (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003), 339-70.

regarding the particular boundaries that should be enforced. Moreover, this disagreement continues to exist for two primary reasons.

The first reason this quarrel is ongoing is because doctrinal beliefs have always been an intricate facet of evangelicalism. Beginning with the Reformation, the majority of events that spawned the need for Protestant theology as well as the various evangelical movements were primarily motivated by the common conviction that the protection of certain beliefs such as justification by faith, Scriptural authority, and personal conversion were imperative to fostering and promoting biblical fidelity.⁵ Consequently, because evangelicalism in its early Protestant as well as later British and American forms upheld a common spectrum of beliefs, evangelical and non-evangelical theologians alike are sensitive to the fact that the ethos of evangelicalism is inherently theological.⁶

The second factor though, which often complicates the question of theological boundaries, is the fact that evangelicalism is a diverse tradition, for it has always been a trans-denominational phenomenon. Since the sixteenth century, Protestant Christianity has splintered into multiple forms including Presbyterianism, Lutheranism, German

⁵For concise surveys of doctrines pertinent to evangelicalism, see Bernard Ramm, *The Evangelical Heritage: A Study in Historical Theology*, (Waco: Word, 1973; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000); John H. Armstrong, ed., *The Coming Evangelical Crisis: Current Challenges to the Authority of Scripture and the Gospel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996).

⁶Though details and approaches vary, the majority of scholars agree that the theological essentials of evangelicalism include a commitment to the Reformation principle of biblical authority (*sola scriptura*), Jesus Christ as the Son of God and source for human salvation, the need for personal conversion, and the imperative mission to spread the gospel across the globe. See D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 1-19; Kenneth Kanzter and Carl F. H. Henry, eds., *Evangelical Affirmations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 37-38; Harriet Harris, "Evangelical Theology," in *The Dictionary of Historical Theology*, ed. Trevor Hart (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 197-200; John G. Stackhouse, Jr., "Evangelical Theology Should Be Evangelical," in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Evangelical Theological Method*, ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 40-43; Roger Olson, "The Future of Evangelical Theology," *CT* 42 (February 9, 1998), 40.

Pietism, English Puritanism, the Baptist tradition, and the Wesleyan tradition including Methodism, the Holiness movement, Pentecostalism, and even various outgrowths of the Charismatic movement.⁷ In addition, as several of these denominations began to prosper in American history, some eventually fragmented even more during the era of World War I when American fundamentalism confronted the cultural and theological threats of Modernism via German higher criticism, Darwinian evolution, and Freudian psychology.⁸

The end result of this unfortunate wedge was a new post-war evangelicalism which entailed various denominations that did not embrace the militant and isolationist ideologies of numerous fundamentalist coalitions. Instead, conservative leaders such as Harold J. Ockenga and Carl F. H. Henry began to interrogate the apparent intellectual shortcomings of fundamentalism.⁹ Their conclusion was that the evangelical movement needed to adapt to the questions and criticisms of the cultural milieu (contra segments of fundamentalism) without adopting the concepts that were antithetical to the Christian faith. Moving forward under the tutelage of various conservative leaders, this new vision eventually took shape through the formation of new seminaries, Christian publications (e.g., *Christianity Today*), and organizations such as the National Association of

⁷For surveys of these developments, see Donald Dayton and Robert K. Johnston, eds., *The Variety of American Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1991); David Edwin Harrell, Jr., *Varieties of Southern Evangelicalism* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1981); Johnston, "Varieties of American Evangelicalism," 40-51; George Marsden, "Unity and Diversity in the Evangelical Resurgence," in *Altered Landscapes: Christianity in America*, ed. David W. Lotz (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 61-76; John R. W. Stott, *Evangelical Truth: A Plea for Unity, Integrity, and Faithfulness* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999), 115-19.

⁸Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 32-61; Pierard, "Evangelicalism," 381.

⁹For their specific concerns, see Harold J. Ockenga, "Can Fundamentalism Win America?" *Christian Life and Times* 2 (1976): 13-15; Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947); Chad Brand, "Is Carl Henry a Modernist? Rationalism and Foundationalism in Post-War Evangelical Theology?" *TrinJ* 20 (1999): 3-4; Stone, *On the Boundaries*, 73-116.

Evangelicals (NAE). In the end, this new evangelicalism “. . . set a course that not only differed from both the fundamentalist and liberal agendas but consciously separated American Protestantism into evangelical, fundamentalist, and liberal-modernist camps.”¹⁰

Coming back to the original difficulty, the current challenge with defining the theological boundaries of post-fundamentalist evangelicalism exists because there is disagreement regarding the specific dynamics that allow it to be both a unified coalition and a diverse denominational movement. Again, many contend that doctrinal stability is the common denominator which has solidified evangelicalism’s multiple participants. For example, R. Albert Mohler, Jr. contends that “The ‘new evangelicals’ who appeared on the scene at midcentury possessed a clear sense of theological identity Although early evangelicalism was never monolithic, its essential core identity was well established,” and that core “. . . was in continuity with the older evangelical traditions that had emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.”¹¹ Yet the question remains as to what the essential criteria of that “core identity” should be.

Despite this concern for doctrinal centrality, the attempt to define twenty-first century evangelicalism strictly within theological mandates has become a tentative and daunting challenge because of two related events that developed several decades earlier. First, serious questions emerged concerning the doctrinal essentials of evangelicalism as it moved forward in the post-fundamentalist context. Richard Quebedeaux detected this trend in the 1970’s and suggested that many evangelicals were capitulating to modernistic

¹⁰Stone, *On the Boundaries*, 80. It should also be mentioned that the new evangelical divide did not extinguish the momentum of fundamentalism. For insights on how fundamentalism continued to develop, see Joel A. Carpenter, “A Shelter in the Time of Storm: Fundamentalist Institutions and the Rise of Evangelical Protestantism: 1929-1942,” *Church History* 49 (1980): 62-75; idem, “Revive Us Again: Alienation, Hope, and the Resurgence of Fundamentalism: 1930-1950,” in *Transforming Faith*, ed. M. L. Bradbury and James B. Gilbert (New York: Greenwood Press, 1984), 105-25.

¹¹R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “Evangelical: What’s in a Name?” in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, 31.

attitudes on various theological and ethical issues.¹² His insights were then later verified by the work of James Hunter who discovered that many younger professing evangelicals were less skeptical toward views that previously were deemed contrary to evangelical beliefs.¹³ Second, this theological instability reached a climax when many evangelicals gradually were tempted to consider redefining evangelicalism beyond many of its traditional doctrinal boundaries because of the cultural surge of postmodernism.¹⁴

Postmodernism and Evangelical Theology

The influence of postmodern thought currently pervades discussions about the identity and potential future of evangelicalism as a theological consortium because it is argued by many that in the past evangelicals adopted certain assumptions and utilized epistemological ideas that postmodernism now reveals to be philosophically untenable.¹⁵

¹²Richard Quebedeaux, *The Young Evangelicals* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1974); idem, *The Worldly Evangelicals* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978).

¹³James D. Hunter, *American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1983); idem, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). Also, to see how this crisis entered the 1990's, consult Millard Erickson, *The Evangelical Left*, 26-31; Robert Brow, "The Evangelical Megashift," *CT* 19 (February, 19, 1990): 12-14.

¹⁴The early stages of postmodernism have been linked to Nietzsche's rejection of modernity, Barth's rejection of both classical orthodoxy and German liberalism, the death-of-God movement, and the hermeneutical approach of deconstructionism. See the essays in David S. Dockery, ed., *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 20, 35, 73-78, 92.

¹⁵Examples of this charge include the uncritical implementation of Baconian scientific theory and the Scottish epistemology of Common Sense Realism. See Sydney E. Ahlstrom, "The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology," *Church History* 24 (1955): 257-72; Mark Ellingsen, "Common Sense Realism: The Cutting Edge of Evangelical Identity," *Dialog* 24 (1985): 197-205; George Marsden, "American Evangelical Academia," in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 219-64.

These objections have brought immediate concerns to the forefront such as the reliability of past procedures that evangelical theologians used to formulate their theology as well as the validity of their many doctrinal conclusions. Consequently, this interrogation reveals that the primary objective behind this search for a new evangelical identity is to construct and implement a specific theological method that supposedly is immune to postmodern criticisms. So the immediate challenge facing evangelicals is to provide an answer to this plight; namely, what should be an evangelical approach to biblical interpretation and subsequent theological formulation in light of the postmodern thought?¹⁶

Initially, this question would appear to foster a similar response that evangelicalism once trumpeted in light of fundamentalism. This is not the case, however, for evangelicals are choosing to embrace one of two mutually exclusive assumptions. Many have conceded that various degrees of postmodern thought must be adopted as essential elements of evangelical theology if the church desires to have any potential dialogue with the contemporary world, while others, who see the necessity to adapt to the current intellectual landscape, reject the notion that postmodernism as a whole has any place in an evangelical understanding of theological method.¹⁷ This disagreement ultimately has

¹⁶To see how various evangelicals are answering this question, consult Millard Erickson, *Postmodernizing the Faith: Evangelical Responses to the Challenge of Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998); Peter Hicks, *Evangelical Truth: A Creative Proposal for a Postmodern Age* (Leicester, England: Apollo, 1998); Michael S. Horton, ed., *A Confessing Theology for Postmodern Times*; Henry H. Knight III, *A Future for Truth: Evangelical Theology in a Postmodern World* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997).

¹⁷For sympathetic treatments of postmodernism, see J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth is Stranger Than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995); Robert Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999). For more critical responses, see Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity against the Challenges of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000); Roger Lundin, *The Culture of Interpretation: The Christian Faith and the Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

led to an impasse, which in turn has made contemporary evangelicalism extremely difficult to define.¹⁸ Evidently, the apparent lack of consensus among evangelicals regarding theological identity has now led to no consensus on theological method.

In light of this dilemma, an analysis of postmodern thought can help clarify the issues that evangelicals are facing as well as set the backdrop for understanding the significance behind the current theological methodologies that are being proposed. To begin, postmodernism is often labeled as a pervasive attitude rather than an official philosophical approach because it affects such a myriad of topics.¹⁹ Yet its multiple expressions have common ground in that they are all reacting to the intellectual aftermath of the modern era. This is why the actual term “postmodernism” is used to refer to a cultural mood that aggressively repudiates the dominant philosophies and ideologies that permeated the subsequent three and a half centuries of the Reformation.²⁰ In more specific terms, the postmodern divergence is the result of a gradual shift from the Enlightenment’s focus on autonomous reason to the adaptation of epistemological and

¹⁸This is why some argue that theological method has become so complex. For example, see Clark H. Pinnock, *Tracking the Maze: Finding Our Way through Modern Theology from an Evangelical Perspective* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990).

¹⁹See treatments by Diogenes Allen, “The End of the Modern World,” *CSR* 22 (1993): 339-41; Walter Truett Anderson, *Reality Isn’t What It Used to Be* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990), 7-12; Margaret Rose, “Defining the Post-Modern,” in *The Post-Modern Reader*, ed. Charles Jencks (New York: Saint Martin’s Press, 1992), 119-36; Craig Van Gelder, “Postmodernism As An Emerging Worldview,” *CTJ* 26 (1991): 412-17; Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins, *A Short History of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 299-304.

²⁰Craig Van Gelder comments on the use of the word “postmodern.” “It was first used in the 1930’s within the arts to indicate a minor reaction to modernism.” Later in the 1960’s this idea was adopted by various groups of artists and in the 1970’s it was used within the field of architecture where it came to signify “. . . an eclectic style of design.” By the 1970’s, the term had infiltrated other fields including music and philosophy. See Van Gelder, “Postmodernism as an Emerging Worldview,” 412-13. For further insights, consult Stanley Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 2-5; David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 39-65.

literary non-realism.²¹ This means that postmodern theories are defined primarily in relation to questions regarding the functional dynamics of noetic structures as well as the reciprocal interaction between human communication and interpretation. Nevertheless, before one can grasp the significance of these subjects as well as their impact on theological method, one must first acknowledge the context in which postmodernism has unfolded. To this we now turn.

The Autonomy of the Mind: Charting Epistemology from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century

Recognizing that postmodern thought by nature is a reaction to earlier philosophical schemes of the modern era, one must begin with an engagement of the period of history known as the Age of Reason, or the Enlightenment. Prior to this period, European culture had been subject to several paradigm shifts because of two milestone events.²² The first episode, which began in the mid-fourteenth century, was the Renaissance. Herein, a new resurgence of interest in various cultural expressions such as art, architecture, and literature ignited a revitalized confidence in the creativity of

²¹Realism can be defined as the belief that cognitive constructions of reality through either thoughts or words can accurately reflect reality as it exists independently of human description while nonrealism rejects this notion because there is no acontextual criterion whereby objective adjudications can determine which interpretation of reality is correct. For treatments, see Panayot Butchvarov, "Metaphysical Realism," in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Robert Audi (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 487-88; Martin Devitt, *Realism and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Jill Fitzgerald and James W. Cunningham, "Mapping Basic Issues for Identifying Epistemological Outlooks," in *Personal Epistemology*, ed. Barbara K. Hofer and Paul R. Pintrich (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002), 217-18; Gideon Rosen, "Realism," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Donald M. Borchert (New York: Simon and Schuster Macmillan, 1996), 492-95; Timothy Williams, "Realism and Non-Realism," in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, ed. Ted Honderich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 746-48.

²²For further insights on this discussion, see Colin Brown, *Philosophy and the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1968), 37-39; Solomon and Higgins, *Short History of Philosophy*, 163-69.

humanity.²³ Following the tide of the Renaissance was the sixteenth century tumult known as the Protestant Reformation.²⁴ Whereas the Renaissance had exalted the potential of cultural progress, the Reformation dismantled all blind trust in institutionalized religious traditions. The grand result of these movements was an epistemological revolution in which thinkers of the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries began to reconsider the role of human reason in the ascertaining of truth.²⁵

This search for a fundamental criteria that potentially could validate all beliefs became a multi-faceted idea that eventually dominated the horizons of religious, philosophical, and scientific inquiry. As multiple proposals began to develop, two primary schools of thought that became prominent were rationalism and empiricism.²⁶ The most influential advocates of rationalism included René Descartes, Benedictus de Spinoza, and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz while the leading proponents of empiricism were John Locke, George Berkeley, and David Hume.²⁷ Though these two approaches were

²³See Brian P. Copenhaver, *Renaissance Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Stephen McKnight, *Sacralizing the Secular: The Renaissance Origins of Modernity* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989).

²⁴For more discussion on the conception of the Reformation, see Alister McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1987).

²⁵Other factors included the scientific theories of Francis Bacon and Sir Isaac Newton as well as the political views of Thomas Hobbes. Also, the rise of commercialism and the devastation of the Thirty Years' War necessitated a new kind of social philosophy. See Solomon and Higgins, *Short History of Philosophy*, 163-78.

²⁶These perspectives and their primary advocates are not highlighted at the expense of ignoring other contributors during this time of philosophical development. Considerable advancements were also made by thinkers such as Blaise Pascal, Thomas Reid, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Voltaire, Gotthold Lessing, and Adam Smith.

²⁷The rationalists were known collectively as the "Continental Rationalists" because Descartes was French, Spinoza was Dutch, and Leibniz was German, while the empiricists were labeled traditionally as the "British Empiricists" because Locke was English, Berkeley was Irish, and Hume was Scottish. See D. W. Hamlyn, *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Viking Publishers, 1987), 134, 168.

similar in that they both saw human subjectivity as the key to potential epistemic objectivity, they were distinct because they utilized two opposing sources.²⁸

The general axiom of the rationalist tradition was that true knowledge derived from the proper use of human reason. This scheme received its earliest treatment from Descartes who previously had been trained in medieval scholastics, mathematics, and science. He sought to establish absolute epistemic certainty for all knowledge by initially scrutinizing any and all beliefs. He finally concluded after agonizing introspection that he could not doubt the fact that he was doubting.²⁹ This validation of individual existence then became the foundation for substantiating all other beliefs including theism.³⁰ Later rationalists such as Spinoza and Leibniz likewise embraced this Cartesian turn to the thinking subject and formulated other correlations between God, the universe, and human reason.³¹ Yet the unifying motif of modern rationalism was to ground human knowledge in the reliable dynamics of reason.

²⁸Solomon and Higgins, *Short History of Philosophy*, 178.

²⁹Descartes' classic conclusion was "I think, therefore I am" (*Cogito ergo sum*). For his specific procedures, see René Descartes, "Discourse on Method: Part IV," and "Meditations on First Philosophy," in *Descartes: Philosophical Writings*, sel. and trans. by Norman Kemp Smith (New York: Random House, 1958), 119-20, 176-248. Also, in conjunction with his desire to solidify religious knowledge, Descartes wanted to discover a methodology that could alleviate the constant disagreements in the academy regarding moral and political issues. Cf., his comments in René Descartes, "Discourse on Method: Part I," in *Descartes: Philosophical Writings*, 97-100; W. Jay Wood, *Epistemology: Becoming Intellectually Virtuous* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), 80.

³⁰Descartes, "Discourse on Method: Part I," 121-25.

³¹Though Descartes attempted to preserve Christian theism, Spinoza grounded rationality in a pantheistic epistemology by arguing that all nature, including human beings, were interrelated, self-contained parts of one divine Substance. See Benedictus de Spinoza, "Ethics," in *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, ed. and trans. by Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985). Leibniz, on the other hand, argued that the universe entailed multiple substances (or monads) rather than one unified substance, which subsequently derived from the supreme divine substance. See Wilhelm Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics; and The Monadology*, trans. George R. Montgomery (Chicago: Open Court, 1908; reprint, Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1992).

Advocates of the empirical tradition, on the other hand, contended that knowledge derived from sense experience. This divergence began when John Locke rejected the endless complexities of Cartesian rationalism, including the notion of innate or mechanical ideas within the human mind, and argued instead that the mind was a *tabula rasa* (i.e., blank tablet) that gradually filtered reality through life experiences, which in turn created various sensations from which the mind constructed new ideas and beliefs. During this process, the mind interprets reality either through primary properties inherent within objects, which exist independently of mental perceptions such as shape or mass, or through secondary properties that we perceive in ourselves, such as the effects things have on us like color.³² In the end, these ideas led to a representative theory of knowledge, which meant that “the mind had no direct knowledge of the outside world because it is never able to by-pass the senses and stand outside them.”³³

Following Locke, empirical thought was later taken to its logical extremes. To begin, Anglican bishop George Berkeley argued that both the primary and secondary properties of Lockian empiricism derived from the mind. This meant that all the concepts utilized to interpret the physical world including shape, mass, and color were part of an ideological collage that existed in the mind. Therefore, reality consisted solely of ideas.³⁴ This deduction then led Berkeley to a novel insight. In order to maintain the existence of reality despite the limits of human perception, Berkeley contended that all the factors that make up the universe were eternally discerned in the mind of God.³⁵ Finally, in contrast

³²Solomon and Higgins, *Short History of Philosophy*, 195. Also, see the development of Locke’s thought in John Locke, *Philosophical Works*, ed. J. A. St. John (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1969); and the assessments of James Collins in *Interpreting Modern Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 110-20.

³³Brown, *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*, 62.

³⁴This concept would subsequently develop into the view known as Idealism.

³⁵See George Berkeley, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. T. E. Jessop (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969).

to Berkeley's empirical theism, the climax of empirical skepticism emerged with David Hume. Hume argued that a latent gap existed between knowledge and the external world that neither reason or sense experience could bridge. Reason was insufficient because the majority of beliefs that people embrace do so without intricate rational support while sense experience alone was inadequate because there is no external means to verify the senses are always functioning correctly. Rather, core beliefs about the world derived from a-rational (as opposed to irrational), instinctive impulses that existed in the mind.³⁶

As the influence of the Enlightenment continued to build throughout the eighteenth century and came to the brink of the nineteenth century, a Prussian thinker named Immanuel Kant raised philosophy to a new level by forging elements of both rationalism and empiricism into a new epistemological paradigm. This endeavor began when Kant, who had been trained in the rationalist tradition from a former student of Leibniz named Christian Wolff, concluded that Hume's criticisms against rationalism and subsequent skepticism were inescapable.³⁷ In light of this quandary, Kant contended that the inherent problem of past philosophical systems was that they were based on the mistaken assumption that the external world was conceived as the mind conformed to various perceptions and experiences of the world.³⁸

³⁶Consult David Hume, "Treatise on Human Nature: Books I-III," in *Hume: Selections*, ed. Charles W. Hendel, Jr. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), 1-51; Anthony Quinton, *Hume* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 10-15, 34-36, 52-57. It should also be noted that Hume's conclusions did not lead him to deny the external world nor embrace blatant atheism. See Hume, "Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion: Part II," in *Hume: Selections*, 299-313; and the analysis offered by Ronald Nash, *Life's Ultimate Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 254-59.

³⁷Kant exclaimed, "I openly confess my recollection of David Hume was the very thing which many years ago first interrupted my dogmatic slumber and gave my investigations in the field of speculative philosophy a quite new direction," in Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, trans. Lewis W. Beck (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1950), 8.

³⁸See Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), 55-62.

Kant asserted that knowledge occurred in the reverse order. Reality was not perceived as the mind adjusted to the world but as the world adjusted to the mind. Kant supported this idea by arguing that reality was mediated through pre-existing cognitive categories instilled in the mind.³⁹ The key to this methodology, however, was that the mind was only capable of interpreting the elements of the world with which it came into contact. This point led to Kant's famous distinction between two worlds, or types of reality. One, which was labeled the phenomenal, referred to knowledge that the mind perceived within the world, while the other, which was identified as the noumenal, pertained to reality as it existed independently of cognitive reflection.⁴⁰ Moreover, the result of this view was a radical disjunction between the world as it appears to the mind and the world as it truly is.

This Kantian reformulation of epistemology became a chief concern of philosophical investigation as the nineteenth century began to progress. For example, the apparent loose ends of Kant's ethical and scientific theories were addressed by two of his leading forerunners, Johann Fichte and Friedrich Schelling.⁴¹ Yet the two most significant trajectories launched by Kant's thought, which in turn eventually led to the

³⁹Kant argued that these categories functioned *a priori* rather than *a posteriori*. In other words, they performed independently of rather than through sense experience. Ibid., 43.

⁴⁰Ibid., 257-75. Also, Kant was convinced that this dichotomy salvaged Christianity because what could not be known in the noumenal realm could be accepted by faith.

⁴¹For exposure to their work, consult Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Attempt at a Critique of all Revelation*, trans. Garrett Green (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); idem, *The Vocation of Man*, ed. and trans. by Roderick Chisholm (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1956); Friedrich Schelling, *On the Natural and Divine Principle of Things*, ed. and trans. Michael G. Vater (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984); idem, *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge: Four Essays*, trans. Fritz Marti (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1980); and the summary offered by Daniel Breazeale, "Fichte and Schelling: The Jena Period," in *The Age of German Idealism*, ed. Kathleen Higgins and Robert Solomon (London: Routledge, 1993), 138-80.

seedbed of future postmodern doubt, were the philosophical reactions of Georg W. F. Hegel and the hermeneutical methodology of Friedrich Schleiermacher.

With regard to Hegel, his work became an influential outgrowth of Kant's work for two primary reasons. First, Hegel enhanced Kant's preliminary thoughts on the individual thinker by applying them to the social nature of knowledge. Though Hegel initially accepted Kant's view that all knowledge was mediated through *a priori* categories, he rejected the notion that knowledge was solely individualistic in nature. Instead, Hegel contended that a single mind interpreted the world only as it functioned in conjunction with a plurality of minds. This idea was personified through Hegel's concept of an immanent, universal spirit (or *Geist*), which entailed the sum total of all minds and ideas that existed in the world.⁴² The spirit functioned as human minds continued to interact and interpret the world.⁴³ The pivotal contribution of Hegel, therefore, was that he broadened the focus of autonomous epistemology to include the factors of historical and corporate (or communal) influences on noetic structures.⁴⁴

The second major way in which Hegelian thought expanded was through the vast spectrum of responses that it received. For example, elements of Hegelianism led to radical anti-religious ideologies as represented by thinkers such as Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx, and Friedrich Nietzsche. Feuerbach pioneered the atheistic trend by

⁴²See Georg Hegel, "The Phenomenology of the Mind," in *Hegel: Selections*, ed. J. Loewenberg, trans. J. B. Baillie (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957), 43-50.

⁴³As Colin Brown explains, "The total of human knowledge is none other than the Absolute Spirit thinking out its thoughts through human minds," or "History, nature, and human thought are really aspects of the Absolute Spirit coming to self-consciousness." See Brown, *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*, 121.

⁴⁴The role of communal influence in epistemology also led Hegel to adopt his well-known thesis, synthesis, antithesis dialectic, which defined truth as an ongoing, developing entity that continued to expand endlessly as different interpreting communities changed past ideas and created new ones. See how he implements this idea in his understanding of history in Hegel, "The Philosophy of History," in *Hegel: Selections*, trans. J. Sibree, 338-442.

redefining the transcendent *Geist* of Hegelianism to entail only the mere personification of human nature.⁴⁵ This meant that knowledge found its fulfillment in understanding the significance of humanity without God. Marx later embraced this notion of anti-theistic materialism and simply applied it to political science and economic theory.⁴⁶ This all-encompassing hostility toward religion was then consummated through the career of Nietzsche who contended that the abandonment of the concept of God was the first step to establishing stability within society.⁴⁷

In contrast to those who embraced and extended Hegel's thought were also those who rejected it. Examples include Hegel's former colleague, Arthur Schopenhauer, who spent his career refuting Hegel's concept of the positive development of truth by arguing that knowledge often regressed rather than progressed within society, as well as Søren Kierkegaard, who rejected the Hegelian notion that God and human knowledge were synonymous.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, whether Hegel would concur with Feuerbachian

⁴⁵His criticisms and theories can be seen in Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Harper, 1957; reprint, Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1989); idem, *Lectures on the Essays of Religion*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Harper and Row, 1967).

⁴⁶For an overview of his theories, see Karl Marx, *Marx: Selections*, ed. Allen W. Wood (New York: Macmillan, 1988). Also, for Hegel's influence on Marx as well as Feuerbach, see Robert Nola, "The Young Hegelians: Feuerbach and Marx," in *The Age of German Idealism*, 290-329.

⁴⁷For exposure to his thought, see Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Viking Press, 1966; reprint, New York: Modern Library, 1995); idem, *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. and ed. Walter Kaufman (New York: Random House, 1968). Also, for treatments of Nietzsche, see Ronald Hayman, *Nietzsche* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Michael Tanner, *Nietzsche* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁴⁸For introductions to these thinkers, see Arthur Schopenhauer, *The Works of Schopenhauer*, abridged ed., ed. Will Durant, trans. T. Bailey Saunders (New York: Tucker Publishing, 1931); D. W. Hamlyn, *Schopenhauer* (London: Routledge, 1980); Søren Kierkegaard, *The Kierkegaard Reader*, ed. Jane Chamberlain and Jonathan Ree (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001).

atheism, Marxism, or Kierkegaardian existentialism, the overall point to concede is that his modified Kantianism ignited multiple ideologies that would endure even into the twentieth century.

The second major outgrowth of Kantian thought, which interestingly enough came from a faculty colleague of Hegel, was the interpretive theory of Friedrich Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher's journey began with a struggle to discover the core of religious belief. He rejected prior options such as the natural theology of medieval scholasticism and the Reformed tradition's focus on special revelation.⁴⁹ Yet after imbibing several of Kant's works, Schleiermacher concluded that self-consciousness was the inner stabilizer that allowed religious knowledge to function.⁵⁰ This notion led Schleiermacher to contend that the central and unifying dynamic behind Christianity was not doctrine, Scripture, or morality, but rather the mutual interdependence that humanity expresses toward the divine.⁵¹

This idea of subjective realization regarding religion drove Schleiermacher to his subsequent understanding of biblical hermeneutics. Just as Christianity was not

⁴⁹Schleiermacher repudiated many of the fundamental tenants of the Christian faith during his early training at the seminary of the Brethren in Barby and the University of Halle. See his comments in a letter to his father in Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Life of Friedrich Schleiermacher, As Unfolded in His Autobiography and Letters*, vol. 1, trans. Frederica Rowan (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1860), 46. Also see Greg L. Thornbury, "A Revelation of the Inward: Schleiermacher's Theology and the Hermeneutics of Interiority," *SBJT* 3 (1999): 7.

⁵⁰Analysis of Schleiermacher's interaction with Kant can be seen in Richard Crouter's introduction to Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, trans. Richard Crouter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 18-39.

⁵¹This idea, which Schleiermacher commonly calls "the feeling of utter dependence" on God, is the fundamental thesis that drives his entire theological method. To see how he implements this notion in theological formulation, see Schleiermacher, "Second Speech: On the Essence of Religion," in *On Religion*, 96-140; idem, *The Christian Faith*, 2nd ed., ed. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (New York: Harper and Row, 1963; reprint, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 12-18.

defined by mere doctrinal tenants or theological mandates, the Scriptures were not bound to propositional equations that spoke of various issues. Rather, the Scriptures were selected instances of religious outbursts that authors recorded for the benefit of later readers. This meant that a proper understanding of a biblical author entailed a common familiarity with the writer's experience.⁵² This was a crucial shift. Schleiermacher moved the focus of hermeneutics beyond the sole task of deriving mere cognitive intent of authors to the possibility of re-living the emotive inspiration that drove authors to communicate. The goal of successful hermeneutics became an existential retraction of the reader rather than the mere discovery of objective propositional data.⁵³

In retrospect, the preliminary foundation of human autonomy that evolved out of the Enlightenment oriented the locus of understanding toward the independent knower. This liberated later thinkers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to explore the ways in which the mind could potentially understand the world with or without religion or any other higher authority. So whether it was Cartesian rationalism, Hume's empiricism, Kantian metaphysics, Hegel's dialectic, Marx's social theory, Schleiermacher's

⁵²His lecture notes on hermeneutics were only available to the public four years after his death. Presently, they can be consulted in Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*, American Academy of Religion Texts and Translation Series no. 1, ed. Heinz Kimmerle, trans. James Duke and Jack Forstman (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1977). Also, see Dawn DeVries' summary "Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher," in *The Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters*, ed. Donald McKim (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), 350-55.

⁵³Schleiermacher's insights not only led to revolutions in hermeneutical theory. They also led to severe renovations in Christianity in general. His attempts to deliver Christianity from the critiques of modernism, by couching it in terms of subjective experience, gradually led to views that completely repudiated the authenticity of Scripture as well as redefined Christianity in terms of social morality and humanitarianism. This is why Schleiermacher is given the title of "the father of modern liberalism." Leading theologians of this German tradition include David Strauss, Albrecht Ritschl, and Adolf Harnack. See summaries by Karl Barth, *Protestant Thought: From Rousseau to Ritschl*, trans. Brian Cozens (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1969); John Hannah *Our Legacy: The History of Christian Doctrine* (Colorado Springs: Nav Press, 2001), 60-66.

theological method, or Nietzsche's atheism, the unifying epistemological bond of the Enlightenment and the modern era was the common belief that the obtaining of truth was inherently anthropocentric.

The Consummation of Modernism: The Postmodern Shift in the Twentieth Century

Ironically, the twentieth century turn to a post, or anti-modern, era proved to be both the final fulfillment and demise of the Enlightenment for two reasons. First, Kantian thought forever changed the emphasis of modernity by altering the point of reference with regards to truth and reality. Whereas earlier thinkers upheld the conviction that the *apprehension of truth* was solely dependent on the cognitive faculties of the knower, Kant's dichotomy between the real world and the perceived world grounded *the very nature of truth* within the mind of the knower. This, in turn, led to the second reason for the downfall of modernity. Post-Kantian thought eventually provoked thinkers of the twentieth-century to apply epistemological concerns to hermeneutics because all claims to comprehend truths necessitated further clarifications on how to convey those truths to others. Therefore, hermeneutical theory became a study of all the social, psychological, and linguistic elements involved in how people constructed their perceptions of reality. Yet this integration resulted in the total abandonment of epistemic autonomy and the possibility of objective truth claims. The question arises though as to how this development came about.

As the ferment of the intellectual climate entered the twentieth-century, two significant factors came to the forefront. One was the surging current of anti-theistic worldviews. The sheer magnitude of Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory on scientific method, the revolutionary approaches to psychology pioneered by Sigmund Freud, the aggressive atheism of Nietzsche, the empirical ethics of Utilitarianism, and the raping of Christianity through the influence of German liberalism had all taken a large amount of

apologetic momentum and intellectual credibility away from Christian or even remotely theistic persuasions. The second factor, which dictated future reflection on epistemology and hermeneutics, was the horrifying revelation of humanity's decadence through the devastation of two World Wars. The previous confidence in the cognitive faculties of man was shattered and the remaining alternative was an introspective search for the purpose of a fragmented human existence.⁵⁴

Two movements, which initially revealed this sterile attitude, were late nineteenth-century Pragmatism and the early twentieth-century movement of Logical Positivism. The idea of Pragmatism, which became prominent in North America through the works of Charles S. Peirce, William James, and John Dewey, determined the value of any metaphysical claim by the practical outcomes it provided.⁵⁵ In other words, the merit of moral, religious, political, or ontological assertions was adjudicated by the potential results it offered. In contrast, a complete assault on metaphysics in general came through the later movement of Logical Positivism.⁵⁶ Whereas Pragmatism sought for superior

⁵⁴Solomon and Higgins, *Short History of Philosophy*, 243-45.

⁵⁵Consult Charles S. Peirce, *Peirce: Selected Writings*, ed. Philip P. Wiener (New York: Dover, 1966); William James, *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (New York: Longmans and Green, 1925); Gerald Myers, *William James* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986); Irwin Edmon, ed., *John Dewey: His Contributions to the American Tradition* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1970).

⁵⁶This movement began with several students and professors at the University of Vienna who later became known as the "Vienna Circle." The major proponents of this view included Moritz Schlick, A. J. Ayer, and Rudolf Carnap. See their treatments of Logical Positivism in Moritz Schlick, *Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Amethe von Zeppelin (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949); A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic* (New York: Dover, 1952); idem, ed., *Logical Positivism* (London: Free Press, 1959); Rudolf Carnap, *The Logical Structure of the World*, trans. Rolf A. George (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967). Also, the early work of Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein has been linked to Logical Positivism though he never publicly affiliated with the movement. See his early work, Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961); A. Janik and S. Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993.)

conduct, Positivism sought for superior language. This ideology viewed truth claims as strictly empirical, or “synthetic.” Consequently, any metaphysical or religious claim that could not be verified or falsified with scientific data was unjustifiable, or more candidly, nonsensical.

Juxtaposed to the arid mentality of Pragmatism and Positivism was another twentieth-century attempt to cope with the meaning of human existence known as Existentialism. Though some scholars trace rudimentary elements of this theory back to Kierkegaard, Existentialism gained its primary momentum shortly after the second World War through the careers of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Paul Sartre.⁵⁷ Like many advocates of other systems in the past, each of these thinkers also had unique approaches.⁵⁸ Yet they all agreed that philosophical thought had been disillusioned by faulty and tyrannical metaphysical structures. In response, existential thought was driven by the presupposition that self-consciousness, or the dynamic of human existence, was the starting point for understanding reality. The classic phrase used to describe this notion is “existence precedes essence,” or the idea that meaning can only be applied to

⁵⁷See their works including Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: A General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. W. R. Boyce (London: Humanities Press, 1969); a collection of lectures that Husserl gave in Germany in 1907 titled Edmund Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology*, trans. William P. Alston and George Nakhnikian, intro. by George Nakhnikian (New York: Humanities Press, 1964); Martin Heidegger's, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edwain Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962); idem, *The End of Philosophy*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper and Row, 1973); Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Philosophical Library, 1947); idem, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956).

⁵⁸The views they espoused indeed had significant implications for Husserl's conclusions led him to oppose National Socialism while Heidegger became a member of the Nazi party and Sartre was an avowed Marxist. For treatments of these thinkers that clarify their variances of thought, see Anthony Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 143-204; George Steiner, *Martin Heidegger* (New York: Viking Press, 1978); Max Charlesworth, *The Existentialists and Jean-Paul Sartre* (London: Prior, 1976).

elements that already exist within human experience.⁵⁹ This idea, in turn, harmonized well with the definitive shift that would lead to postmodern thought.

The final culmination of ideas, which eventually led to the postmodern ethos, arrived with the total renovation of hermeneutical theory. As epistemology and ideas of objectivity continued to fracture, similar ambivalence began to overflow into theories of communication and interpretation. Again, the early stages of this development began with Schleiermacher's contributions to biblical interpretation. Yet they were later enhanced by German thinker Wilhelm Dilthey, who expanded Schleiermacher's concepts to hermeneutics in general.⁶⁰ Dilthey argued that texts were understood only as readers continuously interacted with the contextual environments and mental presumptions of authors, which meant that interpretation was always ongoing, never complete.

These preliminary stages of hermeneutical thought led to further modifications regarding the relationship between authors, texts, and readers. A late nineteenth century example of this was the school of thought known as Structuralism. This view was based

. . . on the assumption that all human social activity is nothing more than manifestations of underlying systems of abstract rules or conventions which govern the way humans order their existence into meaningful structures. These systems of rules exist on a subconscious level At a fundamental level, the principles in these systems are universal. In all areas, then, of social activity, deep structures can be found common to all human societies, regardless of other culturally identifying specifics.⁶¹

Therefore, the locus of literary meaning derived strictly from the linguistic, cultural, and

⁵⁹S. E. Frost, Jr., *Basic Teachings of the Great Philosophers*, rev. ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1962; reprint, 1989), 265. Also, existential thought infiltrated biblical studies through the efforts of Rudolf Bultmann and Paul Tillich.

⁶⁰See Wilhelm Dilthey, *Dilthey: Selected Writings*, ed. and trans., H. P. Rickman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); P. D. Juhl, *Interpretation: An Essay on the Philosophy of Literary Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 239-48; Grenz, *Primer on Postmodernism*, 99-103.

⁶¹W. Randolph Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach*, rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 210.

rhetoical rules that authors followed, not their literary intents.⁶² This focus then received further modifications, which would result in the utter banishment of the author altogether.

As the twentieth-century progressed, elements of Structuralism were taken to revolutionary levels by the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein and the school of the New Criticism. Renouncing his previous commitment to semi-positivistic theories of language, including the idea that true statements were atomistic empirical exclamations of scientific data, Wittgenstein concluded in his later career that languages were actually linguistic structures that people used within their respected communities to explicate their views of reality.⁶³ Consequently, languages were only social vehicles for articulating views of reality rather than reality itself. In 1946, a similar idea was applied to literary studies by two professors named W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley who co-wrote an article entitled *The Intentional Fallacy*.⁶⁴ Their thesis was that mere authorial intention was an insufficient standard for determining meaning because literary works were made up of linguistic signs and symbols that were public in nature, which meant that the audience determined the full meaning of words and texts rather than the authors.

Subsequent to this proposal, interpretive theories began to progress in directions that focused on anything but authorial intent. For example, Hans-Georg Gadamer argued in 1960 that literary meaning was to be found in the reciprocal activity

⁶²Expositions of Structuralism can be found in Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. Charles Bally, Albert Sechehaye, and Albert Riedlinger, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959); Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966). For assessments, see Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986); David Holdcroft, *Saussure: Signs, Systems, and Arbitrariness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

⁶³This idea led to his concept of “language games.” See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), 32ff.

⁶⁴W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley, “The Intentional Fallacy,” *Sewanee Review* 45 (1946); reprinted in the *Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry*, ed. W. K. Wimsatt (New York: Noonday Press, 1958), 3-18.

between texts and the traditions and prejudices of various readers.⁶⁵ Gadamer contends that the horizons (or orientations) of texts fuse together with the horizons of readers and thus create meaning(s).⁶⁶ Finally, upon the arrival of the latter twentieth century, even more radical forms of hermeneutical theory arose. One such example is the movement currently known as deconstructionism. The most prominent figure in this movement, Jacques Derrida, attempts to deconstruct or interrogate the notion that the use of human language is preceded by encoded perceptions of reality.⁶⁷ Derrida argues, instead, that

⁶⁵Gadamer defines tradition as the point of historical reference where interpreters exist whereas prejudices are the mental commitments or presuppositions interpreters have because of their traditions. Therefore, interpreters from particular traditions create meaning as they apply their prejudices. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1989; reprint, New York: Continuum, 1996), 174-75, 269-80; Juhl, *Interpretation*, 294-96; Georgia Warnke, *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition, and Reason* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 75-81.

⁶⁶This dynamic is called the fusion of horizons, see Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 306-07. It should be noted that some of the earliest criticisms and responses to Gadamer and the New Criticism were mounted by an English professor at the University of Virginia named E. D. Hirsch, Jr. In Hirsch's mind, literary (or verbal) meaning ". . . is whatever someone has willed to convey by a particular sequence of linguistic signs and which can be conveyed (shared) by means of those linguistic signs." Therefore, to expand the definition of literary meaning beyond the bounds of authorial intent eliminated the only legitimate point of reference for the hermeneutical task. See E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 31; and his interaction with Gadamer, Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 245-64. Today, however, it seems that Hirsch has modified some of his convictions regarding these issues. See E. D. Hirsch, Jr., "Meaning and Significance Reinterpreted," *Critical Inquiry* 11 (1984): 202-24; idem, "Transhistorical Intentions and the Persistence of Allegory," *New Literary History* 25 (1994): 549-67.

⁶⁷His classic work on hermeneutical theory is Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1976). Also see the anthology Derrida, *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, ed. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); and an interview with Derrida in Imre Salusinszky, ed., *Criticism in Society* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 8-24. For further assessments, see Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982); Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 153-70.

language is a rhetorical ploy that writers simply use to create or repeat illusive assumptions of reality. This is the case because it is impossible for the mind to perceive any kind of reality that exists outside of the realm of language itself. So in actuality, Derrida's redefining of linguistics and hermeneutics is really driven by a deeper protest against metaphysics in general. Furthermore, other excessive reformulations of hermeneutical theory similar to Derrida's have been proposed by thinkers such as Stanley Fish, Richard Rorty, and Michael Foucault.⁶⁸

In light of this latter twentieth-century surge of interest in hermeneutics, what are the all-encompassing results? Simply stated, the autonomous knower of modernity has been interrogated, abused, and finally transformed into a new postmodern ultra-skeptic. Rather than truth being discovered by the almighty cognitive faculties and/or senses, the postmodern response is that truth is invented, not discovered. This echoes the refrain of non-realism as opposed to realism. With regards to epistemology and hermeneutics, the idea that an external world exists independently of human interaction is repudiated. Reality cannot be known as it really is (i.e., epistemological anti-realism) and authors' ideas in texts do not exist independently from how they are interpreted by readers (literary anti-realism). Instead, different communities or individuals interpret reality and texts in light of their particular assumptions, which leads to the subsequent conclusion that one community cannot claim precedence over any other.

This general endorsement of epistemological non-realism finally triggers a general attitude among postmodern participants. An ingrained suspicion or distrust is expressed toward any view that claims epistemic superiority over any other. The popular

⁶⁸Though the literature from these authors is plenteous, see Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980); Richard Rorty, *The Linguistic Turn: Recent Essays in Philosophical Method* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967); Michael Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).

summation of this disposition comes from Jean-Francois Lyotard when he observed that “Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives.”⁶⁹ In other words, the postmodern mentality repels any notion that one particular story, belief, or worldview describes reality objectively, or noncontextually. Moreover, this epistemic apathy is what currently opposes the evangelical tradition.

Postmodern Wedges between Conservative And Postconservative Evangelicalism

The natural setting that is now conducive to postmodern thought is a pluralistic culture. Herein, all belief systems are treated as having equal validity and a potential voice at the epistemic table of worldviews. Yet the implications of this environment are diametrically opposed to the fundamental commitments of the evangelical tradition. Rather than accepting all religions as expressing invariable elements of “truth,” historic Christianity advocates the view that the message of the Bible as consummated in the life of Jesus Christ expresses a superior and universally binding message upon all races, communities, and individuals. This leads to an obvious dilemma. How can evangelicals, who are committed to the Christian gospel, persuasively communicate exclusive, theological claims in the postmodern context and if they can, must they adopt various elements of postmodern thought in order to be successful, and if so, which ones?

These concerns bring the very nature of theology itself under scrutiny because postmodernism continues to blur fundamental concepts that evangelicals have simply assumed and taken for granted. For example, what does it mean to have a doctrinal tradition? Is it a framework of beliefs that directly corresponds to reality or are doctrines simply arbitrary sets of conceptions and linguistic paradigms that different religious communities utilize to express their personal experiences? If the latter is true, then how

⁶⁹Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiii-iv.

can any claim be made that one doctrinal system has legitimate precedence over another? Likewise, with regards to hermeneutical questions, how can the claim be made that one text has authority over other texts? Even so, if one text is viewed as superior to others, how does one validate a particular interpretation of that text as authoritative? All of these concerns combined make the issue of theological method central to current evangelical inquiry. Furthermore, as these discussions persist within evangelical as well as secular academic circles, three particular topics continue to acquire the most attention.

One that is receiving massive amounts of consideration is the subject of epistemological foundationalism.⁷⁰ This term refers to a theory which describes the way noetic structures function by distinguishing between non-basic and basic beliefs. Non-basic beliefs are beliefs “accepted on the basis of a-cultural and universally compelling beliefs or realities, themselves in need of no support”⁷¹ Basic beliefs, on the other hand, are held because they logically derive from non-basic beliefs.⁷² The idea behind this theory is that belief systems are actually epistemic structures wherein certain beliefs have functional priority over others.⁷³ The question, though, is whether or not this

⁷⁰This topic has become so central to discussions about method that both evangelicals who are sympathetic as well as critical to postmodernism wrestle with its legitimacy for evangelical theology.

⁷¹Richard Topping, “The Anti-Foundationalist Challenge to Evangelical Apologetics,” *EvQ* 63 (1991): 45. This idea of foundationless beliefs is linked to Descartes’ search for self-evident, incorrigible, indubitable facts which required no other beliefs to be verified. See Wood, *Epistemology*, 78-85.

⁷²This basic/non-basic distinction is also described as a difference between mediated and non-mediated beliefs. “A belief is justified as true, either mediately by tracing it through its logical relations to a foundational belief or immediately as a foundational belief by virtue of its indubitability.” See William P. Alston, “Two Types of Foundationalism,” *Journal of Philosophy* 73 (1976): 165-66.

⁷³Foundationalism is in no way monolithic. For discussions of variances in foundationalist models, see Alston, “Two Types of Foundationalism,” 165-85; Wood, *Epistemology*, 85-104; Amos Yong, “The Demise of Foundationalism and the Retention of Truth: What Evangelicals can Learn from C. S. Peirce,” *CSR* 29 (2000): 563-88.

approach can survive in the postmodern context.⁷⁴ Two proposals currently addressing this question from within different disciplines are Alvin Plantinga and George Lindbeck.

Plantinga's proposal, which is formulated in the context of philosophy of religion, is presently known as Reformed Epistemology. He, along with others such as Nicholas Wolterstorff, have formulated this proposal as a new defense for the epistemic right for Christians to believe in God.⁷⁵ As seen in Plantinga's work, this perspective generally follows four primary steps. The first stage entails a repudiation of strict Cartesian, or classical foundationalism (hereafter CF) because it is perceived to be self-refuting.⁷⁶ Specifically, it is argued that the epistemological assumptions of CF do not

⁷⁴Foundationalism has enormous implications for numerous issues. To see its effects on epistemology and apologetics, consult D. Z. Philips, *Faith after Foundationalism* (New York: Routledge, 1988); Matthew C. Bagger, "The Miracle of Minimal Foundationalism: Religious Experience and Justified Belief," *RelS* 29 (1993): 297-312; Julie Gowen, "Foundationalism and the Justification of Religious Belief," *RelS* 19 (1983): 393-406; Anthony M. Matteo, "Can Belief in God be Basic?" *Horizons* (1988): 262-82; Mark Timmons, "Foundationalism and the Structure of Ethical Justification," *Ethics* 97 (1987): 595-609. For concerns in systematic theology, see Millard Erickson, "Foundationalism: Dead or Alive?" *SBJT* 5 (2001): 20-32; Thomas Guarino, "Revelation and Foundationalism: Toward Hermeneutical and Ontological Appropriateness," *Modern Theology* 6 (1990): 221-35; Stanley Hauerwas, Nancey Murphy, and Mark Nation, eds. *Theology without Foundations: Religious Practice and the Future of Theological Truth* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994); Thomas B. Ommen, "Theology and Foundationalism," *SR* 16 (1987): 159-71; Douglas F. Ottati, "Between Foundationalism and Nonfoundationalism," *Affirmation* 4 (1991): 27-47. Finally, for general overviews of Foundationalism, see John E. Thiel, *Nonfoundationalism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994); Tim Triplett, "Recent Work on Foundationalism," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 27 (1990): 93-116; Ernest Sosa, "The Foundations of Foundationalism," *Nous* 14 (1980): 547-60.

⁷⁵The initial essay that pioneered this overall defense can be seen in Alvin Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," in *Faith and Rationality*, 16-93. Also see Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984; reprint, 1999), 15-27.

⁷⁶See their critiques in Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*, 35-55; Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," 47-63; idem, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 84-86, 100-05.

meet its own criteria for establishing a belief as basic, namely that it be incorrigible, self-evident, or noninferentially known to be true.⁷⁷ Simply put then, the basic premise of CF does not meet its own conditions to qualify as a basic belief. Therefore, the epistemic legitimacy of CF is undermined.⁷⁸ This charge subsequently leads Plantinga to a second deduction, which is that numerous facts of common knowledge and everyday experience are accepted as rationally justifiable even though they do not meet the criteria of CF.⁷⁹ This being the case, Plantinga moves to a third major point, which is to highlight John Calvin's original concept of an instilled God-consciousness within the internal makeup of man (i.e., *sensus divinitatis*) to support the claim that Christian theism is a perfectly reasonable belief that can be exercised without insurmountable evidence to support it.⁸⁰ Putting these points together then, Plantinga finally concludes that belief in God should be viewed as a properly basic belief.⁸¹ In other words, Christians should be seen as having the epistemic right to believe in God because they simply are utilizing the cognitive equipment they have been given by their Creator to do so.⁸² Furthermore, one should not infer from Plantinga's argument for proper basicity that Christians cannot use evidential polemics to support their beliefs. The key, though, is that for Reformed

⁷⁷Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," 57-63.

⁷⁸See Wood, *Epistemology*, 88-89.

⁷⁹This argument also derives from his rejection of evidentialism as portrayed in natural theology. See Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967); idem, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford:Oxford University Press, 1974).

⁸⁰Whether Plantinga is interpreting Calvin correctly is another issue to consider. See the critique by John Beverluis, "Reforming the 'Reformed' Objection to Natural Theology," *Faith and Philosophy* 12 (1995): 189-206.

⁸¹See Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," 73-78.

⁸²Plantinga is also aware that this argument possibly could be subverted to give epistemic license to others for believing in ludicrous notions. Plantinga entitles this concern "the great pumpkin objection" and offers his solutions to this problem in Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," 74-78.

Epistemologists, various forms of inferential reasoning are deemed as helpful only in a secondary or supplementary sense.⁸³

Another response to foundationalism, which is being proposed in the field of theological method, is a movement primarily affiliated with thinkers of Yale University known as Postliberalism.⁸⁴ Advocates of this approach desire to transcend the epistemic mindsets that have divided liberals and conservatives by creating a new setting wherein different Christian traditions can dialogue without being polarized by doctrinal variances. The most contested form of this thought currently is pioneered by George Lindbeck, who argues that defining doctrines within mere propositional terms (i.e., traditional conservative cognitive approach) fails to respond to the critiques of modernity while limiting the essence of religion to subjective categories (i.e., classical liberal experiential-expressivist approach) jeopardizes the coherence of the Christian tradition.⁸⁵ Instead, Lindbeck proposes an alternative model which he labels a cultural-linguistic approach.⁸⁶

⁸³In fact, Plantinga has attempted to address these questions in a trilogy of works. See Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); idem, *Warrant: The Current Debate*; idem, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁸⁴This movement originates with the earlier criticisms Hans Frei made against the traditional liberal tradition. See Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); idem, *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975); idem, *Types of Christian Theology*, ed. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992). Frei's thought was later enhanced by the canonic-hermeneutical approach of Brevard Childs and is currently developed through the efforts of theologians such as Kathryn Tanner, William Placher, Stanley Hauerwas, and George Hunsinger.

⁸⁵See George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 15-25. Also, Lindbeck initially hoped his postliberal agenda could potentially bring Lutherans and Catholics closer together. See comments in George Lindbeck, "Confession and Community: An Israel-Like View of the Church," *Christian Century* 107 (1990): 492-96.

⁸⁶Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 32-41.

This view defines doctrines as “. . . second-order rules for the boundaries of appropriately Christian talk, while allowing a wide variety of actual, first-order ways of speaking.”⁸⁷ Doctrines thereby become linguistic rules that establish the boundaries for theological discourse. The objection, however, that many evangelicals have raised is whether Lindbeck views doctrines as referring to objective, ontological realities and if so, how?⁸⁸ This discussion continues to reciprocate back and forth with no conclusive answers as of yet.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, postliberal thought continues to exert its influence by fostering stimulating dialogue between theologians in secular academies regarding the nature of theological discourse.⁹⁰ In turn, the postliberal shift to nonfoundationalism also is supplying further motivation for many others to formulate multiple nonfoundational

⁸⁷George R. Sumner, Jr., “Postliberalism,” in *The Historical Dictionary of Theology*, 432.

⁸⁸See his thoughts in George Lindbeck, “Atonement and Hermeneutics of Intratextual Social Embodiment,” in *The Nature of Confession: Evangelicals and Postliberals in Conversation*, ed. Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), 221-40; idem, “The Church’s Mission to a Postmodern Culture,” in *Postmodern Theology: Christian Faith in a Pluralist World*, ed. Frederic Burnham (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), 37-55; idem, “The Story-Shaped Church: Critical Exegesis and Theological Interpretation,” in *Scriptural Authority and Narrative Interpretation*, ed. Garrett Green (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 161-78.

⁸⁹For evangelical interactions with Lindbeck, see Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm, eds., *The Nature of Confession*; Michael S. Horton, “Yale Postliberalism: Back to the Bible?” in *A Confessing Theology for Postmodern Times*, 183-216; Alister McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine: A Study in the Foundation of Doctrinal Criticism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 14-34; Richard Lints, “The Postpositivist Choice: Tracy or Lindbeck?” *JAAR* 61 (1993): 655-77.

⁹⁰Dialogue between the academy and Lindbeck can be seen in Bruce Frohnen, *The New Communitarians and the Crisis of Modern Liberalism* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1996); George Hunsinger, “Truth as Self-Involving: Barth and Lindbeck on the Cognitive and Performative Aspects of Truth in Theological Discourse,” *JAAR* 61 (1993): 41-56; Daniel Liechty, *Theology in Postliberal Perspective* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990); Bruce D. Marshall, ed., *Theology and Dialogue: Essays in Conversation with George Lindbeck* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).

approaches to theological method as seen in the projects of such thinkers as Nancey Murphy and J. Wentzel Van Huysteen.⁹¹

A second major issue that postmodern thought has led thinkers to reassess is the nature of language. The pertinence of this concern for evangelicals is its obvious relationship to Scripture. Many within conservative evangelicalism have argued that biblical revelation is primarily propositional in nature. This view sees the canon as a divine disclosure of cognitive information via human languages that can be understood and summarized in propositional formats by human beings because of the divine gifts of rationality and illumination.⁹² At the other end of this spectrum are classical liberals who define revelation as the specific medium through which humanity encounters God.⁹³

⁹¹Murphy attempts to formulate a nonfoundational method because she is convinced that both fundamentalism and liberalism were deeply rooted in CF, but from different sources. Liberalism was steeped in Kantian metaphysics while fundamentalism was an outgrowth from Reidian epistemology. See Nancey Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press, International, 1996); idem, "Philosophical Resources for Postmodern Theology," *CSR* 26 (1996): 184-205. Likewise, J. Wentzel Van Huysteen is currently attempting to construct a theological method that is both committed to non-foundationalism and epistemological realism in light of advancements in scientific theory. See J. Wentzel Van Huysteen, *Theology and the Justification of Faith: Constructing Theories in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989); idem, *Essays in Postfoundationalist Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

⁹²For example, see Gordon H. Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation* (Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation, 1986); Carl F. H. Henry, *The Authority and Inspiration of the Bible*, in vol. 1 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed., Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 3-35; Ronald Nash, *The Word of God and the Mind of Man* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 45-50.

⁹³This notion finds its heritage in classical liberalism as initiated by Schleiermacher. Here, neo-orthodoxy also must be noted as a view of revelation that repudiates both the radical school of German liberalism and evangelical propositionalism. Thinkers such as Karl Barth argued that revelation was not confined to subjective experience alone nor mere human words, but rather existed via Christ's application of biblical revelation to the human heart. Therefore, Christ is God's revelation which is mediated through the vehicle of Scripture. See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: A Selection*, ed. Helmut Gollwitzer (Louisville: Westminster Press, 1994), 65-81.

Herein, revelation is perceived to be an event to experience rather than mere information to absorb.

In contrast to both of these pendulums are other approaches that theologians are adopting with regards to revelation. One example, which is extremely conducive to the postmodern context, is currently termed narrative theology.⁹⁴ This proposal views the stories recounted in the biblical record as existential reference points that give identity to the Christian community, but whether these stories describe actual events and future realities is still debated.⁹⁵ Despite this concern, narrative theology has also gained further consideration because of Ronald F. Thiemann's adaptation of nonfoundationalism to Scripture in his work *Revelation and Theology*.⁹⁶ Thiemann argues that the Reformers initially approached the doctrine of revelation with preconceived assumptions such as God's existence and graciousness. Yet as the Enlightenment overshadowed the seventeenth century, strict epistemological categories were placed upon Scriptures in order to make them prove what the Reformers had previously assumed.⁹⁷ Thiemann argues that through the later efforts of thinkers such as John Locke, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and Thomas Torrance, the doctrine of revelation became infected with

⁹⁴Introductions can be found in Gabriel Fackre, *The Christian Story: A Narrative Interpretation of Basic Christian Doctrine*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984); Michael Goldberg, *Theology and Narrative: A Critical Introduction* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982); James W. McClendon, Jr., *Biography as Theology*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Trinity Press, International, 1990); George W. Stroup, *The Promise of Narrative Theology* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981).

⁹⁵See criticisms by Millard Erickson, "Narrative Theology: Translation or Transformation," in *Festschrift: A Tribute to Dr. William Hordern*, ed. Walter Freitag (Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan Press, 1985), 29-39; Carl F. H. Henry, "Narrative Theology: An Evangelical Appraisal," *TrinJ* 8 (1987): 3-19.

⁹⁶Ronald F. Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology: The Gospel as Narrated Promise* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985).

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 10-13.

foundationalism because it became a means solely to justify Christian beliefs epistemically.⁹⁸ In light of this theory, Thiemann concludes that biblical revelation must be re-evaluated in light of nonfoundational insights and thereby argues that the narrative of Scripture “. . . does not provide an indubitable foundation for the adjudication of disputes between Christians and non-Christians. At best, it provides the linguistic and epistemic frameworks within which the Christian believes, reasons, argues, and lives.”⁹⁹ Moreover, the validity of this approach continues to spark discussions because of its close association with the subject of foundationalism.

A third subject, which acts as the fulcrum undergirding the issues of foundationalism and the philosophy of language, is the nature of truth.¹⁰⁰ Historically, evangelicals have adopted what is known as the correspondence theory of truth.¹⁰¹ This model postulates that truth “corresponds with fact and is objective . . .”¹⁰² Though it can be expressed in several forms such as equations, ideas, or propositions, the point is that truth accurately reflects reality because it exists independently of human understanding, which, in turn, means that this theory is inseparably linked to the concept of metaphysical

⁹⁸Ibid., 15.

⁹⁹Ibid., 156. Indeed, this does echo the thoughts of Lindbeck.

¹⁰⁰For an overview of “truth” as a philosophical term, see Paul Horwich, “Truth,” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Robert Audi, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 929-31. For treatments of the diverse ways truth has been understood by various evangelicals, see Peter Hicks, *Evangelical Truth*, 39-131; and an overview of five evangelical theologians including Cornelius Van Til, Francis Schaeffer, Carl Henry, Donald Bloesch, and Millard Erickson provided by James Emery White, *What is Truth?* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994).

¹⁰¹For treatments of this model of truth, see A. N. Prior, “Correspondence Theory of Truth,” in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan and The Free Press, 1967), 2:223-32; Bede Rundle, “Correspondence Theory of Truth,” in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 166-67.

¹⁰²White, *What is Truth?* 5.

realism.¹⁰³ Moreover, it is these epistemic commitments concerning the nature of truth that conservative evangelicals have been known to embrace and apply in their formulation of the doctrinal mandates and moral imperatives that have become the hallmarks of evangelical theology.

This theory of truth, however, now falls on hard times with the arrival of postmodern thought. The initial post-Kantian revolution, which repudiated any objective link between human knowledge and the world as it exists outside of noetic apprehension, has evolved into a contemporary intellectual climate that is skeptical towards any notion of a universally-privileged belief system, or metanarrative. All epistemic frameworks are socially-oriented constructs that portray views of truth rather than Truth itself. In turn, this ethos has come to promote at least two other definitions of truth.¹⁰⁴ One is known as a pragmatic theory of truth. In retrospect, this theory again has its roots in the ideologies promoted by William James and John Dewey.¹⁰⁵ As previously surveyed, this notion sees truth as beliefs that simply provide desired results. Yet the obvious weakness with this view is that it has a tendency to “. . . leave out the question of morals. The end seldom, if ever, justify the means.”¹⁰⁶ The second model, which is becoming the most prominent in

¹⁰³Peter Hicks offers a helpful summary of how this view has dominated epistemology in the majority of the western world. He asserts that this model includes four basic components, those being objectivity (truth exists outside and independent of us), universality (truth is the same the world over and for all people), eternity (truth lasts forever), and intelligibility (truth can be discovered, comprehended, and known truly). See Hicks, *Evangelical Truth*, 10.

¹⁰⁴Note that these theories of truth are closely related to theories of epistemology as well.

¹⁰⁵Consult Gertrude Ezorsky, “Pragmatic Theory of Truth,” in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 6:427-30; Peter H. Hare, “Pragmatic Theory of Truth,” in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 709-10; C. J. Misak, *Truth and the End of Inquiry: A Peircean Account of Truth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

¹⁰⁶White, *What is Truth?* 6.

postmodern thought, is known as coherentism.¹⁰⁷ This view defines truth as a set of beliefs or ideas that display systemic consistency or logical structure.¹⁰⁸ Unlike the epistemology of CF, which views some beliefs as being based on others, coherentism views all beliefs as various parts within a given system that are interlinked or connected in an epistemological web or mosaic. The glaring problem this theory poses is that it is conceivable to be exposed to various coherent systems that directly contradict each other.¹⁰⁹ So evangelicals are also faced with the challenge of either defending the correspondence theory of truth, accepting the pragmatic or coherentist theories of truth, or formulating other models that are unsusceptible to postmodern skepticism.

As the subjects of epistemology, revelation, and truth continue to be re-formulated and modified in light of the postmodern setting, the vast responses that are coming from various segments of the evangelical community are diverse to say the least. So much so that a severe rift is beginning to gradually polarize evangelicals into mutually

¹⁰⁷See Laurence Bonjour, "Coherence Theory of Truth," in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 153-54; Michael R. DePaul, "Coherentism," in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 154-55; Sybil Wolfram, "Coherence Theory of Truth," in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 140.

¹⁰⁸Consult Robert Audi, *The Structure of Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 138-40; W. V. O. Quine and J. S. Ullian, *The Web of Beliefs* (New York: Random House, 1970); Ernest Sosa, "The Raft and the Pyramid: Coherence Versus Foundations in the Theory of Knowledge," in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, vol. 5, *Studies in Epistemology*, ed. Peter French, Theodore Uehling, and Howard Wettstein (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), 3-25; Wood, *Epistemology*, 113-25.

¹⁰⁹White, *What is Truth?* 5. Thinkers engaged in this dialogue are aware of this dilemma as well as many others. For more discussion, see Wood, *Epistemology*, 113-19; Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate*, 80-84. Various solutions to the problems of coherentism can be seen in works by Laurence Bonjour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985); Keith Lehrer, *Theory of Knowledge* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1990); Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988); and even Millard Erickson, *Truth or Consequences: The Promise and Perils of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001).

exclusive camps.¹¹⁰ While some see the postmodern worldview as just another cultural threat that must be withstood, others see it as the long-awaited door of opportunity for escaping the outdated fundamentalist-evangelical-liberal stereotypes. This latter perception is based on the conviction that earlier expressions of both conservative evangelicalism and liberalism were actually theological projects dressed in modernistic sheep's clothing.¹¹¹

Regardless of whether this charge is reductionistic or overstated, many evangelicals who accept this theory wholesale believe the solution is to assess postmodernism and subsequently create a new non-modernistic theological method. This project, in turn, has fostered the emergence of a new postconservative, or postmodernistic evangelicalism. Those involved in this shift currently focus on substituting problematic theories that allegedly were prevalent during the modern era with new postmodern concepts.

¹¹⁰For various evangelical proposals regarding theological method, see William J. Abraham, *Canon and Criterion for Christian Theology: From Fathers to Feminism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); Donald A. D. Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience as a Model for Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990); Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prologomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2002). Likewise, for proposals even within the secular academy, see Frederic B. Burnham, ed., *Postmodern Theology: Christian Faith in a Pluralist World* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989); Sheila G. Davaney, ed., *Theology at the End of Modernity* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press, International, 1991); David Ray Griffin, *God and Religion in the Postmodern World: Essays in Postmodern Theology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989); David Tracy, "Theological Method," in *Christian Theology*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson and Robert H. King, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 35-60; Terrence W. Tilley, ed., *Postmodern Theologies: The Challenge of Religious Diversity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995).

¹¹¹For a summary of this point, see Diogenes Allen, "The End of the Modern World," 341; Roger Olson, "Whales and Elephants: Both God's Creatures but Can They Meet?" *Pro Ecclesia* 4 (1995): 168-76; Nancey Murphy, "Philosophical Resources for Postmodern Evangelical Theology," 184-93.

One of the leading analysts of this new postconservative movement is Roger Olson.¹¹² In his Presidential address to the American Theological Society in 1994, Olson assessed the early stages of this movement by claiming that many thinkers were growing weary with the neverending dissonance between evangelical scholars and mainline liberal Protestant theologians.¹¹³ Herein, Olson agrees with thinkers such as Nancey Murphy and James McClendon, Jr. that the source of this problem derives from the fact that both sides of the theological divide exercise a mutual interdependence upon modernistic ideologies by wrongfully presuming their views to be non-biased and objectively true while interpreting all opposing ideas to be necessarily and completely false.¹¹⁴ Consequently, because this ongoing tension leads to minimal or no progress in theological advancements, many including Olson are now convinced that the new postmodern mood provides a more workable framework for future theological discussions.

¹¹²Olson, who actually labeled this movement as postconservative, is the current editor of *Christian Scholar's Review* and professor of Theology at Baylor University's Truett Seminary in Waco, Texas. His thoughts on postconservatism can be seen in Roger Olson, "Postconservative Evangelicals Greet Postmodern Age," *Christian Century* 112 (1995): 480-83; idem, "Whales and Elephants," 165-89; idem, "The Future of Evangelical Theology," 40-48; idem, "Evangelical Essentials: Reservations and Reminders," *Christian Century* 116 (1999): 816-19; idem, "Reforming Evangelical Theology," in *Evangelical Futures*, 201-07; idem, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999), 590-609; and his recent apologetic for theological diversity in idem, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity and Diversity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002).

¹¹³This essay was published a year later in Olson, "Whales and Elephants," 165-89.

¹¹⁴Ibid., 175-76; Nancey Murphy and James Wm. McClendon, Jr., "Distinguishing Modern and Postmodern Theologies," *Modern Theology* 5 (1989): 206-07. Olson also cites two contemporary dialogues between evangelicals and liberals to highlight this dilemma. See Olson, "Whales and Elephants," 165-72; Clark Pinnock and Delwin Brown, *Theological Crossfire: An Evangelical/Liberal Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990); David L. Edwards and John Stott, *Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1988).

According to Olson, it is this conviction that is motivating many evangelical and liberal theologians alike to move in directions that reveal epistemic, hermeneutical, and even doctrinal commonality. However, in doing so, neither evangelicals nor liberals consider themselves to be abandoning their traditions altogether. Olson clarifies this point by stating that

Without intending to move toward liberalism, several evangelical theologians are calling for and laying the groundwork for a radical “revisioning” of evangelical theology that can be called “post-conservative” in that it sets aside the intense reaction against modernity that has characterized so much conservative Protestant theology in this century. At the same time, without intending to move toward conservatism or evangelicalism, several mainline theologians are calling for a new “post-liberal” theology that sets aside over-concern with relevance to “the modern mind” and critical, hermeneutical questions that have dominated so much of liberal Protestant theology in this century. In the process, almost unnoticed, a potential view “middle ground” has been opened up and is being explored by pioneers venturing out from both parties of Protestant theology.¹¹⁵

So while a new middle ground is being cultivated for potential dialogue, postconservatives still view themselves as evangelicals while postliberals do not. The distinctive point of transition is that both groups see their newly forming identities as transcending their formerly inherited methodologies and modernistic perspectives.

With this phenomenon in motion, Olson focuses most of his attention upon defining the various commitments of postconservatives since he is a professing evangelical who is sympathetic to the movement. Regarding the leaders of postconservatism, Olson contends that while its seminal stages originated with the thought of Bernard Ramm, some of the contemporary thinkers who presently are charting the way include theologians such as Clark Pinnock, Stanley Grenz, and William Abraham.¹¹⁶ Each of these thinkers have published works that plead with conservatives

¹¹⁵Olson, “Whales and Elephants,” 169-70.

¹¹⁶Ibid.; idem, “Postconservative Evangelicals Greet the Postmodern Age,” 481; Stanley J. Grenz and Roger Olson, *20th Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992), 297-309. Others also agree with the link between Ramm and the current surge of postconservatism. See Erickson, *The Evangelical Left*, 33-38.

to re-evaluate the nature of evangelical identity and modify their theological approaches by exchanging their predispositions with epistemological propositionalism for concepts that are more sensitive to the postmodern setting.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, as their thoughts have developed in the last decade, certain features have come to mark their general tone.

One crucial element that Olson emphasizes is that postconservatives still claim to be evangelicals. The key though is that for this circle of thinkers, the basic essentials of evangelical identity are reduced to four minimal barriers; those being a deference to the Bible as the supreme norm of truth for Christian belief, a worldview that is centered on a personal God who supernaturally interacts with creation, the grace of God that has been revealed through the person of Jesus Christ, and the church's responsibility to proclaim God's grace to the world.¹¹⁸ Olson contends that for postconservatives, these factors capsulize the essence of authentic evangelical theology because while others may add other features to this list, no self-proclaiming evangelical would detract from it.¹¹⁹

Beyond these four generic axioms that all "conservative" evangelicals endorse, Olson argues that what distinguishes most postconservatives is their willingness to

¹¹⁷See Olson, "Whales and Elephants," 170; Clark H. Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984); idem, *Tracking the Maze*; idem, "New Dimensions in Theological Method," in *New Dimensions in Evangelical Thought*, ed. David S. Dockery (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), 197-208; Stanley Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993); idem, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000); William J. Abraham, *The Coming Great Revival: Recovering the Full Evangelical Tradition* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984); idem, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology*.

¹¹⁸Olson, "The Future of Evangelical Theology," 40. In an earlier article, Olson claims that postconservatives adhere to the features popularized by David Bebbington including conversionism, or an emphasis on the "new birth," biblicism, or reliance on the Bible as the ultimate religious authority, activism, or a concern for sharing personal faith, and crucicentrism, or an emphasis on Christ's atoning work on the cross. See Olson, "Postconservative Evangelicals Greet the Postmodern Age," 480.

¹¹⁹Olson, "The Future of Evangelical Theology," 40.

challenge, modify, and if necessary repudiate all other theological constructs or doctrinal commitments that historically have been deemed essential to the evangelical tradition. This reveals a significant difference in methodology between what Olson calls evangelical traditionalists (i.e., conservatives) and evangelical reformists (i.e., postconservatives).¹²⁰ On the one hand, traditionalists are characterized by “. . . a mindset that values traditional interpretations and formulations as binding and normative and looks with suspicion upon doctrinal revisions and new proposals arising out of theological reflection,” while reformists have a less incredulous mindset “. . . that values the continuing process of constructive theology seeking new light breaking forth from God’s word.” These opposing views therefore diverge on “. . . a variety of fundamental issues, including theological boundaries, the nature of doctrine, progress in theology, and relating to nonevangelical theologies in general.”¹²¹ In more uncertain terms, conservatives apparently determine evangelical identity by adherence to multiple external doctrinal boundaries while postconservatives are more permissive of theological diversity as long as the four central values are maintained.¹²²

The theological perspectives resulting from this postconservative tolerance have been many. In summary form, Olson highlights several that have evolved in recent years.¹²³ One area of change involves the renovation of previous theological and sociological barriers allegedly caused by modernity. For example, many postconservatives are attempting to mend divisions between evangelicals and mainline liberals by sponsoring conferences for fruitful interaction. One such event convened in

¹²⁰Ibid., 41.

¹²¹Ibid.

¹²²So in actuality, the real difference between conservatives and postconservatives appears to be the amount of beliefs one must espouse in order to be considered evangelical. For the former camp, the list is simply longer than the latter.

¹²³Olson, “Postconservative Evangelicals Greet the Postmodern Age,” 480-82.

April of 1995 wherein Wheaton College and InterVarsity publishers sponsored a forum that focused on a dialogue between evangelicals and postliberals.¹²⁴ Likewise, other postconservatives, who believe evangelical theology has been monopolized by white males and “Eurocentrism,” emphasize the need to be more sensitive to multicultural theologies as represented in countries such as Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia, and Latin America and to egalitarian concerns as advocated by the organization Christians for Biblical Equality and feminists such as Elaine Storkey and Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen.¹²⁵

This postconservative emphasis on “theological congeniality” also is coupled with alarming innovations concerning various doctrinal topics such as Scripture. Some such as Clark Pinnock and Stanley Grenz reject the standard conservative views of inerrancy and propositional revelation on the charge that they tend to confine the Bible to static doctrinal categories and lead to premature proof-texting methods of theological formulation.¹²⁶ Instead, they propose that Scripture be defined under other rubrics such as narrative theology wherein the stories of the canon are treated as a holistic stories, rather than flawless documents, that give identity to the Christian community.¹²⁷

¹²⁴Ibid., 480. The papers presented at this meeting were published by InterVarsity a year later in the edited work, Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm, eds., *The Nature of Confession* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996).

¹²⁵Olson, “Postconservative Evangelicals Greet the Postmodern Age,” 481. For works that express these multicultural and egalitarian concerns, see William Dyrness, ed., *Emerging Voices in Global Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); Elaine Storkey, *Created or Constructed?: The Grand Gender Debate* (Carlisle, England: Paternoster Press, 2000); idem, *What’s Right with Feminism?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986); Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, Annelies Knoppers, and Helen M. Sterk, eds., *After Eden: Facing the Challenge of Gender Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen and Ann Carr, eds., *Religion, Feminism, and the Family* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996).

¹²⁶See Olson, “Postconservative Evangelicals Greet the Postmodern Age,” 481; Clark Pinnock, *Tracking the Maze*, 171-72, 184-85; Stanley Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 91-94.

¹²⁷Olson, “Postconservative Evangelicals Greet the Postmodern Age,” 481.

Two other related issues receiving attention among postconservatives include Christian theism and salvific inclusivism. Regarding the former, thinkers such as Pinnock, Greg Boyd, and John Sanders have denounced the model of “classical theism” wherein God is characterized as a transcendent, impassible, all-knowing, deity who meticulously ordains every detail of His creation in exchange for a new model known as open theism.¹²⁸ Specifically, this phrase refers to a redefinition of divine omniscience. Whereas in classical theism, omniscience entails exhaustive knowledge of all things including all future human decisions, open, or free-will, theists contend that God does not in fact know beforehand what human beings will choose to do. Open theists contend that Scripture does not portray God as a divine dictator who predetermines the choices of His creatures but as one who “. . . limits himself and enters into relationships of genuine response to humans, taking their pain and suffering into himself. God is a risk-taker, not one who controls everything so that nothing contrary to his desires can occur.”¹²⁹ This shift to a radical form of Arminianism has also led Pinnock, Sanders and others to re-evaluate the issue of the eternal destiny of the unevangelized.¹³⁰ While rejecting the

¹²⁸Olson observes that not all postconservatives endorse this view. See Olson, “Postconservative Evangelicals Greet the Postmodern Age,” 481. However, the literature on open theism continues to accumulate. For presentations, see Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker, and David Basinger, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994); Clark Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001); Greg Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000); John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998).

¹²⁹Erickson, *The Evangelical Left*, 29. Note also that this movement is receiving multiple criticisms from conservative evangelicals. For example, see Bruce A. Ware, *God’s Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2000); John Frame, *No Other God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2001).

¹³⁰For example, see Clark Pinnock, *A Wideness in God’s Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); John Sanders, *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992).

unwarranted extremes of universalism and pluralism, they also find the standard conservative evangelical view of exclusivism problematic as well. Their alternative is to formulate a new understanding of the relationship between God's saving grace and the world. Herein, it is argued that God's grace can penetrate cultures where people are unaware of the gospel to a sufficient degree whereby those who sincerely and earnestly seek salvation can potentially receive it.¹³¹ Olson writes that postconservatives

. . . express genuine appreciation for the grace of non-Christian cultures and religions founded on belief in the cosmic Christ . . . and the immanent Holy Spirit that strives with humans everywhere God may not be an equal-opportunity savior, but he is a caring heavenly parent who never leaves himself without a witness in nature and culture.¹³²

Along with all these innovations are other postconservative alternatives that continue to be explored in multiple fields such as epistemology, Christology, and theological method. The problem, however, with major segments of this movement is they perpetually and consistently foster ideas that many evangelicals find unsettling. It even appears that many view this movement as moving in directions that are post-evangelical if not already.¹³³ In the midst of this ongoing tension, two major questions arise. First, how does postmodernism affect the theological approaches of postconservative thinkers? What is it within the postmodern ethos that postconservatives find so attractive for furthering evangelical theology. Indeed, the answer to this question is in no way monolithic, but it is crucial to examine. Second, recognizing how diverse the postconservative movement really is, can it be possible to be maintain any significant continuity with historic evangelicalism? More specifically, must one exchange key

¹³¹Olson, "Postconservative Evangelicals Greet the Postmodern Age," 482.

¹³²Ibid.

¹³³For example, see concerns expressed by Erickson, *The Evangelical Left*, 131-47; and responses to Roger Olson in Thomas C. Oden, "The Real Reformers are Traditionalists," *CT* (February 9, 1998): 43; Timothy George, "A Theology to Die for," *CT* (February 9, 1998): 49-50.

conservative beliefs that previously have been cherished for the newer radical views of certain postconservatives in order to overcome the fallible ideologies of the modern era?

Interestingly enough, Olson sheds some light on this issue. In a recent work on theological method, Olson offers a conclusionary statement regarding the proposals of the contributors.¹³⁴ He states that the works offered by these evangelical theologians reveal that “theological reflection can be both postconservative and neither ‘left’ nor ‘right’ but solidly evangelical. These essays show how a truly evangelical theology can move along a trajectory away from fundamentalism and even conservatism . . . and toward a more biblically faithful, more culturally relevant, and therefore more evangelical theology.”¹³⁵ Notice that while Olson concedes that postconservative thought is indeed diverse, his assessment of its diversity is still couched in terms that move evangelical theology beyond standard conservatism. This is because for him, much of evangelical conservatism is equated with outdated modernism. The looming question then that still remains to be answered is this. Can evangelicals formulate a new theological method that escapes the problems of modernism, addresses the skepticism of postmodernism, and also preserves the standard core beliefs of conservative evangelicalism? Indeed, this is a key challenge that all evangelicals must address.

Surveying the Contributions of Stanley J. Grenz and Kevin J. Vanhoozer

Time has shown that the struggle over evangelical identity, which has simmered since the beginning of the post-fundamentalist era, has reached a theological boiling point with the arrival of postmodern skepticism and the related development of postconservative evangelicalism. Some believe the end result of these growing crises could be a point in the near future when the actual term evangelical will be meaningless.

¹³⁴Olson, “Reforming Evangelical Theology,” 201-07.

¹³⁵Ibid., 201.

Already, this trend can be seen in how the earlier observations of Quebedeaux and Hunter during the seventies and eighties are now echoed with even more force in the twenty-first century.¹³⁶ Likewise, it can be felt in the disagreements that continue to grow between conservative and postconservative evangelicals regarding the task of theological method.

Recognizing these challenges, the following chapters will offer an examination, contrast, and assessment of two evangelical theologians who currently are formulating theological methodologies in hopes of preserving the Christian tradition through the storm of postmodernism. Ironically, these thinkers both claim to be following postconservative agendas but display significant differences in their approaches and conclusions. The reason for this is that while one attempts to reformulate evangelical theology at the expense of various conservative evangelical beliefs, the other focuses on reformulating several of the previous constructs in which certain evangelical beliefs have been expressed. One of these theologians, who is a major voice in the postconservative movement and professor of Theology at Carey Theological Seminary and Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia, is Stanley J. Grenz.¹³⁷ The other, who uses the label postconservative differently from Grenz, is former senior lecturer of Theology at New College, University of Edinburgh and now research professor of Systematic Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, Kevin J. Vanhoozer.¹³⁸

¹³⁶See James M. Penning and Corwin E. Smidt, *Evangelicalism: The Next Generation; Does Conservative Protestantism Have a Future?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002); Stackhouse, *Evangelical Landscapes*, 47-74; Robert E. Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenge of the New World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002).

¹³⁷In actuality, Grenz chooses to qualify himself as a postmodern evangelical. See Stanley Grenz, "An Agenda for an Evangelical Theology in the Postmodern Context," *Didaskalia* 9 (1998), 2. Also, Grenz recently had the opportunity to join the faculty of Baylor University's George W. Truett Theological Seminary in Waco, Texas. Yet because of extenuating circumstances, he was not able to accept the position.

¹³⁸See his claim in Kevin Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal about the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology," in *Evangelical Futures*, 76-77.

An analysis of these two evangelicals can help delineate the issues pertinent to theological method for three primary reasons. First, both of these theologians have produced a significant amount of literature on the contemporary issues related to postmodern thought. For example, both of them have traced the historical development and philosophical trajectories of postmodernism as well as responded to numerous implications it poses for the future of evangelicalism.¹³⁹ They have also articulated their concerns regarding the present condition of theological method as well as their proposals for improvement.¹⁴⁰ Finally, their methodologies can be readily observed because they have been put into practice. Grenz, for instance, has produced works that address several doctrinal topics such as Scripture, Pneumatology, Eschatology, Anthropology, and

¹³⁹See Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*; idem, "Star Trek and the Next Generation: Postmodernism and the Future of Evangelical Theology," in *The Challenge of Postmodernism*, 89-103; Stanley Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in the Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster Press, 2001); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); idem, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998); idem, "A Lamp in the Labyrinth: The Hermeneutics of 'Aesthetic' Theology," *TrinJ* 8 (1987): 25-56; idem, "But That's Your Interpretation: Realism, Reading, and Reformation," *Modern Reformation* 8 (1999): 21-28; idem, "The World Well Staged? Theology, Culture, and Hermeneutics," in *God and Culture*, ed. D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 1-30.

¹⁴⁰See Stanley Grenz, "Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic: Theological Method after the Demise of Foundationalism," in *Evangelical Futures*, 107-36; idem, "Beyond Foundationalism: Is a Nonfoundationalist Evangelical Theory Possible?" *CSR* 30 (2000): 37-51; idem, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 61-85; idem, *Renewing the Center*, 184-217; idem, "Fideistic Revelationism: Donald Bloesch's Antirationalist Theological Method," in *Evangelical Theology in Transition*, ed. Elmer M. Colyer (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999), 35-60; idem, "Deconstructing Epistemological Certainty in Theology: An Engagement with William J. Abraham's Criterion in Christian Theology," *WesTJ* 36 (2001): 37-45; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor," 61-106; idem, "Exploring the World: Following the Word: The Credibility of Evangelical Theology in an Incredible Age," *TrinJ* 16 (1995): 3-27; idem, "The Reader in NT Study," in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, ed. Joel Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 301-28; idem, *First Theology: God, Scripture, and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 15-41.

Trinitarianism.¹⁴¹ Likewise, Vanhoozer has invested time in yielding works that deal with many of these same subjects.¹⁴²

In conjunction with their proliferation of literature and insightful contributions, a second reason why an assessment of Grenz and Vanhoozer is crucial is because their models pinpoint the core differences between contemporary evangelical and even postconservative approaches to theological method. As stated previously, both Grenz and Vanhoozer claim to be formulating postconservative models of evangelical theology. Yet Grenz's method leads evangelicalism into definite non-conservative territories whereas Vanhoozer's approach, for the most part, preserves standard pro-conservative convictions. This is not to infer, however, that they show no similarities. Indeed, their efforts address common concerns and include certain epistemological categories,

¹⁴¹See Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 494-527; idem, "The Spirit and the World: The World-Creating Function of the Text," *TToday* 57 (2000): 357-74; idem, "Belonging to God: The Quest for a Communal Spirituality in the Postmodern World," *ATJ* 54 (1999): 41-52; idem, "Eschatological Theology: Contours of a Postmodern Theology of Hope," *RevExp* 97 (2000): 339-54; idem, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei*, vol. 1 of *The Matrix of Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster Press, 2001).

¹⁴²Vanhoozer has addressed such topics as Scripture, Hermeneutics, Trinitarianism, Christology, and Anthropology. See Kevin Vanhoozer, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature: Truth and Scripture's Diverse Literary Forms," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zonderan, 1986), 49-104; idem, "God's Mighty Speech Acts: The Doctrine of Scripture Today," in *A Pathway into Holy Scripture*, ed. Philip E. Satterwaite and David F. Wright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 143-81; idem, "The Spirit of Understanding: Special Revelation and General Hermeneutics," in *Disciplining Hermeneutics: Interpretation in Christian Perspective*, ed. Roger Lundin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 131-65. idem, "Does the Trinity Belong in a Theology of Religions," in *The Trinity in a Plurastic Age*, ed. Kevin Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 41-71; idem, "Christ and Concept: Doing Theology and the 'Ministry' of Philosophy," in *Doing Theology in Today's World*, ed. John D. Woodbridge and Thomas E. McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Zonderan, 1991), 99-145; idem, "Human Being: Individual and Social," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, ed. Colin Gunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 158-88.

hermeneutical assumptions, and theological conclusions that they believe can equip evangelicalism with the necessary tools essential to communicating the gospel to postmodern mindsets. Nonetheless, their approaches do chart two noticeably different courses because one is highly sympathetic to postmodern tendencies while the other is more critical. In fact, it is these differences that can help clarify the present sources of polarization within postconservative ranks as well as the larger evangelical community.

A third and final reason why interaction with Grenz and Vanhoozer is essential is because their differences can help evangelicals chart the issues that require further investigation. One such example is whether evangelical theology can offer a tenable response to postmodernism that is neither modernistic or postmodernistic, but Christian. Though this goal is currently viewed by many as either theologically undesirable or epistemologically impossible, many evangelical voices are concluding that perhaps neither modernism or postmodernism are conducive to a Christian worldview. It seems that Grenz and Vanhoozer exemplify contrasting responses to this problem. Interaction with their models also shows how one's understanding of theological method reveals one's particular view of the relationship between theological language and biblical revelation. In other words, one's perception of the nature of doctrine reveals an even deeper understanding of one's commitment to Scripture.

Upon examining each of these factors as they relate to the works of Grenz and Vanhoozer, this dissertation will contend that the current intellectual setting does propose legitimate challenges that evangelicalism must address. Postmodernism does provide warrant for evangelicals to re-assess the methodologies of their theological forefathers and create new approaches. However, in looking at how these two contemporary theologians attempt to meet this challenge, it will also be argued that the need to move beyond elements of traditional conservative theological method does not necessarily entail the jettisoning of traditional conservative theological beliefs. Comparing the

methodology of these theologians reveals a difference between being a *postmodern* postconservative and a *confessional* postconservative. The former embraces postmodernism at the expense of essential evangelical beliefs while the other safeguards conservative beliefs in non-modernistic terms that respond to the postmodern critique. Moreover, in order to formulate the necessary points of reference for supporting this argument, we must now turn to an analysis of Grenz's thought.

CHAPTER 2

CHARTING THE GRENZIAN COURSE TO A POST- CONSERVATIVE THEOLOGICAL METHOD

As the methodological chasm gradually increases between conservative and postconservative evangelicals, contributors continue to emerge with opposing theological approaches. One voice among the latter ranks, who is extremely sympathetic to the relevancy of postmodernism and currently stands as one of the leading spokespersons on the cutting edge of the movement, is Baptist theologian Stanley J. Grenz. His prolific career as well as his close affiliations with fellow postconservative patrons have made him a leading proponent of a new postmodern evangelical theological method.¹

Regarding his background, Stanley Grenz was the youngest of three children born on January 7, 1950, to Reverend and Mrs. Richard A. Grenz.² After being raised in

¹He has co-written works with postconservatives such as professor of theology at Truett Seminary in Waco, Texas, Roger Olson, and assistant professor of Theology at Biblical Theological Seminary in Hatfield, Pennsylvania, John R. Franke. See Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson, *20th Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992); idem, *Who Needs Theology? An Invitation to the Study of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996); Stanley Grenz and John Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster Press, 2001); idem, "Theological Heritage as Hermeneutical Trajectory," in *Ancient & Postmodern Christianity: Paleo-Orthodoxy in the 21st Century*, ed. Kenneth Tanner and Christopher A. Hall (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 215-39.

²For Grenz's biographical information, see his website Stanley J. Grenz, *StanleyJ.Grenz.com: Biographical Information* [on-line]; accessed 4 March 2003; available from <http://www.stanleyjgrenz.com/bio.html>; Internet; and his reflections on being a Northern Baptist in Stanley J. Grenz, "Baptist and Evangelical: One Northern Baptist's Perspective," and "Theology and Piety among Baptists and Evangelicals," in *Southern Baptists and American Evangelicals: The Conversation Continues*, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1993), 52-56, 149-50.

a Northern Baptist home, his academic training later commenced with the earning of a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Colorado in 1973 and a Master of Divinity from Denver Seminary in 1976. He received his Doctorate of Theology (*magna cum laude*) two years later from the University of Munich in Germany where he wrote a dissertation on eighteenth-century Baptist leader Isaac Backus under the supervision of Wolfhart Pannenberg.³ He then traveled to Canada in 1979 where he pastored Rowandale Baptist Church in Winnipeg and began teaching several courses at the University of Winnipeg and Winnipeg Theological Seminary (currently Providence Seminary).

His academic career later began to blossom in 1981 when he accepted a position to serve as associate professor of Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics at North American Baptist Seminary in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Then beginning in 1990, he accepted the positions of Pioneer McDonald Professor of Baptist Heritage, Theology, and Ethics at Carey Theological Seminary and professor of Theology at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia. During this term, he also has filled an associate position as professor of Theology and Ethics at Northern Baptist Theological Seminary in Lombard, Illinois from 1996 to 1999. Currently, Grenz is still on faculty at Regent College and continues to travel and give special lectures throughout portions of Canada and the United States.

³The influence of Pannenberg on Grenz's theological method will be assessed as this chapter progresses. See his assessments and interactions with Pannenberg's thought in Stanley Grenz, *Reason for Hope: The Systematic Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); idem, "The Appraisal of Pannenberg: A Survey of the Literature," in *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Philip Clayton (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 19-52; idem, "Pannenberg and Evangelical Theology: Sympathy and Caution," *CSR* 20 (1991): 272-85; idem, "Wolfhart Pannenberg: Reason, Hope, and Transcendence," *ATJ* 46 (1991): 73-90; idem, "'Scientific' Theology/'Theological' Science: Pannenberg and the Dialogue Between Theology and Science," *Zygon* 34 (1999): 159-66. Also, a condensed synthesis of Grenz's work on Backus can be found in his article, idem, "Isaac Backus," in *Baptist Theologians*, ed. Timothy George and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1990), 102-20.

In conjunction with his teaching career, Grenz has also amassed a significant amount of influence upon evangelicalism through other means. One example is through his literary contributions. Up to the present, Grenz has authored or co-authored twenty-three books and edited or co-edited two *Festschriften*.⁴ He has likewise contributed essays in over two dozen anthologies, produced over one hundred articles in journals and periodicals as well as eighty book reviews and gained the attention of many laypeople in local churches through itinerant speaking engagements and theological works written at the popular level.⁵ Another means whereby Grenz has established himself within evangelical circles is through ongoing participation in multiple academic and evangelical organizations. To mention a few, Grenz has served as president of the National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion (1989-90) and has been an active member on the boards of the American Academy of Religion (1989-90), the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs (1983-88), the Ethics Commission of the Baptist World Alliance (1986-2000), the Social Action Commission of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (1994-1996), and the Canadian Evangelical Theological Association (1996-2000). Furthermore, he currently confers with the Theological Education Committee of

⁴His most recent book, which addresses Trinitarianism and Anthropology, is Stanley Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei*, vol. 1 of *The Matrix of Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001). Likewise, he has contributed to works in honor of Bernard Ramm and Vernon Grounds. See Grenz, ed., *Perspectives on Theology in the Contemporary World: Essays in Honor of Bernard Ramm* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1990); Stanley Grenz and Kenneth W. M. Wozniak, eds. *Christian Freedom: Essays in Honor of Vernon Grounds* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986).

⁵Regarding Grenz's interaction with churches, see the brief treatment by Karen Stiller, *Stanley Grenz: Bridging Academy and Pew* [on-line]; accessed 4 March 2003; available from <http://www.stanleyjgrenz.com/articles/trailblazers.html>; Internet. Also, for exposure to works written at the popular level, see Stanley Grenz, *Prayer: The Cry for the Kingdom* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988); idem, *The Millennial Maze* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992); idem, *Created for Community: Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Living*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998); idem, *What Christians Really Believe and Why* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998).

the Baptist World Alliance, acts as a consulting editor for *Christianity Today*, and assists the advisory boards of several Christian publishers.

When combining his literary productivity with his proven leadership skills, one quickly recognizes that Grenz is an established voice within both evangelical and academic guilds. As time has progressed, however, the fundamental proposal that distinguishes Grenz in the current evangelical landscape is his articulation of a postconservative, or more accurately, postmodernistic theological method. Grenz argues that in light of the new intellectual climate created by postmodern thought, evangelicals must revise their approaches to epistemology, apologetics, and doctrinal formulation by adopting new ways of constructing theological loci. Nonetheless, to understand the specific course that Grenz is charting and thus avoid reductionistic interpretations of his thought, one must first observe his analysis of several major factors. Specifically, his project for theology addresses four interrelated issues.

First, Grenz's approach is based partially upon his initial synthesis of the major historical and theological developments of the evangelical movement. A second element, which is actually a corollary of his understanding of evangelical identity, is his subsequent accusation that previous theological methodologies that were utilized by various evangelical theologians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were supported by modernistic assumptions. This assessment leads to a third major issue, which is Grenz's aggressive interrogation of these approaches in light of his understanding of the cultural shift from modernism to postmodernism. The charge is made that these former attempts at theological formulation have been deemed epistemologically bankrupt in light of postmodern skepticism. This conclusion finally leads Grenz to question the validity of crucial doctrinal beliefs which historically have been viewed as essential to conservative evangelicals and further apply certain concepts of postmodern thought in the process of theological method. Moreover, each of these factors must be treated individually before any critical interaction with Grenz's project can proceed.

Grenz's Historical Analysis and Assessments of the Nature of Evangelicalism

A major part of Grenz's proposals regarding contemporary theological formulation derives from his initial understanding of evangelical identity.⁶ In other words, Grenz's interpretation of the history and fundamental ethos of the evangelical movement dictates the manner in which his following proposals unfold. So the question arises as to how Grenz comes to his particular conclusions regarding evangelicalism itself. The answer includes three consecutive steps. The first entails the way Grenz traces the trajectory of evangelicalism from the theological moorings of the Reformation to the revivals of the Great Awakenings and later postwar movement of "neo-evangelicalism."⁷ The second entails Grenz's further synthesis of the various sources for theological inquiry which conservative evangelical and classical liberal theologians have used in theological method. This analysis then leads to Grenz's conclusions regarding the specific dynamics that currently unify the evangelical movement.

Regarding its historical roots, Grenz agrees that the inception of evangelicalism began during the Reformation. Recognizing that the Reformer's search for deliverance from the theological tyranny of the medieval church was in actuality a search for the gospel message itself, Grenz agrees with Kenneth Kantzer that prior to any official

⁶Grenz's perceptions of the nature of evangelicalism can be found in Stanley J. Grenz, "A Theology for the Future," *ABQ* 4 (1985): 257-67; idem, "Baptist and Evangelical," 52-67; idem, "Theology and Piety," 149-62; as well as his proposals in idem, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 21-35; and his historical survey of evangelicalism in idem, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 25-150. Finally, one can also see his perception of evangelicalism by how he addresses the issue of theological boundaries within the context of the Evangelical Theological Society in idem, "Die begrenzte Gemeinschaft ('The Boundaried People') and the Character of Evangelical Theology," *JETS* 45 (2002): 301-16.

⁷Grenz uses this term to refer to the coalition that diverged from the fundamentalist-modernist controversies of the early twentieth century. See Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 16, 54, 85-86.

distinction between Protestants and Roman Catholics, “. . . the sixteenth-century Reformers distanced themselves from their opponents by appropriating the term ‘evangelical.’”⁸ So in other words, “Just as ‘evangelical’ is connected etymologically to ‘gospel,’ so also as a designation of a particular party in the church the word is linked to the Reformation.”⁹ Consequently, this theological relationship between Protestant “evangelicals” and the “evangel” sets the platform for Grenz’s particular interpretations of Reformation thought.

Grenz contends that the primary contribution of the Reformers was a renewed focus on personal conversion. This was initially pioneered by the well-known Augustinian monk Martin Luther, whose emphasis on the spiritual impotence of mankind via sinful depravity led him to the solace of justification by faith alone (*sola fide*). Yet alongside this element of Luther’s thought, Grenz also highlights his perceptions of the law. For Luther, the law had “at least” two primary uses; one was to restrain sin as exercised by such divinely-ordained functions as human government while the other was to act as a vehicle of divine conviction that led sinners to repentance and saving faith.¹⁰

Building on Luther’s renewed emphasis on justification, Grenz then argues that the Geneva Reformer John Calvin took Protestant thought a step further by advocating a renewed emphasis on sanctification. While in complete agreement with Luther’s thoughts on soteriology and the two-fold use of the law, Calvin also contended that there

⁸Ibid., 26; Kenneth S. Kantzer, “The Future of the Church and Evangelicalism,” in *Evangelicals Face the Future*, ed. Donald E. Hoke (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1978), 128. Also see Grenz’s agreement with this point in Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 22.

⁹Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 26. Grenz also points out that “churches that emerged from the German Reformation adopted the name *evangelisch* (evangelical) as a means of highlighting Luther’s emphasis on the gospel and in order to set them apart from the Roman Catholic church,” Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 22.

¹⁰Grenz is also aware that there is ongoing debate as to whether Luther argued for a possible third use of the law. See Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 29-30.

was an additional third use for the law. Specifically, it “. . . revealed God’s will to believers as to instruct them in holy living.”¹¹ Grenz observes that this idea proved to revolutionize Protestant thought up to that time. He writes,

Calvin transformed the relationship between law and gospel in the Christian life. According to Luther, the two retain a dialectical relationship; the believer stands continuously in need of being confronted by the demands of the law, which point out sin, and hearing the gospel message of divine forgiveness in Christ, which invokes faith. In Calvin, in contrast, the relationship becomes doubly sequential. In its salvific use, the law paves the way for the hearing of the gospel, but the acceptance of the gospel, in turn, opens the door for the reintroduction of the law which now functions according to its third use. And in this third use, the law accompanies the believer throughout life. In effect, Calvin’s addition of the *tertium usus legis* introduced a new understanding of sanctification into the sixteenth-century discussion of soteriology.¹²

Herein, this approach to understanding the practical outworking of holiness in the lives of believers became a concern that ultimately contributed to a later divergence between Lutheran and Reformed thought.¹³

Based upon the contributions of the Reformers, Grenz argues that Protestant-evangelical thought received further clarifications through two key movements.¹⁴ One, which derived from the Reformed tradition, was English Puritanism. Grenz contends that a major priority within Puritan thought was to ensure that the church only encompassed those who were truly believers, or the elect. They attempted to amass certain evidences that would validate genuine conversions and therefore “. . . bequeathed the quest for

¹¹Grenz also mentions that Calvin was simply following in the footsteps of Melancthon and Martin Bucer on this point. *Ibid.*, 30.

¹²*Ibid.*, 31.

¹³Grenz notes that many modern-day theologians such as Millard Erickson, Gordon Lewis, Bruce Demarest, and Wayne Grudem still maintain the Reformed tendency to divide the acts of forensic justification and the necessary but gradual outworking of sanctification. *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 33-43; *idem*, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 23; *idem*, “Baptist and Evangelical,” 56-57.

certainty of personal election and the vision of the building of a truly Christian nation.”¹⁵ The second influential movement was Lutheran Pietism. Similar to Puritanism, German pietists were concerned with the spiritual welfare of their Lutheran churches but instead of withdrawing from the larger state church, pietists desired to reform churches from the inside.¹⁶ They attempted to escape the barren adherence to creeds and doctrinal formulas by emphasizing the need for inner conversion and the bearing of spiritual fruit in practical everyday living.

Following the theological liberation of the Reformation and the Puritan/Pietistic emphasis on spiritual fervency, Grenz sees the evangelical tradition as gaining further momentum and reaching its climax in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Initially in the 1700’s, the new emphasis on gospel conversion, or what Grenz calls “convertive piety,” swept across Britain and then infiltrated the new American colonies through the open-air preaching and revivalistic ministries of individuals such as John Wesley and George Whitefield.¹⁷ Consequently, by the time the nineteenth century commenced, this concept had established Protestant evangelicalism as the dominant force in the newly formed United States.¹⁸

As the growing American evangelical tradition entered the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Grenz highlights the changing intellectual climate that eventually

¹⁵Grenz, “Baptist and Evangelical,” 57.

¹⁶Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 41.

¹⁷Though Grenz uses this phrase, it actually was coined by Donald Dayton. See Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 23; Donald Dayton, “The Limits of Evangelicalism,” in *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, ed. Donald W. Dayton and Robert K. Johnston (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1991), 48.

¹⁸Grenz mentions three major factors that allowed evangelicalism to prosper in nineteenth-century America. One was the momentum of revivalism as led by preachers such as Charles Finney and Billy Sunday. Another was the welcome interaction between clergy and various civic leaders and the third entailed the massive outgrowth of major denominational organizations. See Grenz, “Baptist and Evangelical,” 59-60.

led it into disarray. The combination of massive social diversity caused by the influx of non-Protestant immigrants, the European impact of Darwinian thought on scientific theories, and the growing theological influence of German modernism eventually spawned a severe dispute known as the modernist-fundamentalist controversy.¹⁹ Herein, naturalistic views of science, critical theories regarding the derivation of the Bible, and the redefining of Christianity to entail mere social humanitarianism convinced many that evangelicalism was in serious jeopardy. In response, evangelical leaders such as dispensationalists Lewis Sperry Chafer and A. C. Gaebelein, Baptists such as A. C. Dixon, and Presbyterians such as William G. Moorehead and New Testament scholar J. Gresham Machen led the charge against the growing threat of theological liberalism.²⁰

The problem, however, with this evangelical emphasis on the “fundamentals” of the faith was that many fundamentalists became apathetic toward theological interaction with mainline churches and society in general. They chose, instead, to withdraw and retreat into denominational subcultures in order to maintain doctrinal integrity and ecclesiastical purity. By the early 1940’s, this unfortunate attitude led thinkers such as Carl Henry, Harold Ockenga and others to salvage the evangelical heritage from the “intellectual ghetto” of fundamentalism by creating a fresh vision for a new evangelicalism. Moreover, while Grenz agrees that this new evangelicalism has endured throughout the twentieth century, he believes it is now diverging into various theological and social directions.

With this historical survey as a backdrop, Grenz also identifies three primary sources for theological reflection before attempting to offer his specific conclusions regarding the core identity of evangelicalism.²¹ Grenz believes the task of theology

¹⁹Ibid., 60-61.

²⁰Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 78.

²¹See Grenz, “Theology and Piety,” 150-53.

requires that theologians look to three sources: “. . . the biblical documents as expressions of the *kerygma*; the heritage of the believing community which is expressed in, but not limited to, the confessions of the church; and the contemporary situation in which the church is to minister.”²² This means theology should include the utilization of the Bible, doctrinal traditions, and culture. The inherent problem with this task though is that different groups fluctuate in how they use these sources. Grenz asserts that fundamentalists tend primarily to focus on the Bible as their sole source for theological formulation while progressives or liberals draw heavily from contemporary cultural ideologies and confessional evangelicals also look to their particular body of beliefs and denominational loyalties for direction.²³ Nevertheless, for Grenz the key is to learn how to develop a balanced theological reflection that sees the value of all three sources.

Another way Grenz highlights the tension created by the use of these elements is by analyzing prominent thinkers within the neo-evangelical movement. In his recent work on the condition of evangelicalism entitled *Renewing the Center*, Grenz compares three generations of evangelical theologians by comparing Carl Henry with Bernard Ramm, Millard Erickson with Clark Pinnock, and Wayne Grudem with John Sanders.²⁴ He concludes that these three sets of theologians illustrate the diverging priorities between current conservative and postconservative approaches. On one side, Henry, Erickson, and Grudem are summarized as advocating theological methods that are sensitive to traditional neo-evangelical beliefs such as biblical inerrancy and Calvinistic soteriology. Ramm, Pinnock, and Sanders, on the other hand, are portrayed as pioneers who have challenged previously accepted evangelical beliefs by attempting to engage in

²²Ibid., 150; idem, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 104-08.

²³It is also recognized that these categories can intermix. For instance, some confessionalists can likewise be fundamentalists or a liberal progressives depending on what traditions they are attempting to preserve. See Grenz, “Theology and Piety,” 151.

²⁴See chaps. 3-5 of Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 85-162.

multiple dialogues with alternative views on various subjects such as the nature of biblical revelation, divine foreknowledge, and the exclusivity of the gospel.²⁵ Yet the defining point between these two groups of theologians is how much of their surrounding cultural ideologies are absorbed into their individual approaches.

In light of the immense diversity within the history of the evangelical tradition as well as the multiple views of theological formulation that are represented within the ranks of twentieth-century neo-evangelicalism, Grenz is convinced that the nature of evangelicalism must be defined by a dynamic that unifies the entire movement. In searching for a solution, Grenz concludes that former proposals for the most part have been unsuccessful. For example, Grenz finds Marsden's sociological dichotomy between generic evangelicals who subscribe to certain doctrinal viewpoints and "card carrying evangelicals" who identify themselves with the transdenominational movement as helpful, but insufficient.²⁶ Likewise, attempts to restrict evangelical identity to a specific set of theological claims is unhelpful because it is too difficult to pin down what professing evangelicals believe and thus construct one grand scheme upon which all would agree.²⁷

²⁵It must be noted that these polarities have been assessed by some as overly reductionistic and even wrongfully biased. For example, see criticisms in D. A. Carson, "Domesticating the Gospel: A Review of Stanley J. Grenz's *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era*," *SBJT* 6 (2002): 82-97. Also, Grenz responds to Carson's concerns in Stanley J. Grenz, *Toward an Undomesticated Gospel: A Response to D. A. Carson*, page 2 [on-line]; accessed 7 January 2003; available from <http://www.modernreformation.org/monthly/grenzresponse.html>; Internet.

²⁶Grenz, "Baptist and Evangelical," 54-55; idem, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 26-27.

²⁷Grenz, "Theology and Piety," 149. Grenz points out elsewhere that throughout Christian history, genuine theological humility has all too often been the first casualty in the fervent defense of doctrinal conformity because theologians tend to fall into the temptation of setting up themselves as the standard for evangelical belief, thus exchanging the descriptive for the prescriptive, or the imperative for the indicative. See Grenz, "Die begrenzte Gemeinschaft," 311; idem, *Renewing the Center*, 176-77.

A prime example that Grenz uses to illustrate this point is the issue of biblical authority. While evangelicals comply on the imperative role of Scripture for the Christian tradition, no consensus can be obtained regarding a single hermeneutical approach for biblical interpretation nor can universal harmony be reached regarding the specific philosophical categories that should be used to articulate a holistic definition of biblical inerrancy. Furthermore, even evangelicals who do agree on inerrancy often find themselves in a quandary regarding various social issues.²⁸ These ongoing disagreements persuade Grenz to conclude that though “commitment to the Bible as our authority is foundational . . . , formulations as to how the Bible is authoritative, although helpful and important, will not lead to unanimity.”²⁹

Grenz’s alternate proposal for defining the nature of evangelical identity consists of a dialectic between piety and doctrine. The former element has primacy because for Grenz, evangelicalism essentially designates a particular way of expressing worship, prayer, and fellowship or the “. . . specific vision of what it means to be a Christian.”³⁰ In a sense then, “the evangelical ethos is more readily ‘sensed’ than described theologically.”³¹ Yet he also concedes that doctrinal beliefs are essential, for Christian piety is always “. . . cradled by a specific doctrinal or theological outlook.”³² The point of emphasis is that individuals or communities can be deemed evangelical if

²⁸To support this point, he mentions that “the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, meeting in Chicago in December 1986, could not produce a document on social issues that all 300 participants could sign.” Grenz, “Theology and Piety,” 158.

²⁹Ibid., 160.

³⁰Grenz, “Baptist and Evangelical,” 55. Other supporting factors include a shared way of living (or piety), a sense of community, and personal faith. Together, these define what “. . . lies at the heart of what the evangelical party within the church throughout history has sought to maintain.” Grenz, “Baptist and Evangelical,” 55-56.

³¹Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 31.

³²Grenz, “Theology and Piety,” 156.

they derive their theological constructs from the stories of the biblical narrative and converge upon the distinct spirituality of the gospel message.³³

The Modernizing of the Evangelical Heritage: Grenzian Criticisms of “Modernistic” Theological Methodologies

Following his historical assessments and preferable revisions of evangelical identity, the next logical step that Grenz makes in setting the stage for his own theological method is to evaluate the current approaches that conservative evangelicals practice.³⁴ This analysis begins with the assumption that present-day conservative evangelicalism is in fact the methodological heir of the nineteenth-century Princetonian tradition as represented by theologians such as Charles Hodge, his son A. A. Hodge, and B. B. Warfield. With this thought acting as a basis, Grenz’s assessment proceeds in four consecutive stages. First, Grenz begins with a search for the dominant epistemic model that was adopted by the nineteenth-century Princeton thinkers. This point is then correlated to a second issue, which is the gradual prominence of the doctrine of Scripture that subsequently evolved in Princetonian theology. This dynamic, in turn, leads Grenz to give careful attention to how these previous assumptions regarding epistemology and biblical revelation influenced the ways in which these theologians understood the nature of doctrinal development. Finally, Grenz concludes that these developments in Princetonian thought, which molded the later theological paradigms of twentieth-century, neo-evangelicals, now face serious opposition and criticisms.

³³Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 31-35. Grenz also states, “I would suggest that, above all, to be ‘evangelical’ entails numbering oneself among a people who claim to have been encountered in Jesus Christ by the God of the Bible.” Grenz, “An Agenda for Evangelical Theology in the Postmodern Context,” *Didaskalia* 9 (1998): 4.

³⁴For his treatments, see Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 61-72; idem, “Beyond Foundationalism: Is a Nonfoundationalist Evangelical Theology Possible?” *CSR* 30 (2000): 57-66. This latter article has also been modified in Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 28-37; and Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 184-90.

This case begins with a search to discover the specific epistemological assumptions that had the most impact during the Enlightenment. In so doing, Grenz joins the contention of most scholars and historians that early on classical foundationalism (hereafter CF) became the dominant model for understanding the function of noetic structures.³⁵ Whether it was through the use of human reason in Cartesian rationalism or the emphasis on sense experience via Lockian empiricism, the fundamental agenda of CF was to discover a reliable source for scientific and religious inquiry that would be able to “. . . overcome the uncertainty generated by our human liability to error and the inevitable disagreements that follow.”³⁶ This shift to epistemic autonomy gradually led many thinkers to distinguish between religious beliefs that could be supported by reason (i.e., natural religion) and those that could not, but were merely advocated by religious communities (i.e., revealed religion).³⁷ Grenz argues that this dichotomy ultimately led later thinkers of the Enlightenment era to either adopt skeptical or ambivalent attitudes toward Christianity altogether.

Grenz then notes that as the later nineteenth century approached, two major attempts were made to salvage both foundationalist epistemology and Christian theology. One approach was the movement of classical liberalism. Herein, adherents were convinced that Christianity could survive the cultural onslaught of modernism only if its

³⁵Grenz defines foundationalism as “. . . merely the acknowledgement of the seemingly obvious observation that not all beliefs we hold (or assertions we formulate) are on the same level, but that some beliefs (or assertions) anchor others. Stated in the opposite manner, certain of our beliefs (or assertions) receive their support from other beliefs (or assertions) that are more ‘basic’ or ‘foundational.’” Grenz, “Beyond Foundationalism,” 59. Likewise, he is also careful to distinguish between “classical” foundationalists, who attempt to ground the entire edifice of human knowledge on indubitable facts and invincible certainty, and “soft” or “modest” foundationalists, who use the same noetic methodology as CF but do not claim that their basic beliefs are held with absolute certainty. Grenz, “Beyond Foundationalism,” 59-62.

³⁶Grenz, “Beyond Foundationalism,” 59.

³⁷Ibid., 62; idem, *Renewing the Center*, 189.

beliefs were reconstructed in such a fashion that they would be conducive to modern scientific and philosophical mindsets.³⁸ The final solution was to follow the heritage of Schleiermacher and relocate the locus of theological authority in the allegedly universal human reality of religious experience.³⁹ It was believed that the common yearning to rely on the divine could act as an epistemic edifice that would sustain the essence of Christianity. The end result though was the jettisoning of many crucial beliefs that historically had been viewed as essential to the Christian faith.

The alternative movement, which Grenz spends most of his energy examining, was the resurgence of conservative evangelicalism through the ground-breaking efforts of the nineteenth century Princeton theologians. Like classical liberals, Grenz asserts that conservative thinkers such as the Hodges and B. B. Warfield were also searching for a foundation that could undergird Christianity in light of modernistic criticisms.⁴⁰ Yet the defining difference was that they were unwilling to abandon cherished beliefs for the sake of cultural appeasement. Instead, they chose to solidify their epistemic foundation upon the doctrine of Scripture, which in turn leads to the second major phase of Grenz's thoughts on conservative theological method.

Grenz interprets the Princetonian focus on Scripture as developing at two levels. The first commenced through the preliminary efforts of Charles Hodge, whose emphasis on biblical veracity was motivated by his concern to maintain the integrity of Reformed orthodoxy in light of the ominous threat of Schleiermacher.⁴¹ Hodge argued

³⁸Stanley J. Grenz, "From Liberalism to Postliberalism: Theology in the 20th Century," *RevExp* 96 (1999): 386.

³⁹Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 59; Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 189.

⁴⁰Assessments of Princetonian theology can be seen in Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 65-67; idem, *Renewing the Center*, 70-80, 189-90; Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 60-63.

⁴¹Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 73.

that Christian beliefs were based on an objective, immutable source rather than the fallible subjectivity of religious experience. That foundation was the Bible because it was divinely-inspired and thereby error-free, or inerrant. Whether the Scriptures spoke of moral and religious truths, or made scientific, historical, or geographical claims, all statements that a sacred writer recorded were true.⁴² Even when biblical passages appeared to contain discrepancies or problematic claims, Hodge still asserted that “they furnish no rational ground for denying Scriptural infallibility.”⁴³

Hodge’s thoughts on Scripture were later echoed and advanced even further by his son Archibald Alexander Hodge and his later successor Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield.⁴⁴ Grenz notes that as they came on the academic scene, their efforts to defend the reliability of Scripture were mounted in response to more enemies other than just Schleiermacher. With the growing momentum of classical liberalism, they also faced “. . . an increasingly secular scientific view of the universe and German higher criticism, which had been on the rise throughout the century but hit America with full force after the Civil War.”⁴⁵ Grenz deduces that their reaction was to concentrate upon substantiating the concept of inerrancy. For example, the truthfulness of Scripture was supported by appealing to empirical evidence such as fulfilled prophecies and verifiable historical

⁴²Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, abridged ed., ed. Edward N. Gross (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988; reprint, 1992), 83-84.

⁴³Ibid., 88-89.

⁴⁴For example, see the essay co-written by A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield entitled “Inspiration,” in *The Princeton Theology: 1812-1921*, ed. Mark A. Noll, 2nd ed. (Baker: Grand Rapids: 2001), 218-32; the individual treatment of inspiration by B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, ed. Samuel G. Craig, (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948; reprint, 1970), 169-226; and his defense of inerrancy in B. B. Warfield, “The Inerrancy of the Original Autographs-1893,” in *The Princeton Theology*, 268-74.

⁴⁵Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 73.

accounts.⁴⁶ It was also enforced through the individual efforts of Warfield, who examined the Scriptures to observe what they claimed about themselves.⁴⁷ He postulated that the Bible assumed its own authority and therefore concluded that inerrancy meant *a priori* that every biblical passage was free of all error.⁴⁸ According to Grenz though, the key difference between former Reformed views of Scripture and the Princetonian tradition was that “In contrast to their forebears who appealed to the inerrancy of Scripture against Rome’s claim to be the repository of certain truth, the Princeton theologians needed an error-free Bible to respond to the challenges of an increasingly secular culture, on the one hand, and a rising liberal Christianity, on the other.”⁴⁹ So in Grenz’s view, while the Princetonian articulation of inerrancy was formulated in order to create a new theological fort that could solidify Christian truth claims against the incredulity of modernism, their motivations and concerns were entirely different from their Reformed forefathers.

Another characterization of Scripture that flowed out of the Princeton emphasis on inerrancy was the concept of propositional revelation. Recognizing that all Scripture was inspired and therefore necessarily true and unchanging, it was likewise acknowledged that all biblical claims were given through the means of human communication. This led to the logical deduction that all verbal statements within the Bible could be summarized into timeless, universally applicable concepts or mandates that transcended all cultures.⁵⁰ Special revelation thereby became a comprehensive

⁴⁶Grenz, “Beyond Foundationalism,” 64.

⁴⁷See Warfield’s detailed treatment in B. B. Warfield, “It Says: Scripture Says: God Says,” in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, 299-348.

⁴⁸Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 77.

⁴⁹Ibid., 73.

⁵⁰Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 67.

reservoir of divinely-revealed facts that human cognitive abilities could apprehend to a significant extent. This in turn leads to the third segment of Grenz's analysis.

In accordance with the assessment of historians such as George Marsden, Grenz also argues that the Princetonian choice to establish a new foundationalism through the medium of Scripture was combined with Scottish Common-Sense Realism in order to formulate an objective means of theological investigation.⁵¹ Believing this strategy consummated the Princetonian theological method, Grenz traces the initial development of this approach to the work of seventeenth-century Reformed thinker Francis Turretin who defined the task of theology as entailing the systematization of the teachings of Scripture.⁵² The key advancements that fit hand-in-glove with this Reformed scholastic methodology were the scientific and epistemological theories of eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid.⁵³ Grenz summarizes Reid's view as entailing the belief that the psychological make-up of human beings entitles them to accept certain ideas as self-evident and above suspicion. This *prima facie* mentality later found great success in America because it promoted the "... basic reliability of the human senses to perceive objects as they actually exist, together with the ability of the mind to classify the evidence so gleaned and carefully organize it into facts about the world."⁵⁴ Yet Grenz's

⁵¹See Grenz's *Renewing the Center*, 71; idem, "Beyond Foundationalism," 63-64; George Marsden, "The Collapse of American Evangelical Academia," in *Faith and Rationality: Faith and Belief in God*, ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 245-47.

⁵²Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 66. This point is also correlated to Richard Muller's assessment of seventeenth-century scholasticism regarding the desire to discover a system of right-doctrine. See Richard Muller, "Scholasticism Protestant and Catholic: Francis Turretin on the Object and Principles of Theology," *Church History* 55 (1986): 204.

⁵³Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 71. Also consult Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, ed. A. D. Woodley (London: Macmillan and Co., 1941).

⁵⁴Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 71.

primary concern with Reidian thought lies in how Princetonian theologians later utilized it in theological inquiry.

The implementation of Common Sense Realism into the Princetonian tradition is initially observed in how Charles Hodge infused Reidian scientific theory into the process of doctrinal development. For example, Hodge argued in his section on method in his systematic theology that just as scientists observe the facts of nature, theologians are to observe the facts of the Bible.⁵⁵ So just as scientists use their abilities to examine the objective, universally true facts of nature, theologians study the unchangeable, error-free, propositions of Scripture. This point leads to Hodge's famous dictum that the Bible is the theologians "storehouse of facts" that he examines in order to formulate all the various propositional axioms in a coherent order.⁵⁶ Grenz concludes that even though this approach was deeply embedded with modernistic tendencies, Hodge's son as well as Warfield adopted this theological method and passed it on to the future evangelical generation that would eventually separate from twentieth-century fundamentalism.

Grenz's treatment of the development of conservative evangelical theological method ends with the charge that twentieth-century neo-evangelicalism simply revised and advanced the priorities of the Princeton tradition. Beginning with the opposition to Barthian neo-orthodoxy by thinkers such as Gordon H. Clark and later by Carl Henry, Grenz notes that the ideas of inerrancy and propositional revelation again became prominent within evangelical circles.⁵⁷ The concept was especially enhanced by Henry who argued that a fundamental link existed between the God-given cognitive capacities to

⁵⁵See Grenz, "An Agenda for Evangelical Theology," 5; Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 28-29.

⁵⁶Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 27.

⁵⁷See Gordon H. Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Religion* (Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation, 1986); Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 6 vols. (Waco: Word, 1976; reprint, Wheaton: Crossway, 1999), 3:216-29, 272-303.

understand clear human communication and the rational, reasonable nature of propositions stated in Scripture.⁵⁸ Coupled with the assumption that the Bible only contained accurate statements, Grenz argues that Henry's work simply ushered the Princetonian modernistic approach into the newly formed evangelical movement.⁵⁹

In light of Henry's contributions, Grenz also identifies other evangelicals whom he believes have accepted the mantle of propositionalism and revitalized rationalism. One example is Millard Erickson. Though Grenz commends Erickson for his attempts to deal with the tension between theological development and cultural contextualization, he still categorizes Erickson within the methodological camp of Henry and the Princetonian predecessors because of his ingrained commitment to inerrancy and later criticisms of the postconservative movement.⁶⁰ Other evangelical theologians Grenz mentions include his former seminary professors Bruce Demarest and Gordon Lewis who co-wrote a systematic theology entitled *Integrative Theology*.⁶¹ Grenz interprets their approach to theological method as parroting Hodgian and Henrian thought because they assume the timeless, universal nature of Scriptural assertions and maintain that the goal of theology is to amass true statements into a series of factual propositions by using the canons of logic and scientific methods.⁶² Finally, in similar fashion, Grenz categorizes

⁵⁸For his assessments of Henry's thought, see Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 67-70; idem, *Renewing the Center*, 86-102.

⁵⁹Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 69-70.

⁶⁰Ibid., 71; idem, *Renewing the Center*, 118-34. Also see Erickson's treatment of Scripture in Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 224-65; and his reaction to postconservative evangelicalism in Millard Erickson, *The Evangelical Left: Encountering Postconservative Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 82-86.

⁶¹Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987).

⁶²Ibid., 1:25-27; Grenz, "Beyond Foundationalism," 64-65.

Wayne Grudem within this overall approach and even views him as a potential successor to Erickson.⁶³ Because he defines the task of systematic theology as the attempt to determine what the whole Bible teaches about any given topic, Grenz argues that Grudem perpetuates the unfortunate modernistic tendencies of his conservative forebearers by reducing the theological task to initial collections of random points that the Bible makes on given topics and the subsequent synthesis of the data into cohesive axioms.⁶⁴

This complex accusation that evangelical theology for the last century has been practiced in light of previous nineteenth-century thinkers who simply rerouted CF in the nature of Scripture and adopted the metaphysical realism of Common Sense philosophy convinces Grenz that contemporary conservatives are in actuality evangelical modernists. They are evangelical because they adhere to a common spirituality grounded in the gospel and Scripture. Yet they are modernists because they “. . . advocate that we continue to engage in theological reflection on the basis of the questions and assumptions that arose out of the Enlightenment.”⁶⁵

This apparent reality leads Grenz to note three problems with this phase of the evangelical tradition. One is that the noble endeavor to formulate all the major teachings of Scripture into a systematic whole eventually led to the unintended silencing of the Bible altogether. “The conservative’s focus on the construction of the one true set of doctrines . . . replaced treating the Bible as text with the quest for the revelation that supposedly lies behind the texts of Scripture.”⁶⁶ So while classical liberals made Scripture subordinate to religious experience, conservatives made Scripture subordinate

⁶³Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 154-59.

⁶⁴See Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 21; Grenz, “Beyond Foundationalism,” 65.

⁶⁵Grenz, “An Agenda for Evangelical Theology,” 1.

⁶⁶Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 63.

to their systematizations of theological truth. Second, Grenz contends that though the desire to preserve the reliability of Scripture through the concepts of propositional revelation and inerrancy were helpful, there are other elements of communication and interpretation that evangelicals have yet to successfully address.⁶⁷ Though some thinkers such as Erickson have noted this problem, Grenz agrees with John Jefferson Davis's critique that conservative approaches have "... tended to promote a repetition of traditional formulations of biblical doctrine, rather than appropriate recontextualizations of doctrines in response to changing cultural and historical conditions."⁶⁸ Conservatives fail to communicate with the culture because they have refused to understand their active participation within it. Finally, the third problem that Grenz mentions leads to the brink of his own theological method. This entails a mandate for evangelicals to adapt to the current cultural hostilities toward all modernistic epistemologies and methods of inquiry.

Reformulating Evangelical Beliefs in Light of New Postmodern Perceptions

After revising the essence of evangelical identity and reducing much of twentieth-century conservative evangelicalism to a Christianized version of modernity, the final blow Grenz delivers in order to substantiate his proposals for a new theological method is the cultural transition from modernism to postmodernism.⁶⁹ He argues that the

⁶⁷See Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 70-72.

⁶⁸See John Jefferson Davis, *Foundations of Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 67; Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 71.

⁶⁹Works that cover his thoughts on postmodernism as a movement include Stanley Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); idem, "Beyond Foundationalism," 65-70; idem, *Renewing the Center*, 168-75; idem, "Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic: Theological Method after the Demise of Foundationalism," in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, ed. John Stackhouse, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 107-36; idem, "Star Trek and the Next Generation: Postmodernism and the Future of Evangelical Theology," in *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David S. Dockery (Wheaton: Bridgepoint, 1995), 89-103.

basic assumptions and theological methodologies that evangelical modernists have traditionally embraced have been proven to be philosophically unacceptable by the advancements of postmodern thought. Consequently, Grenz is convinced that this dilemma requires evangelicals to abandon these defective ideals in exchange for new approaches that are “postmodern” proof.⁷⁰ Yet in light of these recommendations, questions naturally arise as to how Grenz understands the nature of postmodernism and how he thinks it can possibly be conducive to evangelical theology in general.

Grenz defines postmodernism itself as a complex movement driven by an aggressive rejection of the Enlightenment project and its entailing philosophical ideals.⁷¹ Note that this perception includes two critical elements. First, postmodernism in all its forms is basically an act of repudiation or perhaps even liberation. Second, the specific object of opposition is the previous era of modernity. So for Grenz, postmodern thinkers are unified by their common criticisms and abandonment of the dominant epistemic and scientific approaches of the modern era. This means that the first point of reference for Grenz’s understanding of postmodernism is actually modernism.

Grenz assesses the modern era as an attempt to establish epistemic certainty on the basis of anthropological objectivity. He believes the earliest rudimentary elements of this search were conceived during the Renaissance when thinkers, otherwise known as

⁷⁰Grenz has been greatly sympathetic to recent professing evangelicals, such as Donald Bloesch, William Abraham, and Clark Pinnock, who are attempting to formulate new theological approaches. See interactions in Stanley Grenz, “Fidiestic Revelationism: Donald Bloesch’s Antirationalist Theological Method,” in *Evangelical Theology in Transition*, ed. Elmer M. Colyer (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999), 35-60; idem, “Deconstructing Epistemological Certainty in Theology: An Engagement with William J. Abraham’s Criterion in Christian Theology,” *WesTJ* 36 (2001): 37-45; idem, *Renewing the Center*, 139-50.

⁷¹Grenz, *Primer on Postmodernism*, 83. He also writes that “whatever it may eventually become, postmodernism began as a reaction to the modern worldview and the Enlightenment project that is so integral to it.” Grenz, *Primer on Postmodernism*, 57; and that “Postmodernism represents a rejection of the Enlightenment project and the foundational assumptions upon which it was built,” idem, “Star Trek,” 92.

humanists, began to express noticeable interest in classical forms of human expression such as art and literature and likewise exhibited a tendency to reject the reigning Aristotelianism of the medieval ages.⁷² Likewise, Grenz acknowledges the influential contributions of sixteenth-century English philosopher Francis Bacon whose emphasis on ongoing scientific experimentation functioned as one of the major transitional ideals between the Renaissance era and the seventeenth century.⁷³

Later, Enlightenment thinkers altered this previous reverence for humanity's ability to improve the world by placing humanity at the center of it. Grenz believes this line of thought was sparked initially in the seventeenth century by revolutions in philosophy and science as represented by René Descartes and Sir Isaac Newton.⁷⁴ Cartesian rationalism insisted that the proper use of human reason could result in true knowledge in any field of study, whether it was religion, science, or mathematics while decades later, Newtonian scientific theory postulated that scientists could observe certain laws that revealed the definite structure of the universe. The common idea between Descartes and Newton that Grenz emphasizes though is that they both set a new agenda for metaphysics and epistemology, this being the use of human reason to observe and accurately describe the real world.⁷⁵

As these ideas continued to expand, Grenz also acknowledges the crisis that eventually necessitated further modifications in Enlightenment thought. The new focus on epistemic autonomy created a new flux of approaches that eventually excluded the

⁷²Grenz, *Primer on Postmodernism*, 58.

⁷³Ibid., 58-59; idem, "Star Trek," 90; idem, *Renewing the Center*, 220-21; Grenz and Olson, *20th Century Theology*, 16-17.

⁷⁴Grenz, *Primer on Postmodernism*, 63-67.

⁷⁵Grenz also points out that "both Descartes and Newton sought to use the power of reason to enhance a theological agenda. However, the revolution in philosophy and science they engendered resulted in a new view of the world and our place in it that has not always been sympathetic to the Christian faith." Ibid., 67.

theistic presuppositions of earlier Enlightenment thinkers. So despite the efforts of some to harmonize Christian orthodoxy with pure reason, many thinkers either embraced deism as a theological alternative or became completely skeptical of Christianity as illustrated in the work of David Hume.⁷⁶ Likewise, many thinkers concluded that neither reason or sense experience could answer the serious metaphysical questions of life. The solution that later solved this dilemma as well as set the fundamental agenda for the western modern era was offered by Kantian philosophy. Grenz argues that Kant's modifications regarding the dynamics between human knowledge and reality established a radical epistemic individualism that revitalized the fading Enlightenment focus on reason and objective knowledge.⁷⁷

In retrospect, Grenz determines that the crux of modernistic thought hinges on two critical assumptions. One is that the world is a structured, observable reality that may be examined and scrutinized by all who desire to do so. Second, accurate knowledge of this world can be obtained through the use of human reason because it is a universally reliable, trustworthy, epistemic tool. This means that knowledge is inherently good. It can engender certainty because it is objective by nature and it can promote optimism because social progress can be made as knowledge continues to increase.⁷⁸ Moreover, with this summary as a backdrop, the transition can be made to Grenz's treatment of postmodernism.

Grenz links the inception of postmodern thought to the initial struggles of post-Kantian philosophy. As the eighteenth century began to progress, Grenz stresses various modifications that began to be formulated by such thinkers as Johann Fichte and Friedrich

⁷⁶Ibid., 72-73.

⁷⁷Ibid., 79-80.

⁷⁸Grenz, "Star Trek," 91. Grenz also adopts elements of Paul Tillich's assessment of modernity. See Grenz, *Primer on Postmodernism*, 67-71; Paul Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1968), 320-41.

Nietzsche. These thinkers rejected key elements of Kantian epistemology, which Grenz argues would later prove to be significant in the hands of later thinkers.⁷⁹ As the twentieth century began, Grenz notes that the demise of modernism arrived when epistemology became secondary to hermeneutics. Though recognizing the important contributions of Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Wittgenstein, and Gadamer, Grenz contends that modernism met its philosophical match with the rise of the literary theory of deconstructionism.⁸⁰ Herein, textual meaning was defined as being dependent on the perspective of readers so “. . . that there are as many interpretations of a text as readers (or readings).”⁸¹ He then observes that this hermeneutical perspective was applied to a multiplicity of other issues through the efforts of the thinkers such as Derrida, Foucault, and Rorty and in the aftermath of their efforts, a new intellectual climate emerged.

Among the subjects affected by postmodern thought, Grenz spends most of his efforts surveying two primary issues.⁸² The first, of which Grenz is highly sympathetic, is the dismantling of CF.⁸³ Grenz sees this event as the most devastating for conservative

⁷⁹Fichte’s influence came in the merging of the two Kantian categories of reality (i.e., noumenal vs. phenomenal). He rejected the notion of a cognitive-independent realm (i.e., noumenal) and determined that all reality is subsumed in the realm of human experience (i.e., the phenomenal realm). While agreeing with this point, Nietzsche took this assault to its logical end by rejecting the Kantian proposal that identical cognitive categories exist in all minds universally. Instead, Nietzsche argued that different minds use different epistemic constructs to create vain perceptions of reality. See Grenz, *Primer on Postmodernism*, 84-97.

⁸⁰Grenz, “Star Trek,” 92.

⁸¹Ibid., 93.

⁸²Grenz has also offered cursory treatments of how postmodern thought is expressed culturally through architecture, art, theater, literary fiction, movies, and television. See Grenz, *Primer on Postmodernism*, 20-38.

⁸³Grenz, “Beyond Foundationalism,” 66-70; idem, “Articulating the Christian Belief Mosaic,” 112-16; idem, *Renewing the Center*, 190-95. Quotes on this section will come from the first source because the latter two essays are simply edited versions of the first article.

evangelicals because CF is linked to the correspondence theory of truth.⁸⁴ Postmodern thought views these concepts as epistemic illusions because there is no such thing as a human subject (or interpreter) who thinks (or interprets) outside of a particular context. Reality, truth, or meaning are subjectively created rather than objectively discovered. As potential alternatives, Grenz sees value in nonfoundational theories of knowledge such as coherentism and pragmatism which are currently being advocated by philosophers and theologians alike.⁸⁵ The second corollary issue, which Grenz sees as threatening to the essence of Christianity, is the disbelief in any unifying metanarrative (i.e., story that accurately reflects a universal reality).⁸⁶ He contends that Christians “. . . simply do not share the despair over the loss of universality that leads to the radical skepticism of the emerging era.”⁸⁷ So while Grenz sees the value of postmodern criticism, he does not agree that the gospel message cannot make any legitimate mandates whatsoever.⁸⁸ Finally, it is at this juncture that Grenz believes evangelical modernists must move beyond their outdated views to new horizons that address postmodern challenges.

⁸⁴Grenz, “Beyond Foundationalism,” 65. The idea of establishing indubitable, self-evident beliefs is incoherent unless those beliefs correspond to reality as it truly exists. Also, it is important to note that while Grenz agrees that CF is defective, it is not altogether clear what his thoughts are regarding soft or modest foundationalism.

⁸⁵Grenz mentions the contributions of philosophers such as A. K. Rogers, Harold H. Joachim, and W. V. Quine as well as theologians including Wolfhart Pannenberg, George Lindbeck, and Alvin Plantinga. *Ibid.*, 66-77.

⁸⁶The concept of metanarrative is important because of the way Grenz will later articulate his particular approach to realism.

⁸⁷Grenz, *Primer on Postmodernism*, 165. Ironically, Grenz believes this postmodern attitude, which is ultimately antithetical to Christianity, has led to the rediscovery of a critical theme that actually undergirds the biblical message, namely the community. See Stanley J. 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*, ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 96.

⁸⁸Again, Grenz attempts to formulate a postmodern defense of the gospel metanarrative in Grenz, “The Universality of the ‘Jesus-Story,’” 85-11.

Grenz's Proposals Regarding a Postmodern Theological Method

Grenz initially confesses that his thoughts on theological method are triggered by his commitment to being a postmodern evangelical.⁸⁹ This title marks a departure from the alleged conservative modernist agenda which confines the task of theology to sheltering specific doctrinal boundaries from impending threats of secular culture. Viewing this approach as reductionistic, Grenz concurs with thinkers such as Nancey Murphy that evangelicals must actively engage the thought forms of the present cultural context and even be willing to integrate various postmodern insights in order to continue to communicate the gospel contextually.⁹⁰ Grenz believes that when this is done properly, certain elements of postmodern thought coincide with his perception of evangelical identity as well as his objectives as a theologian. Yet questions arise as to what this postmodern-evangelicalism looks like and how it functions.

First and foremost, Grenz contends that a postmodern-evangelical theology must address certain concerns within the postmodern setting.⁹¹ For example, it must reject the notions of epistemic autonomy and rational certainty because it recognizes that human knowledge is grounded in the subjective orientation of diverse linguistic communities (i.e., post-individualistic, post-rationalistic). It must also link the obtaining

⁸⁹Grenz, "An Agenda for Evangelical Theology," 2.

⁹⁰See Nancey Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Agenda* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 90; Grenz, "An Agenda for Evangelical Theology," 2.

⁹¹Grenz vocalized his preliminary response to this challenge in the early eighties when he called for a new theological agenda that could focus on a new biblicism that moves beyond fragmented proof-texting of cherished doctrines, fosters noticeable ethical change, engenders an accepting ecumenical environment for fruitful dialogue among denominations, integrates a more holistic view of the scope of salvation, and escapes the spiritual barrenness of legalism. See Grenz, "A Theology for the Future," 266. The following traits however, are mentioned in Grenz, "Star Trek," 98-101; idem, *Primer on Postmodernism*, 171-74.

of knowledge itself with practical everyday spirituality in order to escape the modernistic assumption that knowledge in and of itself is inherently good (i.e., post-noeticentric). Finally, it must foster a holistic anthropology that is sensitive to the social web that connects all elements of the world including humanity, nature, society, and most importantly, God (i.e., post-dualistic).

These cultural sensitivities, which must be maintained in order for a postmodern theological method to be successful, also require the general task of theology to be redefined. To do this, Grenz is mindful that the evolution of theology as a discipline is complex. He is aware that the original etymological derivation of theology (i.e., the study of God) has been expanded by multiple developments such as twelfth-century medieval scholastics, eighteenth-century German thought, and twentieth-century American evangelicalism.⁹² After much consideration, Grenz concludes that the theological task encompasses continual intellectual reflection on the faith within the presiding cultural context or as John Franke summarizes on behalf of Grenz in *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context*;

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.⁹³

Two points are emphasized in this definition. First, theology is an interpretive enterprise that continually conveys the Christian faith in fluctuating historical contexts. This means theology is always in flux because rather than merely rehearsing an immutable set of doctrinal tenets, it attempts to communicate and apply the Christian salvific experience in

⁹²See Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 62-64; idem, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 3-4; Frank Whaling, "The Development of the Word 'Theology,'" *SJT* 34 (1981): 292-93.

⁹³Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 16.

contemporary thought forms that are conducive to the setting of each generation.⁹⁴

Second, the task of theological discourse is primarily oriented toward the church because it attempts to articulate the Christian belief framework in ways that are faithful to the stories of biblical narrative and foster godly piety in the personal lives of believers.⁹⁵

This refinement of the theological task combined with the apparent need for a contextually sensitive theology leads Grenz to elaborate further on how his methodology functions in light of postmodernism. To do so, he outlines his approach in three categories. One entails certain metaphysical assumptions that must be adopted in light of postmodern philosophy. Another includes a re-evaluation of the sources for theological discourse; those being Scripture, tradition, and culture. Finally, Grenz identifies major thematic motifs that unify the diverse segments of Christianity and thereby preserve the integrity of its overall tradition as well as guide his theological approach.

To begin, Grenz imposes two metaphysical ideas upon his understanding of theological formulation. The first relates to epistemological nonfoundationalism. Grenz

⁹⁴Grenz and Franke call this element of the theological task “pilgrim theology” because it is continually exploring new horizons and models as cultures fluctuate. Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 16-17. This point is also illustrated by Grenz’s earlier distinction between replica and analogue models of theology. Replica models strive to *simulate* the modeled realities (or in this case Scriptural claims) on a smaller scale while analogue models attempt to *illustrate* the structural relationships of the intended modeled realities. Theology is defined by the latter. See Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 82; idem, *Theology for the Community*, 14. Yet Grenz is also quick to acknowledge that even though theological assertions are second-order claims, they do refer to ontological reality in that they reflect the overall conceptual framework of the Christian community. See Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 78; idem, *Theology for the Community*, 14-15.

⁹⁵Grenz and Franke call this element “servant theology.” Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 17. Also, Grenz has stated elsewhere that theology should help believers sharpen their understanding of the gospel (i.e., polemical purpose), foster discipleship through biblical instruction (i.e., catechetical purpose), and synthesis all of Christian teaching so the church can grasp the biblical narrative’s portrayal of reality (i.e., systematic purpose). See Grenz, “Agenda for Evangelical Theology,” 7-8; idem, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 64-65.

argues that the best solution to the demise of CF is a modified coherentist model of knowledge (and truth) which selectively combines several elements.⁹⁶ One idea originates with Pannenberg who argues that since all truth is universal, the truthfulness of Christianity is expressed as its beliefs are shown to coincide with all fields of knowledge.⁹⁷ This does not mean however, that for Pannenberg truth is *currently* absolute and objective. On the contrary, all truth is articulated in historical contexts with fallible scientific and theological theories that must constantly be evaluated.

Pannenberg's point is that Christian theology is validated as true because it supplies the most efficient framework for expanding knowledge in all fields of study.⁹⁸ Another element Grenz highlights is Lindbeck's focus on the nature of doctrine. Though leery of some potential implications toward relativism, Grenz finds insight in Lindbeck's argument that doctrines are socially-linguistic constructions (or Wittgenstenian language games) that derive their truthfulness from how they connect with theological traditions of various communities.⁹⁹ This idea is then connected to the critique of CF as articulated by Reformed Epistemology. Grenz hones in on Plantinga's argument that Christian beliefs partially derive their epistemic basis, or proper basicity, from the specific contexts of their respectful believing communities rather than rationally irrefutable axioms.¹⁰⁰

These factors lead Grenz to postulate a nonfoundational epistemology that emphasizes two factors. One, which entails a conflation of elements from Lindbeck's and

⁹⁶Again, his discussion of CF and subsequent proposal for a modified coherentism can be found in Grenz, "Beyond Foundationalism," 70-81. This treatment is later edited in other works including idem, "Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic," 116-24; idem, *Renewing the Center*, 190-211; Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 38-54.

⁹⁷Grenz, "Beyond Foundationalism," 70-71.

⁹⁸Ibid., 72.

⁹⁹Ibid., 72-74; idem, "From Liberalism to Postliberalism," 403-04.

¹⁰⁰Grenz, "Beyond Foundationalism," 75.

Plantinga's thought, is the authoritative nature of theological claims. Grenz contests the idea that doctrinal assertions are morally binding because they objectively refer to theological realities that exist independently of subjective interpretation. Instead, he believes that the entire Christian belief-framework is properly basic because of the essential role it plays in describing the religious experiences of Christian communities.¹⁰¹ The force of theological assertions rests within how they are used in the community in which they are expressed. This communitarian orientation leads to the second factor, which is Grenz's emphasis on the way in which Christian doctrine should be articulated. A misconstrued deduction that could be made regarding Grenz's emphasis on communitarian doctrinal frameworks is that he is defecting back to a query for an epistemic foundation. Grenz is quick to respond that this is not the case. Interpretive frameworks of any community do not exist prior to or apart from the theological constructs that describe them.¹⁰² They exist simultaneously and inseparably. This is why Grenz bemoans the approaches of conservatives who often treat systematic theology as an exercise in dividing various doctrines into arbitrary categories. They fail to integrate doctrines holistically because they fall prey to a modernistic mindset by viewing some doctrines as secondary beliefs that are based upon other primary, foundational doctrines. As a solution, Grenz argues that theology should present Christian doctrines as a mosaic, or web, of beliefs that display the continuity of the entire interpretive framework which the Christian community uses to understand the world.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹Ibid., 75-77. Grenz is also careful to distinguish this point from classical liberalism. This tradition followed a CF approach by seeking a universal subjective experience inherent within all religious traditions and promoting a dichotomy between these experiences and theological assertions that describe them. Grenz observes, however, that various religious experiences in fact are qualitatively different and that they do not exist independently of cognitive theological constructs pre-established by religious communities. Grenz, "Beyond Foundationalism," 77.

¹⁰²Grenz, "Beyond Foundationalism," 77.

¹⁰³Ibid., 78-79.

Another metaphysical issue that directly relates to Grenz's nonfoundational coherentism is his view of ontological non-realism. Grenz knows that any nonfoundational epistemology naturally leads to the question of metaphysical realism.¹⁰⁴ Yet instead of posing this question within flat modernistic terms, Grenz prefers to present the dilemma by asking, "How can a nonfoundationalist theological method lead us to statements about a world beyond our formulations?"¹⁰⁵ The reason the question is phrased in this manner is because Grenz adopts the post-Kantian critique that we do not inhabit reality in-and-of itself as it exists now. We, in fact, live in a world of our own making via communitarian constructs.¹⁰⁶ Yet the question still remains as to how theological language can in any way refer to the "world."

At this juncture, the influence of Pannenberg is again revealed in Grenz's thought. Grenz draws from Pannenberg's link between history and eschatology to establish a quasi-realism.¹⁰⁷ Originally, Pannenberg followed the rudimentary ideas of Dilthey and even Heidegger by defining the essence of human existence as an attempt to establish existential purpose and significance in light of an anticipated future.¹⁰⁸ What is expected in the unknown brings purpose to the present. For the Christian, however, present knowledge is incomplete and will continue to be until the future is consummated

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 79.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 80.

¹⁰⁷To see Pannenberg's influence on Grenz's view of realism, see Grenz, *Reason for Hope*, 3-43; idem, "Beyond Foundationalism," 80-81; idem, *Renewing the Center*, 245-48; idem, "Eschatological Theology: Contours of a Postmodern Theology of Hope," *RevExp* 97 (2000): 347-51; idem, "Why do Theologians Need to be Scientists," *Zygon* 35 (2000): 348-53; idem, "'Scientific' Theology/ 'Theological' Science," 162; idem, "Wolfgang Pannenberg," 77; Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 266-73.

¹⁰⁸Grenz, "Eschatological Theology," 348-49; Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 269-70.

in the eschaton.¹⁰⁹ This leads Grenz to uphold an “eschatological realism.” Herein, present reality is deemed incapable of objective observation because God’s perfected will is not fully actualized or experienced. Only in the eschatological future will His being, kingdom, and will be fully understood.¹¹⁰ In keeping with this emphasis, one could say Grenz holds to an “already-not yet” dialectic. On one hand, he holds to a “realized” non-realism in which we attempt to formulate second-order, socially-bound, incomplete claims about our Christian experience while on the other, he advocates a “deferred” realism in which our knowledge will one day unequivocally and objectively refer to the real world of a redeemed, new creation. So the essence of present-day theological assertions is found in how they relate to the future eschatological *telos*, or end.¹¹¹

Another pertinent category of issues that work in conjunction with Grenz’s postmodern metaphysic are the roles of Scripture, tradition, and culture in theological discourse. Grenz is convinced that a postmodern-evangelical theology must draw from these elements in a more integrative and cohesive fashion. Yet this desired objective requires that each one be redefined in terms and employed in ways that overcome postmodern criticisms.

Scripture, for example, must be revised because Grenz believes the nature of biblical authority is currently shackled by modernistic paradigms that conservative evangelicals and liberals alike endorse.¹¹² Regarding conservatives, Grenz believes they

¹⁰⁹Grenz, “Wolfhart Pannenberg,” 77.

¹¹⁰Grenz, “Eschatological Theology,” 350-51; Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 271-73.

¹¹¹See Grenz, “Eschatological Theology,” 346.

¹¹²For treatments on Scripture, see Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 109-36; idem, *Theology for the Community of God*, 494-527; idem, “An Agenda for Evangelical Theology,” 9-12; and his essay Grenz, “The Spirit and the Word: The World-Creating Function of the Text,” *TToday* 57 (2000): 357-74; which has been re-edited in Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 206-07; idem, “Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic,” 124-25; Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 64-92.

forsake the original purpose of the Reformation plea for *sola scriptura* by choosing to simply view the Bible as a cluster of propositional facts waiting to be organized.¹¹³ This approach is traced back to the Princetonian tradition which posits a one-on-one correspondence between divine revelation and the words of Scripture. Herein, inspiration and the meaning of biblical texts allegedly collapse into a mere concern for Scripture's intrinsic veracity and historical reliability.¹¹⁴ Liberals, on the other hand, reject the meticulous accuracy of Scripture and argue instead that biblical authority resides in either the historical events recorded in Scripture or the religious intents of the biblical authors.¹¹⁵ Both of these approaches reveal two common problems. One is that they assume a foundationalist approach by seeking a universal point of reference, whether it be objective biblical data or religious experience. The other is that they both fail to explain how divine revelation as disclosed in the Bible is communicated to contemporary readers.

Grenz observes that the source of these problems lies in a disjunction between the Holy Spirit's formation of Scripture in the past and His utilization of Scripture in the present. This is illustrated with the standard conservative view that inspiration is a completed deposit of truth within the stories and words of the Bible. Grenz writes,

The traditional view defines inspiration in terms of the activity of the Holy Spirit in superintending the authors of Scripture in their writing. The older definition distinguishes an active sense (the action of the Spirit), a passive sense (the effect of the Spirit's action on the human author), and a terminal sense (the biblical writings as a deposit of what God desired to have written).¹¹⁶

¹¹³Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 206; idem, "Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic," 124.

¹¹⁴Grenz, "The Spirit and the Word," 358-59; idem, "Agenda for an Evangelical Theology," 9; idem, *Renewing the Center*, 206; idem, "Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic," 124.

¹¹⁵Grenz, "The Spirit and the Word," 358.

¹¹⁶Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 117.

While this view sees the Spirit as actively guiding biblical authors to bring about desired literary results, there seems to be a minimal significance for the Spirit beyond the one-time act of inspiration. This leads Grenz to reject the classical model of biblical authority because for him, Scripture is not revelation because of the historical references, syntax, or linguistic symbols it contains, but because the Spirit somehow speaks through its pages continually. Concepts such as inerrancy and infallibility therefore are insufficient to validate Scripture as spiritually binding.¹¹⁷ Rather, Scripture is authoritative for the Christian community because it is the vehicle the Spirit uses to communicate.¹¹⁸

Grenz substantiates this idea by emphasizing a reciprocal interaction between inspiration and illumination.¹¹⁹ Using ideas implied in the Puritan/Pietistic emphasis on the Spirit's role in biblical understanding as well as the statement on Scripture found in the Westminster Confession, Grenz contends that the Bible is authoritative not simply because it was originally given by the Spirit, but also because it is constantly used by the Spirit.¹²⁰ The Spirit brought life into the Scriptures as they were written (inspiration) and continues to use them to vocalize His will in the present (illumination). Yet how does this dynamic transpire? Here, Grenz utilizes four ideas to articulate his answer.¹²¹

¹¹⁷See Grenz, *Theology for the Community*, 518-24.

¹¹⁸Grenz, "Agenda for Evangelical Theology," 10; idem, "The Spirit and Word," 358; Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 65. This is also why he treats Scripture under pneumatology in Grenz, *Theology for the Community*, 494-527.

¹¹⁹Grenz, *Theology for the Community*, 500.

¹²⁰Grenz highlights the Westminster Confession wherein it states, "The Supreme Judge . . . , in whose sentence we rest, can be no other than the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture." Grenz, "The Spirit and the Word," 357-58; and Bernard Ramm's claim that "The proper principle of authority within the Christian church must be . . . the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture." See Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 113.

¹²¹The format for summarizing these points initially derives from Stephen Wellum, "Biblical Language, Authority, and Recent Proposals for the Doing of Evangelical Theology" (paper presented at the 48th annual meeting of the Midwest Regional Evangelical Theological Society, Minneapolis, MN, 14-15, March 2003), 10-11.

Grenz begins by adopting a linguistic model known as Speech-Act theory in order to establish a contemporary point of reference for illustrating his view of biblical revelation. Speech-Act theory postulates that people use language to do things with words, namely to transmit messages. The factors that allow this dynamic to take place include locutions (i.e., words, gestures,) illocutions (i.e., intended use of locutions such as promising, commanding, encouraging), and perlocutions (i.e., outcome or results upon the audience).¹²² With regards to the Bible, Grenz argues that the Spirit uses the locutions of Scripture to convey specific illocutions to the Christian community.¹²³ The particular ways in which this occurs, however, warrant further explanation.

Grenz attempts to clarify how the Spirit uses Scripture by applying Speech-Act theory to the specific issue of textual communication. To do so, he acknowledges other thinkers who are currently using Speech-Act theory to explicate the nature of revelation and finds the thoughts of Nicholas Wolterstorff especially helpful.¹²⁴ Wolterstorff argues that God communicates through biblical revelation by endorsing, or authorizing, the illocutionary forces of Scriptural locutionary acts by either “deputizing” speakers to speak divinely sent messages (e.g., a prophetic word) or simply “appropriating” discourses that various biblical authors wrote.¹²⁵ Grenz finds this idea of “appropriated discourse” as a key to unlocking the way in which the Spirit uses the Bible. Yet it requires a key modification, which leads to Grenz’s third proposal.

¹²²For introductions to Speech-Act theory, see J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, ed. J. O. Urmson and Marian Sbisà, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962; reprint, 1978); John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

¹²³See Grenz, “The Spirit and the Word,” 360-61.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*, 361-62; Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 38-42, 188-99.

¹²⁵Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 51-57.

While Grenz appreciates the insights of Wolterstorff, he is not comfortable with the excessive attention that appropriated discourse gives to the biblical authors. This is because he wants to maintain a distinction between the original derivation of Scripture via the inspired writers and the ongoing use of Scripture by the Spirit. Though the authorial-discourse model moves in the right direction, it “. . . remains too closely focused on the author who produced the text, rather than on the text as itself being canon.”¹²⁶ Grenz, therefore, formulates a kind of pneuma-discourse approach wherein the Spirit conveys new illocutionary meanings through Scripture that are not restricted to the original authors’ intentions alone. Here, Grenz appeals to contemporary philosophers such as Paul Ricoeur who argue that when authors record literary works, the texts eventually become distanced from their authors and take on a hermeneutical life of their own. In Grenz’s words, “the text has its own intention, which has its genesis in the author’s intention, but is not exhausted by it.”¹²⁷ Consequently, understanding biblical texts is not obtained by mere exegesis alone because the Spirit continually appropriates the Bible in different ways as various contexts change thereby communicating *new* and *unique* messages to every new community of hearers.¹²⁸

The fourth and final stage of these revisions entails the intended objectives that the Spirit has in appropriating Scripture. The initial goal is to establish a supreme source through which He can communicate. This applies to the actual formation of the canon itself. The Bible alone establishes the general formats for accurate reflection on the faith, thereby making Scripture unique. From here, the Spirit chooses to use the narratives of Scripture to remind the Christian community how the past relates to their present. Grenz describes this activity as a “paradigmatic event” in which readers of texts

¹²⁶Grenz, “The Spirit and the Word,” 361.

¹²⁷Ibid., 362.

¹²⁸Ibid.

take on the identity of those within the narrative itself.¹²⁹ In conjunction with this focus on the past, the Spirit also speaks through Scripture in order to depict what the present should be ideally so that it will instill a hunger in the hearts of believers for the future.¹³⁰ So in the end, the Spirit uses the Bible to create an ideal world by orienting,

. . . our present on the basis of the past and in accordance with a vision of the future. The Spirit leads contemporary hearers to view themselves and their situation in the light of God's past and future, and to open themselves and their present to the power of that future, which is already at work in the world.¹³¹

This new understanding of Scripture leads to similar modifications regarding the ways in which theological traditions should be utilized in postmodern theological formulation.¹³² Grenz acknowledges that the doctrinal traditions of the church provide contemporary believers with a theological roadmap which highlights ideas that should be embraced and certain pitfalls to avoid. Likewise, traditions serve as a points of reference to show how a contemporary generation of believers is connected to the past.¹³³ Yet the problem that overshadows the contributions of tradition is similar to that of Scripture,

¹²⁹Ibid., 366-67.

¹³⁰Ibid., 368-69.

¹³¹Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 207; idem, "Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic," 125. It should also be noted that Grenz anticipates the objection that this concept of Scripture might lead to sheer subjectivism. His response is that this danger is only apparent if we attempt to interpret the Spirit at an individualistic level. We should rather interpret the Spirit's speaking through Scripture together as a Christian community in order to maintain hermeneutical accountability. See Grenz, "The Spirit and the Word," 373-74; Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 67-68. Note that this point will receive further elaboration in Grenz's discussion of community as the integrative motif of theology.

¹³²See Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 95-97, 105-06; idem, "Agenda for an Evangelical Theology," 12; idem, *Renewing the Center*, 208-09; idem, "Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic," 126-27; Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 93-129; idem, "Theological Heritage as Hermeneutical Trajectory," 215-39.

¹³³Grenz, "Agenda for an Evangelical Theology," 12; idem, *Renewing the Center*, 208; idem, "Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic," 126.

namely CF.¹³⁴ Even though tradition is distinct from the Bible in that it entails interpretive formulations of biblical claims, Grenz believes that just like Scripture, tradition has been erroneously viewed as a static deposit of unchangeable truth. This is why it has been such a volatile subject between Roman Catholics and Protestants as well as classical liberals and conservative evangelicals.¹³⁵ In fact, this foundationalistic approach is a major reason why many evangelicals are ambivalent toward tradition altogether.¹³⁶

Grenz contends that the solution to this problem is to view tradition in a similar vein as Scripture. Though Scripture is the supreme source whereby the Spirit speaks because it reveals the fundamental structures for Christian belief, it is not the exclusive source. In Grenz and Franke's own words, ". . . while acknowledging the significance of *sola scriptura* as establishing the principle that canonical Scripture is the *norma normans non normata* (the norm with no norm over it), it is also true that in another sense *scriptura* is never *sola*."¹³⁷ The reason for this statement is Grenz's contention that the Bible is not read and interpreted apart from various traditions that readers create. Instead, it is read along with and in light of them.

The key in this dynamic is that just as the Spirit guides the church through speaking in Scripture, he also speaks through the traditions that faithful Christian communities establish. In other words, there is a reciprocal activity that the Spirit creates between the Bible and the church's perceptions of its message. One example Grenz and

¹³⁴Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 94-95.

¹³⁵Ibid., 96-108.

¹³⁶Ibid., 109-12; idem, "Theological Heritage as Hermeneutical Trajectory," 215-17. Grenz and Franke also agree with Richard Lints that the present emphasis on inductive methods of Bible study, the transdenominational-parachurch nature of the evangelical movement, and its entailing "ahistorical devotional piety" foster an anti-traditionalist attitude within conservative ranks. See Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 109; Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prologomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 92.

¹³⁷Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 112.

Franke use to illustrate this point is the formation of the canon. The church, in one sense, precedes the canon chronologically because biblical writers, who were members of the Christian community, recorded documents that were not deemed authoritative until later members were led by the Spirit to do so. Yet the canon's dependency on the community does not mitigate against its authority over the community because all believers recognize that the canon is what the Spirit uses to define and produce their spiritual identity.¹³⁸ The point is that just as the Spirit led the church in the formation of the canon, he also guides the church in constructing interpretive frameworks to express its message. So all of the symbols, creeds, and debates that represent the theological traditions of the church combine to form a hermeneutical guide that reveals how the Spirit has spoken to the community in the past. Furthermore, while traditions are not the final arbiters of the Christian faith because they are subordinate to the Spirit's use of Scripture, they do offer contextual grids that the Spirit uses to speak to the church in any contemporary culture.¹³⁹

Coupled with these thoughts on Scripture and tradition is also the crucial function of the cultural context.¹⁴⁰ For Grenz, the source of culture in theological formulation is essential for two primary reasons. One is the fact that when the Spirit speaks through Scripture or traditions, it is always contextually mediated.¹⁴¹ The Spirit speaks to all generations of believers within their cultural setting, whether it be the ancient second-century or the postmodern twenty-first century. So part of understanding

¹³⁸Grenze and Franke, "Theological Heritage as Hermeneutical Trajectory," 225.

¹³⁹Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 120-29; idem, "Theological Heritage as Hermeneutical Trajectory," 234-39.

¹⁴⁰See Grenz, *Revisoning Evangelical Theology*, 97-101; idem, "An Agenda for an Evangelical Theology," 12-14; idem, *Renewing the Center*, 209-11; idem, "Culture and Spirit: The Role of Cultural Context in Theological Reflection," *ATJ* 55 (2000): 37-51; Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 130-66.

¹⁴¹Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 208; idem, "Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic," 127.

what the Spirit says includes a sensitivity to the culture in which it is said. This leads to the second reason culture is imperative for Grenz. Just as the Spirit speaks through vehicles that are culturally dependent, theologians should also communicate the Christian message in culturally-relevant terminology. This does not imply any sort of postmodern syncretism or that culture supersedes the Spirit's voice in Scripture.¹⁴² Rather, Grenz's point is that evangelicals' inescapable location in history should compel them to communicate theology in language and concepts that derive from their given context. Only when this is done can theology face the contemporary challenges, struggles, and questions of its time.¹⁴³ Yet how are evangelicals to use culture properly?

Grenz answers this question by imploring evangelicals to recognize two dynamics that are intrinsic to all cultures. One, which can be considered the passive element, entails the pneumatological trend embedded in Grenz's understanding of Scripture and tradition. Just as the Spirit speaks through these two means, he likewise speaks through culture itself. Grenz supports this idea by arguing that since the Spirit is the giver and sustainer of all life, his voice can likewise echo within all mediums of human expression.¹⁴⁴ This, in turn, leads to the second factor which can be considered the active element of cultural awareness. As theologians hear the Spirit speak harmonizing messages through Scripture, tradition, and culture, they must intentionally utilize contemporary ideologies to describe the Christian message. So as an example, just as the early church used Greek categories of ontology to describe the full deity and humanity of Christ and medieval theologian Anselm of Canterbury implemented the new

¹⁴²See Grenz, "An Agenda for Evangelical Theology," 13; idem, *Renewing the Center*, 210; idem, "Articulating the Christian-Belief Mosaic," 128. The problem with the latter deduction is that it falls prey to the fallacy of foundationalism by advocating the notion that a particular cultural ideology can act as a universal, self-evident criteria.

¹⁴³Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 97-99; idem, "An Agenda for an Evangelical Theology," 13-14.

¹⁴⁴Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 162.

feudalism of his time to construct a more tenable view of the atonement, theologians can apply contemporary theories of addictions and addictive behavior to their formulations of anthropology and hamartiology.¹⁴⁵ Grenz's point is that all using cultural advancements in various fields enables the Christian faith to be packaged in linguistic, social, and cognitive categories that relate to the present culture.¹⁴⁶

With these multiple revisions in check, the final segment of ideas that completes Grenz's proposals for a postmodern theology includes three motifs which he believes reflect the ideals that are common to the entire spectrum of the Christian tradition. One, which acts as the basic structural theme that gives overall symmetry to all Christian theologies, is Trinitarianism.¹⁴⁷ Second, the church acts as the integrative theme that maintains the primary hermeneutical objective of theology, which is to articulate the Christian faith for the sake of the Christian community.¹⁴⁸ Third, eschatology marks the ultimate orientation of theology as a whole.¹⁴⁹ Combined, Grenz is convinced these categories permit his method to remain thoroughly evangelical in scope. The question though is how?

¹⁴⁵See Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 98-99; Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 161.

¹⁴⁶For Grenz's explanation of cultural development itself, see Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 130-47.

¹⁴⁷See Grenz, *Theology for the Community*, 68-99; idem, *Renewing the Center*, 212-14; idem, "Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic," 129-31; idem, *The Social God*, 23-57; Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 169-202.

¹⁴⁸See Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 147-62; idem, "An Agenda for Evangelical Theology," 14-16; idem, "Belonging to God: The Quest for Communal Spirituality in the Postmodern World," *ATJ* 54 (1999): 41-52; idem, "The Spirit and the Word," 373-74; idem, *Renewing the Center*, 214-16, 287-324; idem, "Articulating the Christian-Belief Mosaic," 131-33; Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 203-38.

¹⁴⁹See Grenz, *Theology for the Community*, 847-59; idem, "Eschatological Theology," 339-51; idem, *Renewing the Center*, 216-17; idem, "Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic," 134-56; Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 239-73.

Grenz recognizes that all expressions of Christianity begin with the concept of God. Yet not just any concept will do. Grenz consents that all manifestations of Christian theology adhere to a Trinitarian understanding of God. He notes the patristic era of the church in which Christian thinkers saw the necessity to articulate a Trinitarian conception of God, or the idea that one God exists as three co-eternal beings otherwise known as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.¹⁵⁰ He likewise applauds the efforts of Hegel, Barth, Pannenberg, and Karl Rahner for rejuvenating Trinitarianism after its unfortunate demise during the Enlightenment.¹⁵¹ In light of these developments, Grenz observes two ways in which Trinitarianism guides theology. One is that it gives theological continuity to how God progressively discloses himself through the initial act of creation and then through the subsequent works of redemption and reconciliation. Second, Trinitarianism also shows how the individual works of each person within the Godhead can be unified as one divine act.¹⁵² These innovations lead Grenz to conclude that the renewed interest in the Trinity as a relational entity can aid evangelicals in constructing their understanding of anthropology and ecclesiology. The interaction of mutual love and acceptance within the Godhead can act as a model for reinterpreting the concept of man being the *imago dei* as well as the role of the church in the life of the

¹⁵⁰See Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 213; idem, "Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic," 131. Also, Grenz summarizes the content of Trinitarianism with four concepts; singularity (God is one), plurality (God exists as three persons), diversity (the Godhead possesses economic or functional distinctions), and unity (the Godhead exists in absolute harmony and cooperation). See Grenz, *Theology for the Community*, 85-88.

¹⁵¹Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 186-92; Grenz, *The Social God*, 29-50.

¹⁵²Grenz follows Rahner and Pannenberg who argue that to speak of the triune God in His self-disclosure through creation is necessarily to speak of Him as He truly exists. In other words, the distinction between the immanent and the economic Trinity is removed, or as Grenz states, the "theology from above" and "theology from below" are now synonymous. See Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 190-92.

believers. Moreover, Grenz believes his theological method is robustly Christian and evangelical because of its commitment to historical Trinitarianism.

Along with Trinitarianism as a theological guide, Grenz contends that ecclesiology is the common denominator that can be found in all the developments of the Christian tradition. The reason for this choice is that all the spiritual events or theological debates that occur in the lives of believers happen in the context of the church. For instance, when people come to faith, they are normally joining a community of believers. When they articulate their faith or express their fundamental beliefs, they are either consciously or subconsciously expressing what their communities of faith believe.¹⁵³ Therefore, theology can only be properly understood in light of its relationship to the Christian community that conveys it.¹⁵⁴ This does not mean, however, that something intrinsic to the church is capable of validating its own claims. The heart of the Christian faith is fundamentally connected to an encounter with the God of the Bible through Jesus Christ.¹⁵⁵ Nevertheless, salvific experiences occur within the context of how communities choose to describe them. So in a qualified sense, the church is basic for theology.¹⁵⁶

Grenz sees manifold advantages with this conclusion. One is that it overcomes the crime of the Enlightenment in which theology was kidnapped from the church and subsequently abused by anti-supernatural, rationalistic interrogations.¹⁵⁷ This approach

¹⁵³Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 215-16; idem, "Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic," 133. Grenz initially saw the essential role of ecclesiology for theology in his thoughts on the kingdom. The kingdom was crucial because it described what was to come in the future but it left no model of what it should look like in the present. The answer was the church. See Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 147-48, 156.

¹⁵⁴Grenz, "An Agenda for an Evangelical Theology," 15.

¹⁵⁵Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 232.

¹⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 233.

¹⁵⁷Grenz, "An Agenda for an Evangelical Theology," 14.

places theology back within the realm from whence it came.¹⁵⁸ At the same time, this communitarian emphasis also escapes the postmodern disdain for individual autonomy and CF by conceding that theological assertions are second-order truth claims that derive their authority from the Christian communities that express them rather than any alleged epistemic objective foundation.¹⁵⁹ Ultimately though, Grenz believes that the concept of the church stabilizes theological method because it forces believers to find their identity by looking at each other and what they will have together in the future. Grenz argues that because the Bible is basically a story of how a scattered number of people who were once alienated from God received redemption and now await the time when together they will enter a kingdom as a unified community, the present manifestation of that people known as the church functions as the authorized point of reference for making all theological claims about its future hope.¹⁶⁰

This future-oriented element of ecclesiology leads Grenz to conclude that eschatology is the final concept that undergirds the entire theological orientation of Christianity. What this means is that eschatological hope seasons all theological reflection because theology as a whole is concerned with how God's work in the present is leading to His directed end, or *telos*. Surpassing the work of Ernst Käsemann, Grenz marks the inception of this idea back to the ground-breaking work of Jürgen Moltmann who has become renowned for his contention that eschatology is not a mere element of Christian theology, but the very medium through which the entire Christian faith is

¹⁵⁸It is for this reason that Grenz entitles his work on systematics *Theology for the Community of God*.

¹⁵⁹Grenz is well aware that postmodern thought interprets the value of personal identity in the context of social relationships rather than individual independence. See Grenz, "The Quest for a Communal Spirituality," 44.

¹⁶⁰Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 235-38. Other concerns regarding the significance of the church within the evangelical movement can be seen in Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 163-89; idem, *Renewing the Center*, 287-324.

expressed.¹⁶¹ Grenz builds on this idea in order to avoid a couple of dangers that face eschatology. One is the postmodern critique against any metanarrative that binds all human existence together under one anthropocentric reality.¹⁶² The solution is to see eschatology as the description of the hope of one community, not the entire human race. The other entails the excessive attempts to delineate chronological sequences of future end-time events and connect current incidents to supposed prophetic expectations.¹⁶³ Eschatology should be understood as a climactic age rather than simply a series of cataclysmic episodes.

Grenz attempts to evade these pitfalls by expanding the dimensions of eschatology in three ways. First, Grenz asserts that eschatology is inherently theological, or more specifically, theocentric.¹⁶⁴ The hope of eschatology derives from a God who is bringing his current creation to its decisive end, not a diluted confidence in a utopia that can be accomplished by the modern ingenuity of mankind. Second, eschatology is to be thoroughly eschatological. Though this may seem like a juvenile tautology at first glance, Grenz is not imploring evangelicals simply to address eschatology as a preliminary category in systematic works or become obsessed with one specific aspect of eschatology. Rather, he is arguing that a theology is truly eschatological only when it addresses all contemporary issues from the perspective of the future culmination.¹⁶⁵ It uses the divine

¹⁶¹See his treatment of Moltmann in Grenz, "Eschatological Hope," 339-41; Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 245-46.

¹⁶²Grenz, "Eschatological Hope," 341; Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 261-62.

¹⁶³Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 241-42.

¹⁶⁴See Grenz, "Eschatological Theology," 344-45; idem, *Renewing the Center*, 217; idem, "Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic," 134-35; Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 259-60.

¹⁶⁵Grenz, "Eschatological Theology," 346; Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 262.

promise of a new creation as a *telic* vantage point, or hermeneutical fulcrum, for understanding and interpreting reality in the present. This leads to the third aspect of Grenz's eschatology, which is the aforementioned idea of eschatological realism. As explicated in Grenz's metaphysics, knowledge of the world as it exists in-and-of itself, or first-order knowledge, cannot be obtained until it is redeemed in the eschatological future. Therefore, theology is constantly driven to make theological claims that attempt to describe the ideal elements of the future within the real problems of the present. Only then can theological claims be considered to truly be referring to "reality."

In retrospect, Grenz goes to great lengths to articulate a theological method that is both sensitive to postmodern criticisms and evangelical beliefs. He is convinced, however, that in order to accomplish this daunting task, many of the conservative assumptions regarding epistemology, Scripture, and theology must be purged of all modernist notions of certainty in exchange for nonfoundational coherentism and metaphysical non-realism (still recognizing that Grenz is a deferred realist). These shifts also include the redefining of the sources of theology in terms of postmodern linguistic theories, which are sensitive to the communitarian nature of knowledge. Finally, Grenz identifies several constructs that can be conducive to his postmodern revisions and still leave a minimal impression of evangelical identity. Further questions that still linger regarding Grenz's method include how it actually functions, how it compares with other postmodern as well as contemporary "modernistic" approaches, and whether or not his method can preserve the continuity of the evangelical tradition. In the following section, a preliminary backdrop will be established for answering these questions by observing how Grenz interacts with one prominent issue in contemporary evangelical theology.

Grenz's Theological Method in Practice

Part of understanding any theological method must come from examining the manner in which it interprets given subjects and evaluating the value of its subsequent

conclusions. Grenz's approach is no different. One particular issue that helps clarify the directions of his method is the postmodern challenge of religious pluralism. For evangelicals, the burning questions underlying this issue pertain to the exclusive right to privilege Christian truth-claims over all other religious traditions and the corollary concern of the eternal destiny of unbelievers. Recognizing that this contemporary challenge is becoming a growing concern, Grenz has seen fit to address this issue.¹⁶⁶ Moreover, in doing so, one can observe how he consistently implements his theological approach and detect the consequences it brings.

Grenz's treatment of this subject commences with an overview of the prevailing ethos towards religions that characterizes the postmodern era. Postmodern thought rejects the idea that any possible worldview holds universal epistemic authority because all beliefs, including religious ones, are strictly social-linguistic constructs (or narratives) formed by different cultural communities. Therefore, there is no acontextual God's-eye-view or Archimedean vantage point that can establish sufficient warrant for substantiating any one worldview, or narrative, as objectively defining reality for all existing communities. There are multiple narratives, but no metanarrative.¹⁶⁷

Grenz traces this postmodern denial of an overriding metanarrative to the gradual secularization of history within theological thought.¹⁶⁸ He marks the beginning of this process with the linear-view of history that ancient Israel adopted in exchange for the previous cyclical ideals promoted by the surrounding pagan religions. Herein, Israel defined history as a trajectory possessing both a beginning and an end.¹⁶⁹ This initial idea

¹⁶⁶See Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 249-86; idem, "Universality of the 'Jesus-Story,'" 85-111.

¹⁶⁷Grenz, "The Universality of the 'Jesus-Story,'" 95.

¹⁶⁸Ibid., 87-95.

¹⁶⁹Ibid., 88.

later led to the conviction that this history was being actively guided by one single deity to an anticipated eschatological consummation. Yet after this Old Testament idea was passed on through the gospels and later commended to the New Testament church, it eventually eroded as third and fourth century leaders began to view the future expectation of believers as being fulfilled in a mystical, eternal state divorced from history altogether.¹⁷⁰ Following the further cultivation of this view in medieval thought, the linear-view was reborn through the Enlightenment. The key though was that the Enlightenment as well as the ensuing modern era altered the theocentric focus of divine creation and consummation to anthropocentric progress.¹⁷¹ This renovation then reached its climax when thinkers, who agreed with the modernistic attitude toward antiquated, religious myths, concluded that history is not unified by a turn to humanity either.¹⁷² Instead, it is splintered because humanity is comprised of numerous contextually-laden interpreters who construct subjective perceptions of histories rather than objective deductions of history.

As a direct result of this postmodern “mood,” a globalized sensitivity has been engendered toward the value of all interpretive communities.¹⁷³ This dynamic has naturally overflowed into the area of religion and instilled a pluralistic tone that views all religious traditions as equal contributors to the task of theological dialogue. In turn, this environment has proven to be extremely resistant to the evangelical claim that eternal reality has been disclosed exclusively through one human message. This “scandal of particularity” seeks to hold all people morally accountable to the Christian gospel because it is intended for everyone universally and therefore nullifies the validity of all other

¹⁷⁰Ibid., 90.

¹⁷¹Ibid., 92-93.

¹⁷²Ibid., 94-95.

¹⁷³Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 249.

worldviews, or narratives.¹⁷⁴ Moreover, this obvious impasse leads to a substantial dilemma. How can evangelicals claim that their language-creating world has precedence over the myriad of others?¹⁷⁵

Grenz asserts that responses to this challenge initially get tangled in questions regarding the criteria for eternal salvation. This narrows the challenge of pluralism to determining “. . . whether or not adherents of other religions can be fitting recipients of eternal life, and then charting the biblical and theological basis for this determination.”¹⁷⁶ While this question has received diverse reactions, Grenz identifies the three general perceptions that classify the currently reigning positions. Two, which Grenz sees as the viable options among evangelicals, are exclusivism and inclusivism.¹⁷⁷ The third option, which has been unanimously rejected by evangelicals, is the voice of the postmodern age known as pluralism.¹⁷⁸ After showing reluctance to embrace the apparent noncritical

¹⁷⁴Grenz notes that it is this very belief that has fueled the missionary impulse of Christian movements. See Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 250; idem, “The Universality of the ‘Jesus-Story,’” 86.

¹⁷⁵Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 280.

¹⁷⁶Ibid., 251.

¹⁷⁷Grenz defines exclusivism by quoting Ronald Nash’s formula which includes two key elements: those being that Jesus Christ is the only Savior and that explicit faith in him is necessary for salvation. Grenz then adds a third element, which is that faith in Christ can only happen in this life. Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 255. Then recognizing the diversity among inclusivist proponents, Grenz acknowledges at least two major proposals. Some such as Richard Swinburne, who do believe explicit faith in Christ is mandatory for salvation, argue that those beyond the reach of the gospel message in this life may have a post-mortem opportunity for salvation. Others such as John Sanders, who do not believe explicit faith is required for salvation, believe that those who never hear the gospel may receive eternal life if they respond in faith to the revelation they do have. Ibid., 262.

¹⁷⁸Grenz defines pluralism as the belief in the salvific activity of God in all religions. Though Christianity may retain significant insight for religion in general, this does not mitigate against the fact that all other religions possess the ability to make valid theological and even salvific claims. Ibid., 263.

attitude of exclusivism and expressing sympathy with the alleged compassionate tone of inclusivism, Grenz concludes that this approach is not the most efficient way to establish a point of contact with other religions in the current postmodern context.¹⁷⁹

To foster an apologetic that will initially intrigue the interest of world religions, Grenz argues that evangelicals must first discover if other religions offer any potential value to God's overall plan in history, or his divine economy.¹⁸⁰ This approach is crucial because any connection that can link the diverse religions with Christianity can provide a basis upon which evangelicals can engage the mutual objectives of other religions. Yet it is acknowledged that this objective must begin with an examination of the Bible since it is this narrative that guides Christian belief. After examining its major themes, Grenz concludes that the Scripture emphasizes God's plan of salvation, which entails the creation, fall, work of redemption, and future consummation. The key though is that the plan is universal in scope.¹⁸¹ It entails God's promise to redeem all of creation, renew a people for himself, and use this redeemed community to reach other nations and races. Likewise, this universal scope of God's activity inevitably stretches beyond primary mediums. This is seen in incidents where Scripture occasionally alludes to the fact that individuals worshipped God outside the boundaries of Old Testament Israel and the New Testament Church.¹⁸² "Consequently, the Christian message cannot deny the presence of divine knowledge beyond the boundaries of the church. Just as in the biblical era, so also

¹⁷⁹This is not to imply, however, that the salvation of others is unimportant for Grenz. His point is that simply formulating an official statement on the final destiny of those outside of Christianity is not the most efficient way to engage the globalized context of postmodern culture. *Ibid.*, 268.

¹⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 268-69; *idem*, "The Universality of the 'Jesus-Story,'" 104.

¹⁸¹Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 269-72; *idem*, "The Universality of the 'Jesus-Story,'" 97-102.

¹⁸²See his examples in Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 272-74; *idem*, "The Universality of the 'Jesus-Story,'" 99-100.

today, wherever people are drawn to worship the Most High God, there the true God is known."¹⁸³

From this deduction, Grenz then begins to search for what he believes is the common point of contact between Christianity and other religions. After correlating the biblical motif of redeemed humanity, as it exists in the present age and anticipates the future, with contemporary social constructivist theories of knowledge, Grenz concludes that the rudimentary ideal is the universal quest for social cohesion, or community. All people, whether Christian or not, find their identity in how they fit within a specific social context. Grenz claims,

The seemingly universal quest for community and the social role of religion in human life suggests a criterion by which an evangelical theology of the religions can view all religious traditions. The human religious phenomenon carries a positive intent. Whatever their ultimate vision of reality may be, all religious traditions contribute to identity formation and social cohesion.¹⁸⁴

This means that all religions have one mutual objective in that they seek to stabilize the lives of people through functional societies. However, Grenz wisely observes that this common bond does not guarantee all religious communities are guided by unified forces or have the same goals. If postmodernism has taught us anything, it is that truth-claims are based upon different agendas. Likewise, religious traditions can suffer from social prejudices, demonic influences, and depraved imperfections.¹⁸⁵ So even though the idea of community is crucial because it opens the door for evangelical dialogue with other religions, it still does not solve the larger problem of privileging the gospel over other religious traditions.

The solution to this problem is where Grenz's theological method is most obvious. He initially agrees with Mark Heim that evangelicals cannot simply appeal to an

¹⁸³Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 281.

¹⁸⁴Ibid., 277; idem, "The Universality of the 'Jesus-Story,'" 105.

¹⁸⁵Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 277-79; idem, "The Universality of the 'Jesus-Story,'" 106-7.

either/or perspective or flat issues of truth and falsehood. because this would lapse back into the fallacy of foundationalism.¹⁸⁶ The proper way to pose the dilemma is not by asking which religious tradition is true, but which religious tradition is most ultimate?¹⁸⁷ When couched in these terms, Grenz contends that the Christian community can claim universality because it personifies the most comprehensive illustration of the universal intent of God's salvation for humanity and creation itself. For example, the Christian Trinitarian perception of God establishes the supreme social model for how human beings should interact in communitarian settings.¹⁸⁸ The Christian community also acts as both a visible, tangible expression of God's desire to save all humanity as well as a clearly visible preview to the future redeemed creation.¹⁸⁹ Finally, Christianity possesses the fullest possible understanding of God and reality because it derives from the person and work of Christ himself.¹⁹⁰

Upon observing how Grenz formulates his theological method and then comparing it to his postmodern evangelical response to pluralism, one must conclude that Grenz is relatively consistent in his approach. He abides within his epistemic commitments by avoiding any remnants of CF to validate the Christian gospel against other religious truth-claims and refuses to adhere to any realist metaphysic that assumes that reality in-and-of itself can be described with the language of the Christian community. Instead, he appeals to his coherentist epistemology as well as his

¹⁸⁶Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 280.

¹⁸⁷Ibid.; idem, "The Universality of the "Jesus-Story,"" 108.

¹⁸⁸Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 281-82; idem, "The Universality of the 'Jesus-Story,'" 109.

¹⁸⁹Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 283-84; idem, "The Universality of the 'Jesus-Story,'" 110.

¹⁹⁰Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 284-85; idem, "The Universality of the 'Jesus-Story,'" 109-10.

eschatological realism to solidify the nature of evangelical truth-claims. Christian theology is true in that it exhibits epistemic continuity and explicates in temporal terms what will come to pass in the future. With regard to how he uses his sources, he is also faithful to abide by the major themes of Scripture, express familiarity with the Christian tradition via interaction with influential thinkers, and use contemporary cultural theories of sociology, linguistics, and psychology to conceptualize his thoughts. He is likewise relentless to link Trinitarianism to the structural apologetic of evangelical theology, appeal to the Christian community as basis for establishing the voice of Christianity among other religions, and use eschatology as the primary tool for vindicating Christian theology against all other religious traditions.

In light of his consistency though, questions still linger regarding what is left for the evangelical tradition in light of this theological approach. For instance, can evangelicals only claim that their truth-claims are “truer” than other religious truth-claims because they provide a superior model of human existence. Until Christ returns, must the evangelical tradition settle for an apologetic based on a communitarian pragmatism? Concerns such as these demand that Grenz’s method receive further examination. One effective way of doing so is to compare his approach with other evangelical models of theological method that contrast and even conflict with his postmodern concerns. External points of reference can help clarify the strengths and potential theological defects inherent within Grenz’s system as well as establish a platform for interaction on contemporary theological method as a whole.

Upon looking at the contemporary evangelical landscape, one such example lies in the influential proposals of Kevin Vanhoozer. As previously mentioned, Vanhoozer is similar to Grenz in that he claims to be advocating a postconservative approach to theology and sees value in the postmodern movement. Yet his proposals are distinct in that he maintains certain beliefs that Grenz discards. Vanhoozer appears to

advocate a more confessional rather than postmodern form of postconservative of theological method. Therefore, we now turn to an examination of his thought in hopes of establishing points of contrast with Grenz's approach as well as discerning potential alternatives.

CHAPTER 3

TRACING VANHOOZER'S VERSION OF POST- CONSERVATIVE THEOLOGICAL METHOD

As previously mentioned, Roger Olson has observed that the current postconservative shift within evangelicalism is not an entirely monolithic movement.¹ One reason why is that many evangelicals are divided regarding the amount of credence that should be given to leading approaches and certain doctrinal commitments intrinsic to early post-fundamentalist evangelicalism. Some are highly critical while others are more sympathetic. In addition, those who are the most skeptical toward conservative theological beliefs and methodologies are often the ones who display the most affinity with various segments of postmodern thought. This is the trend that again can be seen in the kind of postconservatism that is advocated by thinkers such as Stanley Grenz. Others, on the other hand, who desire to preserve the major elements pertinent to conservatism, tend to show more caution in applying postmodern ideals to their theological system.

One evangelical who exemplifies this latter approach of postconservative thought is Kevin J. Vanhoozer.² Like Grenz, he has established himself within

¹Roger E. Olson, "Reforming Evangelical Theology," in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 201-02.

²Note that both Vanhoozer and Grenz comprise the entire second segment of the aforementioned work edited by Stackhouse. Herein, they summarize their particular theological methodologies. See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal about the Ministry and Mimesis of Theology," in *Evangelical Futures*, 61-106; Stanley J. Grenz, "Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic: Theological Method after the Demise of Foundationalism," in *Evangelical Futures*, 107-36. Also, see later assessments of their models by Olson, "Reforming Evangelical Theology," 204-05.

evangelical ranks as a theologian, noted author, and critical analyst of the postmodern movement. Yet the primary focus of the majority of his contributions centers on how postmodernism affects the issue of hermeneutics.³ In fact, his work in this area is what undergirds his overall perceptions of theological method in general.

Regarding his background, Kevin Vanhoozer was born March 10, 1957 and is currently affiliated with the Presbyterian Church of Scotland.⁴ His academic training began in 1975 at Amherst College in Massachusetts, though he actually earned his Bachelor of Arts in 1978 from Westmont College in California. He then received his Master of Divinity from Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia four years later and finally in 1985, obtained his Ph.D. in Divinity from Cambridge University in England where he wrote a dissertation on the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur.⁵

³See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "A Lamp in the Labyrinth: The Hermeneutics of 'Aesthetic' Theology," *TrinJ* 8 (1987): 25-56; idem, "But That's Your Interpretation: Realism, Reading, and Reformation," *Modern Reformation* 8 (1999): 21-28; idem, *Is There a Meaning in this Text? The Bible, The Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998); idem, "The World Well-Staged? Theology, Culture, and Hermeneutics," in *God and Culture*, ed. D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 1-30. Citings of this article will come from its republication in idem, *First Theology: God, Scripture, and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 309-36. One can also consult the recent work on postmodernism which he edited entitled idem, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming in 2003).

⁴Information regarding Vanhoozer's background can be found at Trinity International University's website <http://www.tiu.edu/> under *Trinity Evangelical Divinity School Faculty: Kevin J. Vanhoozer* [on-line]; accessed 20 March 2003; available from <http://www.tiu.edu/people/faculty/vanhoozer.htm>; Internet. The following data also comes from his curriculum vita as received under *File Attachments* [on-line]; accessed 3 April 2003; available from vanhoozer@owc.net; Internet.

⁵This dissertation was later revised and published as Kevin Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: A Study in Hermeneutics and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Other works that he has produced on Ricoeur's thought include Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Philosophical Antecedents to Ricoeur's Time and Narrative," in *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. David Wood (London: Routledge, 1991), 34-54; idem, "Paul Ricoeur," in *The Dictionary of Historical Theology*, ed. Trevor Hart (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 489-93.

After graduating, Vanhoozer returned to the States to begin his teaching career. His first opportunity came in 1986 where he joined the faculty of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (TEDS) in Deerfield, Illinois to teach theology until 1990. He then traveled overseas to teach theology and religious studies at New College, University of Edinburgh, in Scotland where he eventually became senior lecturer. After serving there for eight years, he later returned to TEDS in 1998 to serve as research professor of Systematic Theology where he currently resides to this point and time.

In surveying his accomplishments as a scholar and spokesman, Vanhoozer, like Grenz, has become an important voice within evangelicalism both through publications and active involvement in various organizations. With regard to his writing career, currently Vanhoozer has authored three works, edited two, co-edited one, and has numerous works in progress.⁶ He also has contributed chapters in over fifteen books and provided essays for five theological dictionaries.⁷ Likewise, he has written twelve journal

⁶His most recent book is Kevin Vanhoozer, *First Theology*. His editing contributions include Vanhoozer, ed., *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: Theological Essays on Culture and Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); idem, ed., *Nothing Greater, Nothing Better: Theological Essays on the Love of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); Kevin Vanhoozer and Andrew Kirk, eds., *To Stake a Claim: Mission and the Western Crisis of Knowledge* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999). His next book, which is projected to be published in 2004, is Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Theology* (Louisville: John Knox Press, forthcoming). He is also co-writing works with Richard Lints and D. A. Carson as well as editing upcoming works such as Vanhoozer, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*; idem, ed., *The Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, forthcoming).

⁷Dictionary essays include Kevin Vanhoozer, "Bernard Ramm," in *The Dictionary of Evangelical Theologians*, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 290-306; idem, "Language, Literature, Hermeneutics, and Biblical Theology: What's Theological about a Theological Dictionary?" in *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 1:15-48; idem, "Salvation," in *The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, ed. Leland Ryken et al. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), 752-56; idem, "Paul Ricoeur," 489-93; idem, "Exegesis and Hermeneutics," in *The New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander et al. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 52-64.

articles and furnished book reviews for eight different theological journals.⁸ In conjunction with his literary pursuits, Vanhoozer has been an active participant in several academic and theological organizations as well. For example, he has been the former organizer of the biennial Edinburgh Dogmatics Conference (1993-98), a member of both the Panel on Doctrine (1993-97) and the Working Party on the Interpretation of Scripture (1995-98) for the Church of Scotland, and co-chair of the Systematic Theology Group for the American Academy of Religion (1994-2003). Furthermore, he has led a summer seminar on hermeneutics at Calvin College entitled “Hermeneutics at the Crossroads” in July of 2002, currently acts as moderator of a seminar on Scripture through the Center for Theological Understanding at TEDS (2001-present), and serves on the editorial board for the International Journal of Systematic Theology (1998-present).

In the period of time that Vanhoozer has settled into the evangelical ranks, he has invested the majority of his efforts addressing the nature of hermeneutics as it relates to both postmodernism and evangelical theology, which in turn has led him to formulate his own recommendations regarding doctrinal development and theological method. Upon observing his work, Vanhoozer agrees with Grenz that postmodern thought mandates that certain elements of conservative evangelical thought be re-evaluated and modified. He even appeals to several of the same conceptual schemes that Grenz utilizes, such as Speech-Act theory and Reformed Epistemology, in order to postulate his solutions. Yet his particular vision for a new theological method is radically different in that it preserves pivotal evangelical commitments that Grenz repudiates. This is why Vanhoozer’s approach is, in a sense, more of a *confessional postconservatism* as opposed to Grenz’s *postmodern postconservatism*. Nonetheless, before his approach can be fully

⁸Vanhoozer has provided reviews for *Westminster Theological Journal*, *Review in Religion and Theology*, *Theological Book Review*, *Pro Ecclesia*, *Scottish Journal of Theology*, *Modern Theology*, *Anglican Theological Review*, and *Theology Today*.

understood and further distinguished from Grenz's proposals, several key elements should be identified.

Vanhoozer's theological method is initially conceived in light of the postmodern focus upon hermeneutics. He contends that previous atheistic worldviews of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries have given birth to an intellectual setting that exhibits an unethical attitude toward textual interpretation wherein interpreters ignore or at least avoid the literary intents of authors. This problem is also compounded by the present crisis in evangelical theological method as seen in contemporary disputes over the theological identity of evangelicalism, the relationship between faith and reason, and the nature of biblical revelation. These problems combined motivate Vanhoozer to structure a new approach that addresses these problems in ways that are both faithful to conservative evangelical beliefs and sensitive to postmodern criticisms and it is at this juncture that we now commence with specific assessments of each of these elements.

The Postmodern Attack on Hermeneutics and Christian Theism

Part of the reason why Vanhoozer's theological method can be labeled as post-conservative is because it modifies certain conservative approaches of the past in order to respond to postmodern challenges. Recognizing this, one must note that Vanhoozer's initial assessment of postmodernism as a cultural phenomenon is based upon two factors. First, Vanhoozer's perception of postmodernism *as a culture* is based on his understanding of cultures in general. Second, his analysis of postmodern *cultural expressions* is based upon specific procedures that he views as imperative to interpreting all cultures.

With regard to how Vanhoozer generally defines a culture, he claims that "A culture expresses the totality of what a group of humans value."⁹ As specific segments of people gradually develop in various historical and linguistic contexts, they eventually

⁹Vanhoozer, "The World Well-Staged?" 315.

adopt certain ideas and attitudes that lead to subsequent epistemic priorities, behavioral patterns, and social structures. A culture is then essentially a visible rendition of the emotive and cognitive commitments that dominate a particular community. It is an objectification, or disclosure through words and works, of the *Zeitgeist* (i.e., spirit of the age), or ethos, of a group of people.¹⁰ Consequently, cultures touch every facet of society including religion, philosophy, ethics, and economics as well as education, entertainment, family, and even architecture. Yet the corollary question naturally arises as to how cultures can be interpreted and understood accurately?

Vanhoozer believes that the solution to this challenge begins with the Kantian distinction between the examination of the realm of nature and human freedom.¹¹ Regarding the former, scientists examine the physical, universal laws that mechanically govern the invariable occurrences of nature itself. In contrast, the practice of human volition is unique in that people do not ponder thoughts or perform actions under the compulsion of one single pattern of causal laws. Rather, the history of various cultures reveals that multiple factors can be at work behind human behavior that are sometimes random and even arbitrary because they are not restrained by universal, physical rules.

This does not mean, however, that cultures are unintelligible or beyond interpretation. Here, Vanhoozer appeals to the work of Dilthey and the further insights of Ricoeur.¹² Dilthey worked under the shadow of Schleiermacher by arguing that to interpret history correctly, one must understand the ways in which people have expressed themselves through their works, whether they be literary, physical, or artistic.¹³ The type of understanding Dilthey wanted, though, defies the mere goal of explaining the facts of

¹⁰Vanhoozer, "The World Well Staged?" 313.

¹¹Ibid., 312-13.

¹²Ibid., 313.

¹³Ibid.; Raymond Williams, *Culture* (London: Fantana, 1981), 15-16.

history. It entails the reliving of the experiences and thought processes that motivated people (or authors) to create their assorted works. On the basis on this point, Ricoeur has deduced that history really is engulfed by the field of hermeneutics because it provides the body of data that interpreters draw from in order to capture the essence or the spirit of the past.¹⁴ All cultures, therefore, possess a potentially understandable continuity because they leave traceable impressions upon the world of the present. They reveal the results of ideas that are freely thought, attitudes that are freely embraced, and decisions that are freely made. Contemporary interpreters are then able to understand cultures because they can discover what past thinkers freely chose to value in their particular contexts.

In light of his definition of a culture as well as his belief that each one can be understood, Vanhoozer mentions two dynamics to which evangelicals must be sensitive in order to interpret the current postmodern setting. One is the actual hermeneutics of culture, or the actual process of interpreting a specific culture. In order to observe and assess cultures properly, Vanhoozer again endorses another idea of Ricoeur by arguing that the primary elements included in the interpretation of texts ironically are involved in the interpretation of other nontextual cultural expressions.¹⁵ Just as texts communicate meaning through sentences and words to readers, other visible actions also transmit meaning to observers. Therefore, interpreting cultures should include an analysis of the “textual-like” meanings that are conveyed through other means than just literary works.¹⁶ Additionally, interpreting cultures must be done from a distinctly theological perspective. What Vanhoozer is emphasizing in this point is that evangelicals must recognize that all

¹⁴See Vanhoozer, “The World Well Staged?” 313; Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 52.

¹⁵Vanhoozer, “The World Well Staged?” 314.

¹⁶Vanhoozer also notes that in doing this, interpreters can achieve an understanding of distant cultural traditions as well as the traditions in which they exist themselves. *Ibid.*, 316.

cultures, including the postmodern, are inherently religious in nature. In his own words, “culture is a form of lived religion. We learn what a people really believes and values by interpreting that people’s works, arts, and forms of life.”¹⁷ All cultures are then linked to specific beliefs about God, the significance of human life, and the nature of spirituality.

The second dynamic Vanhoozer emphasizes along with the hermeneutics of culture is the current culture of hermeneutics.¹⁸ This play on words is made in order to encourage evangelicals not only to be concerned with interpreting their context, but to also be aware of how their context defines the act of interpretation. Vanhoozer recognizes that in the postmodern setting, all disciplines are subordinate to hermeneutical theory because all fields of knowledge meet on the common ground of language.¹⁹ Whether pertaining to scientific theories, philosophy, or religious beliefs, human inquiry always engages the world through socio-linguistic signs thereby making all knowledge contextual. So as evangelicals continue to examine their current setting, they must realize that their interpretations are viewed by the surrounding culture as unobjective. In turn, this dilemma finally sets the backdrop for Vanhoozer’s own assessments of postmodern culture.

Vanhoozer has attempted to trace the development of postmodernism from several angles. One has been through juxtaposing the two French revolutions in epistemology as led by René Descartes and Jacques Derrida.²⁰ In the early seventeenth

¹⁷Ibid., 326. To support this point, Vanhoozer mentions that theologians such as Augustine, Cornelius Van Til, Abraham Kuyper, Herman Dooyeweerd, Carl Henry, and even Paul Tillich held to a common axiom. They believed that “there is no such thing as a purely secular culture; the way people live and express themselves in their works has religious meaning Culture is thus the fruit of a theology or a worldview.” Vanhoozer, “The World Well Staged?” 326.

¹⁸Vanhoozer, “The World Well Staged?” 326-31.

¹⁹Ibid., 327.

²⁰See Kevin Vanhoozer, “Exploring the World: Following the Word; The Credibility of Evangelical Theology in an Incredulous Age,” *TrinJ* (1995): 3-27.

century, Descartes deduced that the reality of human thought was the first truth that doubt could not deny.²¹ This premise then became the basis for a turn to the thinking subject wherein rationality was viewed as the epistemic tool that potentially could discover and explain the world as it truly exists. Consequently, modernity was born. Yet three centuries later, this era was laid to rest with the arrival of Derrida's deconstructionism.²²

Derrida rejects the Cartesian notion that human rationality is embedded in an objective, contextually sterile state. All thinking subjects, instead, are rooted in various socio-political contexts that are restricted to specific ideas, cultures, and periods of time.²³ This leads Derrida to mount an assault on what he calls logocentrism, or the belief that

the meaning of words and the truth of ideas is guaranteed by an authoritative source or center (e.g., Reason) that has direct access to the world. Thanks to the *logos*, the mind reasoning, the world is "present" to the mind as an idea. What the knowing subject knows in the first instance is his or her own mind, but the world is nevertheless "present," at least as a reflection.²⁴

Derrida believes this idea, which has dominated western thought, is philosophically untenable and must be interrogated through an act of deconstruction. In other words, all metaphysical links between language and reality must be disconnected altogether. Language is not an objective point of reference that links human thought to reality because linguistic and ideological restrictions of a given language actually precede any ideas that are described by that language. "Though we may think that we use words to express thoughts, Derrida maintains that the way we think is determined by the language

²¹Ibid., 4.

²²Ibid., 5. Vanhoozer actually marks the postmodern era as beginning 1968, this being two years after Derrida had made his debut at a seminar at Johns Hopkins University. Vanhoozer, "Exploring the World," 5. More in depth work on Derrida can be seen in Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 49-55, 57-68. 119-26.

²³Vanhoozer, "Exploring the World," 5.

²⁴Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 59. Elsewhere, Vanhoozer claims that logocentrism views language as being able to map the world or that consciousness can mirror the cosmos. See Vanhoozer, "Exploring the World," 5.

we use.”²⁵ So linguistic descriptions of reality exist prior to reality itself. Moreover, in retrospect, whether it be through the rationalism of Descartes or the deconstructionism of Derrida, both have had a kind of Copernican effect on epistemology by changing the way we think about our knowledge of the world and ourselves as knowers.²⁶

Another way in which Vanhoozer tracks the development of postmodern thought is by identifying three stages in the history of literary criticism.²⁷ The first stage, which Vanhoozer labels as the age of the author, focuses upon the function of authorial intention in communication. This concern initially received a revolutionary emphasis by the Reformers who were concerned primarily with the nature of biblical interpretation and thereby emphasized a grammatical-historical approach to textual exegesis. The problem, however, was that this turn to the author later became distracted with concerns over the psychological complexities of human consciousness as seen in Schleiermacher.²⁸ Nonetheless, the original focus of this phase was upon the metaphysics of meaning, or the ontological nature of meaning as it exists in texts, and the locus of meaning, which was assumed to reside in the intentions and/or experiences that authors chose to communicate.

The second major stage in literary studies is labeled by Vanhoozer as the age of the text.²⁹ This phase marks a shift from a concern about the metaphysics of meaning to

²⁵Vanhoozer, “Language, Literature, Hermeneutics,” 24.

²⁶Vanhoozer also adds that whereas Descartes decentered God and divine revelation by making the knowing subject the source of truth, Derrida simply took the next logical step and decentered the knowing subject as well. See Vanhoozer, “Exploring the World,” 4.

²⁷Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 25-29; idem, “The Reader in New Testament Interpretation,” in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, ed. Joel Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 303-04. This latter article is republished as Vanhoozer, “The Reader at the Well: Responding to John 4,” in *First Theology*, 237-39. Citings of this essay will come from this more recent publication.

²⁸Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 25.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 26-27.

the epistemic possibility of ascertaining meaning. The inception of this era began when the authorial-oriented approach to meaning received a fatal blow from Kantian thought. The idea that the world corresponds to the pre-cognitive categories of the mind created a direct correlation to literary interpretation, namely that “We do not perceive the text as it is itself, but only the text as construed and constructed by the human mind.”³⁰ This idea later led to further complications when subsequent thinkers emphasized other barriers that stood between authors and readers, two crucial ones being time and language.³¹ When audiences read authors, they often do so within different periods of history, which may very well be distanced by significant amounts of time. Likewise, audiences read texts in their own linguistic contexts that can be foreign to the original settings of the authors. If readers and authors then are so polarized, what possible point of reference can be used to establish a common ground between both parties? The answer is the text. Texts are the current sources of inquiry rather than the authors who produce them. With this proposal in hand, thinkers developed interpretive methods that viewed texts as autonomous conveyors of meaning, or more specifically, literarily independent of their authors. So in the end, as opposed to studying the transcendent contributions of authors in the first age, the second age focused on explicating the immanent sense of texts.³²

The third and final stage in this cycle is entitled the age of the reader.³³ In this phase, it is believed that the idea that texts can be liberated from the readers who read and

³⁰Vanhoozer, “The Reader at the Well,” 237.

³¹Ibid., 303.

³²Vanhoozer mentions the schools of the New Criticism and Structuralism as primary expressions of this view. Both theories desired “. . . to *explain* the text’s form and structure (e.g., knowledge *about* the text) rather than to understand its reference (e.g., knowledge of what the text is *about*).” Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 26.

³³Vanhoozer highlights that whereas the first stage focused on metaphysics of meaning and the second centered upon the epistemology of meaning, this phase confronts the ethics of meaning. Ibid., 27-28.

interpret them is virtually impossible. So just as the textual-oriented approach deemed the authorial-oriented method as untenable, this new reader-response model rejects both. Meaning is not confined to what authors originally intended nor to the linguistic structures inherent within texts. Rather, it is created in the dynamics of reading as readers interpret texts in their own contexts and use them for their own purposes.³⁴

In light of these stages of development in literary studies as well as the intellectual landmarks of Cartesian and Derridian thought, Vanhoozer also argues that postmodern culture can be identified by the ideas it values the most.³⁵ One such example is the use of language. For postmoderns, language is the overarching entity that guides all human thought about reality because there is no nonlinguistic access to the world. Whatever we think is always shaped by the language we employ.³⁶ Another postmodern priority is pluralistic ethics. Note here that the term ethics is not used to refer to a system of moral values. The purpose for using this word is to emphasize the need to avoid any description of the world that excludes or mitigates against any other perception.³⁷

³⁴Vanhoozer also distinguishes between conservative and radical reader-response approaches. Conservative critics argue that readers are accountable to texts and should heed textual structures in order to fill in literary gaps that authors inevitably leave unattended while radical critics contend that texts are completely inactive and subject to the arbitrary aims and agendas of readers. The key difference is that the latter group denies that readers are in any way constrained by the texts they are interpreting. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 28; idem, "The Reader at the Well," 242-45.

³⁵This discussion can be seen in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "First Theology: Meditations in a Postmodern Toolshed," in *First Theology*, 19-23.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 20.

³⁷Here, Vanhoozer uses the thought of Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas to convey the idea of postmodern ethics. For Lévinas, "ethics has to do with resisting the tendency of systems of language and systems of thought to swallow things up (to 'totalize')." It ". . . questions philosophy itself insofar as the latter is bound up with metaphysics and epistemology, both attempts to reduce all forms of otherness into the 'Same,' that is, into what our philosophical and political systems classify as 'good,' and 'true.'" *Ibid.*, 21; Emmanuel Lévinas, *A Lévinas Reader*, ed. Seán Hand (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 79.

Finally, Vanhoozer mentions a third priority in postmodern thought, which is hermeneutical aesthetics. This concept sees all forms of discourse and worldviews as attempts to make metaphysical sense of the world.³⁸ Yet in the end, every noetic construct is simply a set of artistic metaphors that form fictitious descriptions of reality.

Now with the history of postmodern thought as well as its philosophical trajectory established, one question remains. What is postmodernism for Vanhoozer? Essentially, he believes it is a culture that has applied atheism to the field of hermeneutics. Vanhoozer argues that this is the case because one's belief concerning God's relationship to the world acts as the basis for one's beliefs about the way human language describes the world. In other words, views of language presuppose views about God.³⁹ Vanhoozer attempts to illustrate this point by tracking the historical turning points that have led to the postmodern setting. He writes,

In the premodern world, the nature of reality was fixed and revealed by God. In early modern philosophy, reality was thought to have an eternal order that was knowable by reason. In later modern philosophy, Kant suggested that what reason knows is its own workings on experience, not the world itself. In our postmodern context, the tendency is to radicalize Kant's insight and to follow Nietzsche by saying that we can never get beyond our languages to an extralinguistic reality. The challenge today is to explain how language can be used to talk truly about reality.⁴⁰

As seen in this scheme, Vanhoozer argues that postmodern culture exists because of the gradual erosion of Christian theism. The belief that God is the grounding element of reality and knowledge was initially modified by the Enlightenment, severely renovated by Kantian epistemology, and finally repudiated by the post-Kantian atheism of Nietzsche.

Coming into the present, the death of God movement, which renounced the idea of a supreme author creating the universe, has now been applied to hermeneutics. Just as there is no divine author of the world who has authority over humanity, there are

³⁸Vanhoozer, "First Theology," 22. Also see how this concept of aesthetics affects theological discourse in idem, "A Lamp in the Labyrinth," 25-28.

³⁹Vanhoozer, "Language, Literature, Hermeneutics," 27.

⁴⁰Ibid.

no authors of texts who have authority over readers.⁴¹ Consequently, this interpretive ambivalence has fostered a dynamic that Vanhoozer calls *hermeneutical non-realism*.⁴² This phrase is used to describe the pervading postmodern belief that literary meaning does not exist prior to interpretive activity because the truth of an interpretation depends on the response of the reader.⁴³ In contrast, *hermeneutical realism* refers to the idea that textual meaning exists prior to interpretation and that readers can discover it and are held accountable to it as they read.⁴⁴ For Vanhoozer then, the postmodern culture entails a complex series of ideas that are unified by a hostile rejection of the Christian God that has led to a subsequent emphasis on unrestrained epistemic and hermeneutical anarchy. Furthermore, these postmodern perceptions foster irresponsible attitudes and unethical behavior toward authors, texts, and ultimately God himself.

Identifying Key Ambiguities of Conservative Evangelical Theological Method

Another set of concerns that Vanhoozer surveys before formulating his own theological method include several factors of conservative evangelical theology that he believes are the most disputed in light of contemporary postmodern culture. These

⁴¹This is why Vanhoozer agrees with Carl Raschke that deconstructionism is the death of God put into writing. He also adds that postmodern thought is the death of God put into the culture as well. See Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 30, 34; Carl Raschke, "The Deconstruction of God," in *Deconstruction and Theology*, ed. Thomas Altizer et al. (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 3.

⁴²Vanhoozer is borrowing this idea from Stephen Mailloux, "Rhetorical Hermeneutics," *Critical Inquiry* 11 (1985): 620-41. Also see Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 26.

⁴³Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 26.

⁴⁴Ibid. Also, this contrast parallels the difference between metaphysical realism and non-realism. Just as the hermeneutical nonrealist denies that a reader-independent meaning exists within a text to which a reader's interpretation should strive to obtain, so "the metaphysical nonrealist denies that there is a mind-independent reality to which our true descriptions must correspond." Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 26.

include the fundamental nature of evangelical identity, the functional role of rationality (or reason) in evangelical theology, and the dynamics essential to an evangelical understanding of how the Bible as a text should be viewed as special revelation. Together, the ways in which these issues have been addressed by evangelicals in the past as well as the recent criticisms they have received by postmodern thought help set the stage for how Vanhoozer will develop his own postconservative-evangelical approach to theology.

The first issue pertains to the problem of determining what elements are essential to evangelical identity. As seen in Olson's overview of the postconservative movement in general as well as the specific views proposed by Grenz, this question is receiving diverse and sometimes even mutually exclusive responses from professing evangelicals. Vanhoozer contends that this pervading dissonance exists because there is deeper confusion regarding the precise nature of evangelical *theology*. Vanhoozer initially supports this thesis by highlighting the quandary that once haunted Bernard Ramm when he was asked during a lecture to give a concise definition of American evangelical theology.⁴⁵ After giving a generic reply to the question, Ramm realized his perceptions of evangelicalism were limited to simple doctrinal constructs that were maintained in light of the twentieth-century struggles between orthodoxy and liberalism as personified in the fundamentalist-modernists controversies.⁴⁶ "The several doctrinal truths that made up Ramm's evangelical theology lacked, by his own admission, an overall cohesion, the unity not of a haphazard set of truths but the unity of *truth*."⁴⁷ He

⁴⁵See Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor," 61-62; idem, "The Pattern of Evangelical Theology: Hommage à Ramm," in the introduction of Bernard Ramm, *The Evangelical Heritage: A Study in Historical Theology* (Dallas: Word, 1973; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), ix-x; Bernard Ramm, *After Fundamentalism: The Future of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), 1.

⁴⁶Vanhoozer, "The Pattern of Evangelical Theology," ix. Also, see the same assessment of Ramm by Millard Erickson, *The Evangelical Left: Encountering Postconservative Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 33-38.

⁴⁷Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor," 62.

later recognized that in order to preserve the heritage of evangelicalism, its substance and structure required re-assessments in light of the new post-Enlightenment situation.⁴⁸

These challenges later proved to be prophetic in that they now reflect the issues that confront evangelicals in the postmodern setting. Many present-day evangelicals, in other words, are following in Ramm's footsteps because they recognize how difficult it is to articulate the theological continuity of the evangelical tradition in a non-modernistic culture. To this point, some believe evangelicalism has yet to fulfill this goal because it lacks a unified voice that can address the major arenas of society while others decry that it has capitulated to cultural pragmatism and overtly individualistic spirituality.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, Vanhoozer acknowledges that many others are proposing various solutions. These include the efforts of evangelicals, such as Thomas Oden, who advocates a type of paleo-orthodoxy in which he pleads with contemporary evangelicals to construct their theology in light of the traditions of the early church fathers, and the proposals of Cambridge theologians, such as John Milbank, who emphasize the need to repudiate secular reason in the process of theological formulation.⁵⁰

⁴⁸Vanhoozer, "The Pattern of Evangelical Theology," xi.

⁴⁹For example, see Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); David Wells, *No Place for Truth or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); Vanhoozer, "The Pattern of Evangelical Theology," x.

⁵⁰See Vanhoozer, "The Pattern of Evangelical Theology," xii; Christopher A. Hall, *Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), 15-18; John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990). Vanhoozer also mentions the neo-orthodox tradition as another category of thought that has been viewed by some, including Ramm, as a potential solution to solidifying evangelical theology. The reason for this is because Karl Barth has been labeled by some thinkers as a prototype postmodern theologian. See Vanhoozer, "The Pattern of Evangelical Theology," xiii; William S. Johnson, *The Mystery of God: Karl Barth and the Postmodern Foundations of Theology* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997).

In looking at these proposals, however, Vanhoozer contends that all the efforts to unify evangelical theology actually are attempts to answer a more fundamental question, namely, what does it mean to be biblical, or more candidly, how can a theology be constructed that maintains fidelity to the message of the Bible and thus proves to be evangelical? Evangelical identity thereby is determined not only by specific doctrinal beliefs or even how they are unified systematically. It is also based upon whether one's method for constructing doctrinal beliefs harmonizes with the overall biblical message. This point finally leads Vanhoozer to argue that the theological standstill regarding evangelicalism is based upon an even more rudimentary issue, which ironically is the foundational subject of postmodern thought, that being textual interpretation. The postmodern hermeneutical crisis exists because the human process of interpretation has been exposed to be biased rather than purely objective. Interpretive conclusions simply do not follow hermeneutical methodology. Instead, both elements interact and work simultaneously. Correlating this criticism to the question of evangelical identity, Vanhoozer argues that postmodernism targets the source of contention by revealing the fact that significant variances regarding doctrinal beliefs (or theological claims) really are symptoms of deeper disagreements concerning hermeneutics (or biblical interpretation).⁵¹

This point is crucial because how one articulates the belief that the Bible can be read and interpreted as God's word does two things. First, it addresses the skepticism of postmodern thought because as opposed to moderns who believe "... the Bible is valuable for what it tells us about what lies behind the text (history)," postmoderns think "the Bible is valuable for what it tells us about the reader in front of the text (ideology)."⁵² Consequently, addressing the dynamics of biblical interpretation automatically entails that one deals with the hermeneutical objections of postmodernism.

⁵¹Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor," 66.

⁵²Ibid.

Second, Vanhoozer believes that the way one interprets the Bible as a divine text reveals the *crux interpretum* of the debate regarding evangelical identity because as he has argued in his assessment of postmodern culture, beliefs about God presuppose hermeneutical theory. Therefore, with regards to evangelicalism, how one goes about the interpretive enterprise reveals evangelical identity just as much as the interpretations that one ultimately embraces. In order of priority then, one's approach to hermeneutics leads to one's theological method, which in turn leads to one's theological identity.

A second major issue within conservative evangelical thought that is in serious jeopardy because of postmodern criticisms is the role of rationality in evangelical theological method.⁵³ Herein, this question relates to the proper function, if any, that human reason should have in the development of a biblical worldview, or more specifically, evangelical theology. Recognizing that Christian thinkers have been struggling with the relationship between faith and reason for centuries, Vanhoozer contends that in the end, to reject the relevancy of rationality altogether leads to one of two alternatives that unquestionably are antithetical to Christianity; one being cognitive anarchy, which upholds no rules for thinking but every individual believes what is right in his own eyes and the other being cognitive totalitarianism, which demands that an individual follow the rules dictated by the reigning powers.⁵⁴ Yet to concede that reason should have a place in evangelical theology is only the beginning point.

Once rationality in general is accepted as an essential component of evangelical theology, one must also determine its specific meaning as well as the most efficient ways

⁵³See discussions of this issue in Kevin Vanhoozer, "Christ and Concept: Doing Theology and the 'Ministry' of Philosophy," in *Doing Theology in Today's World: Essays in Honor of Kenneth Kantzer*, ed. John D. Woodbridge and Thomas McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 99-146; idem, "The Voice and the Actor," 86-90; idem, "Exploring the World," 8-11; idem, "The Trials of Truth: Mission, Martyrdom, and the Epistemology of the Cross," in *To Stake a Claim*, 120-56. Citings of this last essay will come from its republication in idem, *First Theology*, 337-73.

⁵⁴Vanhoozer, "Christ and Concept," 99-100.

to implement it in the theological process. It is here where postmodernism finds its opportunity to exploit evangelical thought because it continues to interrogate the dominant view of rationality that conservative evangelicals traditionally have embraced. At this juncture, Vanhoozer shows agreement with Grenz by arguing that ironically post-fundamentalist evangelicals have attempted to defend the faith against the threats of modernity by using tools of modern thought such as empirical scientific inquiry and Common-Sense realism.⁵⁵ Likewise, Vanhoozer concurs with Grenz that the majority of twentieth-century conservatives embraced a Cartesian view of rationality (i.e., CF) in which they sought ways to hold their theological conclusions with absolute epistemic certainty by basing them on undeniable, rationally justifiable premises.⁵⁶ Vanhoozer recognizes though that CF has been deemed untenable by postmodern culture because all attempts to prove one's faith or solidify a sense of epistemic certainty are deemed suspect because of the contextual nature of knowledge.⁵⁷ In turn, Vanhoozer also acknowledges that this repudiation of CF has led to the further development of alternate nonfoundational approaches to rationality (or epistemology).

It is this very battle between foundational and nonfoundational models that Vanhoozer believes is impeding any healthy dialogue between faith and reason because neither model provides a workable structure in which evangelical theology can both preserve Christian orthodoxy and respond to postmodern concerns. On the one hand, foundationalism demands too much because it forces evangelicals to prove the veracity of their beliefs by basing them on foundations that philosophers deem epistemically

⁵⁵Vanhoozer, "Exploring the World," 8.

⁵⁶Ibid. Vanhoozer also agrees with Grenz that this agenda was echoed in the methodology of earlier thinkers, such as Charles Hodge, who attempted to explicate a theological method that reflected the modernistic inductive methods of scientific inquiry. See Vanhoozer, "Exploring the World," 9.

⁵⁷Ibid., 9.

appropriate, while on the other, nonfoundationalism does not require enough because it simply mandates that beliefs be described within the confines of their own terms and noetic commitments.⁵⁸ Vanhoozer argues that in order to find a balanced medium that can transcend these two extremes and allow rationality to supplement Christian theology properly, evangelicals must concede that reason is not acontextual or completely objective, as seen in CF, nor is it simply restricted to the cognitive tendencies of particular communities, as represented in nonfoundational approaches.⁵⁹ Rather, Vanhoozer concludes that evangelicals must endeavor to formulate alternative models of rationality that do concede liability to error but also affirm reason's capacity to act as a point of reference for holding theological formulations epistemically accountable.

The third major issue of evangelical theology that warrants further attention in Vanhoozer's mind because of the onslaught of postmodern thought is the belief in biblical, or more specifically, textual revelation.⁶⁰ Herein, Vanhoozer believes that the concept of the Scripture principle, or the view that biblical language is to be identified as the "word of God," must be re-evaluated in light of at least two challenges.⁶¹ First, there is a need for more clarification regarding the exact means whereby Scripture, as a text,

⁵⁸Vanhoozer, "Christ and Concept," 103.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰For clarification then, the previous two concerns related to the interpretation (hermeneutics) and potential comprehension (epistemology) of the Bible, while this dilemma now deals with the divine nature of the Bible (textual ontology). Also, the two primary works that contain Vanhoozer's detailed criticisms of conservative models of revelation include Kevin Vanhoozer, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature: Truth and Scripture's Diverse Literary Forms," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 49-75; idem, "God's Mighty Speech Acts: The Doctrine of Scripture Today," in *A Pathway into Holy Scripture*, ed. D. F. Wright and Philip E. Satterwaite (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 143-81. Citings of this latter article will come from its republication in idem, *First Theology*, 127-58.

⁶¹See his comments on the Scripture principle in Vanhoozer, "God's Mighty Speech Acts," 127-28.

conveys divine information. For instance, is divine revelation found within the actual words, concepts, sentences, propositions, beliefs, or images of the Bible?⁶² Second, in conjunction with questions regarding the literary locus of divine revelation, there is also the postmodern reluctance to make a one-on-one correspondence between language in general and reality as it exists independently of linguistic description. Consequently, in order to articulate a contemporary doctrine of biblical revelation, Vanhoozer is convinced that evangelicals must explicate in a precise manner how divine revelation is disclosed through literary discourse as well as formulate a philosophy of language that validates the idea that words, divinely inspired or not, can accurately refer to the world. The problem, however, is that up to this point, these objectives have suffered tremendous setbacks.

One source that has mounted opposition against the evangelical belief in divine revelation derives from the school of historical criticism.⁶³ This discipline strives to interpret the biblical text by first dismantling all the factors that went into its original composition such as the literary sources, authorship, and historical setting and then conflate them once again in order to reconstruct an accurate rendition of the historical referents behind the text. The end result of this method though was that critics who adopted it upheld the humanness of Scripture at the expense of divine inspiration.⁶⁴ According to Vanhoozer, the reason for this is that while this approach was critical of texts, it was blind to its own predispositions. Early on, it was assumed by many that this method was apolitical and objective until scholars such as Rudolf Bultmann later exposed the absurdity of this notion by arguing in light of post-Kantian epistemology that readers do not have access to the history or culture of a text. Rather, they only have the texts

⁶²Vanhoozer, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature," 53.

⁶³His assessments of historical criticism can be seen in Vanhoozer, "God's Mighty Speech Acts," 127-28; idem, "The Reader at the Well," 245-46.

⁶⁴Vanhoozer, "God's Mighty Speech Acts," 128.

themselves and the presuppositions they use to interpret them.⁶⁵ Likewise, historical criticism proved to be anything but objective because its adherents implemented their approaches with preconceived commitments regarding the nature of God. It ultimately proved to be more of a radical ideology than an objective methodology.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, its impact on the doctrine of Scripture remains in that the authenticity and complete veracity of Scripture are still questioned today.

Another corollary assault on divine revelation that Vanhoozer treats is the Biblical Theology movement.⁶⁷ This school of thought initially developed in reaction to the concern that biblical interpretation had become shackled to unchallenged theological categories, and therefore, advocates, such as eighteenth-century scholar J. P. Gabler, argued that biblical studies needed to be distinguished from dogmatics as an independent discipline.⁶⁸ Eventually, this project came to postulate theories of the “mental constructs” of biblical thinkers on the basis of the lexical variations between Hebrew and Greek.⁶⁹

⁶⁵Vanhoozer, “The Reader at the Well,” 246.

⁶⁶This is why Vanhoozer claims that biblical criticism arose and flourished when deism was increasingly in vogue and that classical views of revelation and inspiration presupposed theism. See Vanhoozer, “God’s Mighty Speech Acts,” 128.

⁶⁷His thoughts on the Biblical Theology movement can be found in Vanhoozer, “The Semantics of Biblical Literature,” 53-56; idem, “Exegesis and Hermeneutics,” 52-54; idem, “Language, Literature, Hermeneutics,” 20-23; idem, “From Canon to Concept: ‘Same’ and ‘Other’ in the Relation Between Biblical and Systematic Theology,” *SBET* 12 (1994): 98-100.

⁶⁸This notion was solidified two hundred years later by Krister Stendahl who distinguished between what the text meant (biblical theology) and what the text means (systematics). See Vanhoozer, “Exegesis and Hermeneutics,” 53; idem, “From Canon to Concept,” 99-100.

⁶⁹One conclusion was that the etymology, syntax, and grammar of Hebrew and Greek revealed variances regarding concepts of time and history. “Greek thought was said to be static and abstract in contrast to the dynamic and concrete thought of the Jew.” Vanhoozer, “Language, Literature, Hermeneutics,” 20-21. However, this stage of the movement degenerated simply to assessing the histories of the religions of both Israel and the early church. See Vanhoozer, “From Canon to Concept,” 98.

As this movement moved into the mid-twentieth century, however, the narrow focus on words and lexical data was deemed insufficient because it ignored the broader categories of literary discourse. Thinkers, such as James Barr, argued that “. . . the content with which any biblical theology is concerned is found not in the terminology so much as the various sentences and forms of discourse in Scripture.”⁷⁰ So while the earlier phase of the Biblical Theology movement read theology off of etymology and syntax, the latter stage chose to read it off of literary structure.⁷¹ Despite these variances, the problem for advocates of biblical revelation is that both segments of the movement reject the idea that propositions can act as a linguistic vehicle of religious truth because “. . . biblical statements are too large for those who believe words are the building blocks of meaning and they are too small for those who insist that the key to meaning is the text’s literary form.”⁷² Consequently, this movement supplements the current postmodern antinomy between an obsessive fascination with and incredulous skepticism toward language.

A final source of contention, which Vanhoozer believes is intensifying the confusion regarding the doctrine of Scripture as much as the formidable criticisms of these previous secular approaches, pertains to the idea of propositional revelation.⁷³ Herein, the idea of propositionalism as a philosophical concept is not seen as an inferior

⁷⁰Vanhoozer, “The Semantics of Biblical Literature,” 54. The work that trumpets this thesis is James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1961).

⁷¹Vanhoozer, “The Semantics of Biblical Literature,” 54.

⁷²Ibid., 55.

⁷³Ibid., 56-67; idem, *Is There a Meaning*, 210; idem, “The Voice and the Actor,” 76-77; idem, “God’s Mighty Speech Acts,” 133-42. It should also be noted that Vanhoozer does not focus on this issue at the expense of ignoring other concerns such as divine inspiration or biblical inerrancy. He is well aware of the contemporary criticisms regarding these issues. For example, see Vanhoozer, “God’s Mighty Speech Acts,” 133-39. His choice to focus on the use the linguistic concept of propositionalism is because it underlies all the various factors relevant to an orthodox view of Scripture as well as postmodern theories of language.

category for describing the divine-human dynamics of biblical literature. Vanhoozer believes it is crucial to use it. The problem is that evangelicals do not agree on the specific nature of propositions in general and therefore cannot arbitrate a unified way of viewing biblical statements as propositional.⁷⁴ Likewise, this lack of consensus also leaves evangelicals vulnerable to the criticisms that non-evangelical sources pose against propositional revelation as well.⁷⁵

Vanhoozer highlights the fact that the original purpose of the idea of “propositionalism” within evangelical thought was to stress the cognitive aspect of revelation.⁷⁶ Yet as this project developed, evangelicals provided diverse explanations as to how revelation resides within propositional statements. To illustrate this point, Vanhoozer categorizes three prominent models within conservative evangelicalism. The first, which Vanhoozer labels as a meaning-content approach, can be seen in the work of thinkers such as Ronald Nash, Stanley Obitts, and Gordon Lewis.⁷⁷ Vanhoozer argues

⁷⁴See Vanhoozer, “The Semantics of Biblical Literature,” 56-57; and the dated but helpful work by Paul Helm, “Revealed Propositions and Timeless Truths,” *RelS* 8 (1972): 126-36.

⁷⁵Two of the most formidable sources come from the neo-orthodox view of Karl Barth and what Vanhoozer calls the neoliberalism of James Barr. For Barth, propositionalism relegates revelation to mere conceptional schemes at the expense of a personal encounter with the divine, while for Barr, it is impossible to speak of revelation at all because we have no access to a communication from God that is antecedent to the traditions we use to describe Him. See Vanhoozer, “God’s Mighty Speech Acts,” 134-35; George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 42-44; James Barr, *The Bible in the Modern World* (London: SCM Press, 1973), 120-21.

⁷⁶One of the major reasons for this emphasis was to respond to the threat of neo-orthodox thought, which viewed revelation as an event that occurred as someone encountered Scripture rather than as a static deposit of information placed within the language of Scripture. Vanhoozer, “The Semantics of Biblical Literature,” 64.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 57-59; Ronald Nash, *The Word of God and the Mind of Man* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982); Stanley Obitts, “A Philosophical Analysis of Certain Assumptions of the Doctrine of the Inerrancy of the Bible,” *JETS* 26 (1983): 129-36; Gordon R. Lewis, “What does Biblical Infallibility Mean?” *BETS* 6 (1963): 18-27.

that evangelicals within this line of thought make a problematic distinction between propositions, which are defined as cognitive segments of information, and the actual words of Scripture, which are the divinely-ordained linguistic signs in which propositions are conveyed.⁷⁸ What concerns Vanhoozer in this model is that it falls prey to a quasi-Barthian view wherein Scripture merely is a witness (albeit inspired) *to* revelation.⁷⁹ The second model, which Vanhoozer entitles a conceptual-verbal approach, is seen in the work of thinkers such as Carl F. H. Henry and Clark Pinnock.⁸⁰ What distinguishes this approach from the former is that it defies the dichotomy between propositions and words. This can be seen in how Henry defines a proposition as a verbal statement that is either true or false as well as Pinnock's emphasis on the relationship between propositions and verbal communication.⁸¹ This stricter form of verbal-propositionalism leads Henry and Pinnock to argue that inerrancy applies to the very words of Scripture because the veracity of biblical propositions depends upon the divinely-inspired words that convey

⁷⁸Vanhoozer, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature," 57-58.

⁷⁹Ibid., 58-59. Vanhoozer mentions several examples to support this charge. For instance, Nash claims that one can affirm propositional revelation but reject verbal inspiration because the latter has to deal with the supernatural derivation of words, not the divine content deposited within the words. Likewise, Obitts and Lewis argue that inerrancy should be applied to the propositions of Scripture rather than the actual words because in and of themselves, sentences cannot be verified as true or false, but propositions can. See Vanhoozer, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature," 58; Nash, *The Word of God*, 50-54; Obitts, "A Philosophical Analysis," 129; Lewis, "What does Biblical Infallibility Mean?" 18. Vanhoozer recognizes that these thinkers deny a Barthian view of revelation. The problem is that he believes their semantical distinctions regarding propositionalism misconstrue the actual way languages function.

⁸⁰See Vanhoozer, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature," 59; Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 6 vols. (Waco: Word, 1976; reprint, Wheaton: Crossway, 1999), vol. 3; Clark Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation: The Foundation of Christian Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971).

⁸¹Vanhoozer, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature," 59; Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 3:455-81; Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation*, 110. Note, however, that Pinnock now denies the propositional view that he once upheld. See Clark Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984).

them.⁸² The third model, which Vanhoozer views as a more extreme form of Henry's thought, is the declarative-assertive approach of Gordon H. Clark.⁸³ Clark's view is similar to Henry in that he views propositions as inseparable from words and sentences, but different in that he restricts propositions to certain kinds of sentences, namely statements in the indicative.⁸⁴ In summary, the overall point that Vanhoozer emphasizes in surveying these approaches is that while they all agree that revelation is disclosed in a cognitive fashion, significant variances exist regarding the nature of *biblical* propositions that affect one's view of inerrancy, inspiration, and theological method.

This being the case, the collage of ambiguity regarding propositionalism has led many evangelicals to formulate alternate proposals for understanding the nature of revelation as disclosed in human language.⁸⁵ One such example is a renewed emphasis on the mystical dynamic between the Spirit and Scripture. Vanhoozer claims that Donald Bloesch is an excellent contemporary example of this view wherein Scripture is viewed as a sacramental means whereby the Spirit brings the reader or listener into a divine encounter with God.⁸⁶ Another approach focuses on redefining the nature of inspiration and emphasizing the humanness of Scripture. Here, Vanhoozer asserts that proponents of

⁸²Vanhoozer, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature," 59.

⁸³Ibid.; Gordon H. Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation* (Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation, 1986).

⁸⁴Vanhoozer, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature," 59. This is why Clark argues that with the exception of a few imperative sentences and exclamations in the Psalms, the Bible is composed of propositions, or direct equational statements that can be verified as true. Clark, *Karl Barth's Theological Method*, 150; Vanhoozer, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature," 59.

⁸⁵See Vanhoozer, "God's Mighty Speech Acts," 139-41.

⁸⁶Obviously, this view is a resurrected version of Barthian thought. See Vanhoozer, "God's Mighty Speech Acts," 137; Donald Bloesch, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration, and Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994), 27.

this perspective include Clark Pinnock, William Abraham, and Kern Robert Trembath.⁸⁷ The idea behind this set of theories is that the Spirit inspired the biblical writers through supernatural encounters and historical events which, in turn, motivated them to record their own thoughts concerning what they experienced, but the actual texts that they produced do not transcend their human shortcomings, weaknesses, and frailties. Rather, the Spirit communicates through the Scriptures in spite of them. A final alternative, which Vanhoozer deems as influential, conceives biblical authority in terms of the salvific results that Scripture illicit. He notes that the contributions of G. C. Berkouwer and Donald McKim illustrate this notion well.⁸⁸ Berkouwer argued that Scripture was authoritative not because it derived from an *a priori* act of inspiration but because it gives direct witness to Christ, the object of faith, and in a similar vein, McKim contends that the primary authority of Scriptural propositions resides in their soteric purposes.⁸⁹ The key to notice in all these proposals is that they do not embrace propositionalism in the same ways that conservative evangelicals have. These proponents have chosen, for the most part, to abandon the concept as a helpful way of articulating the relationship between revelation and language. Consequently, Vanhoozer contends that new evangelicals, who desire to conserve propositionalism as a tenable concept, must come to grips with the philosophical intricacies of the topic and formulate more holistic approaches that harmonize the essential ideas that previous evangelicals originally were trying to preserve.

⁸⁷See Vanhoozer, "God's Mighty Speech Acts," 140-41; Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle*; William J. Abraham, *The Divine Inspiration of Holy Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981); Kern Robert Trembath, *Evangelical Theories of Inspiration: A Review and Proposal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

⁸⁸See Vanhoozer, "God's Mighty Speech Acts," 141; G. C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, trans. and ed., Jack B. Rogers (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975); Donald McKim, *What Christians Believe about the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985).

⁸⁹Vanhoozer, "God's Mighty Speech Acts," 141; Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, 166; McKim, *What Christians Believe*, 91.

In summary of this segment, the combination of Vanhoozer's previous assessments of postmodernism along with the urgency he believes is pending on the aforementioned challenges to evangelical theology set the trajectory for how his proposals unfold. Collectively, his proposals make up what he calls a "canonical-linguistic" approach that include revisions to several key subjects germane to evangelical concerns.⁹⁰ These components can be categorized into two segments, which comprise four basic ideas altogether. The first section entails his re-evaluation of hermeneutics and Scripture as well as how these subjects interrelate in the theological development. Vanhoozer develops an intricate Christian approach to hermeneutics that responds to postmodern theories of language and also substantiates the subsequent manner in which he articulates his understanding of biblical revelation. The second couplet, which builds upon the first, entails his thoughts on the task of biblical interpretation as it pertains to systematic theology and doctrinal development as well as the construction of a new model of rationality, which he argues is neither foundational or nonfoundational, that can act as an epistemic defense of his theological approach. In the end, Vanhoozer believes his reassessments result in a distinctly postconservative methodology that is able to sustain traditional conservative beliefs while at the same time, surpass many of the standard ways in which those beliefs have been expressed.⁹¹ We now turn to an analysis of the first two segments of his methodology in order to observe the postconservativeness of his thought.

Discovering the Ethics of Interpretation and the Dynamics of Biblical Language

As already mentioned, Vanhoozer is convinced that the fundamental dilemma underlying postmodern thought as well as the leading debates regarding evangelical

⁹⁰Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor," 75.

⁹¹Though this point can be applied to his overall approach in general, Vanhoozer personally endorses the term "postconservative" in relation to his reformulation of the nature of Scripture. *Ibid.*, 76, 82.

identity is hermeneutical in nature. It also has been shown that he believes the conventional issues pertinent to hermeneutics are fueled by preconceived theistic commitments. Following his logic then, Vanhoozer deduces that on the one hand, hermeneutics is essentially theological insofar as the interpretation of texts normally functions in congruence with views about God while on the other, theology also is hermeneutical because it seeks to interpret the message of Scripture.⁹² Therefore, in actuality, beliefs about God, Scripture, and hermeneutics intersect and build upon each other equally.⁹³ To conceive of one automatically includes perceptions of the others.

This observation is critical for Vanhoozer because he believes it is the only reliable point of reference for theological method. Echoing the conclusion of David Kelsey, Vanhoozer argues that theologians develop their doctrines of God and Scripture simultaneously.⁹⁴ Theological formulation is not preceded by isolated beliefs about God *or* Scripture *or* the Christian faith in general, but by assumptions in each of these areas. For example, one cannot simply adopt a *sensus divinitatis* approach and conclude that a preconceived belief in God's existence can act as a sufficient starting point for theology because it precludes any reliable criteria for determining the validity of that assumption.⁹⁵

⁹²See Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 455; idem, "The Spirit of Understanding: Special Revelation and General Hermeneutics," in *Discipling Hermeneutics: Interpretation in Christian Perspective*, ed. Roger Lundin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans); republished in idem, *First Theology*, 208. Subsequent citations of this last article will come from the latter publication.

⁹³Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor," 74. One could also categorize all texts in general or objective reality as a whole under the heading of Scripture. The choice to emphasize Scripture specifically is because of its prominence in evangelical theology.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, 73; idem, "First Theology," 28-31; David H. Kelsey, *Proving Doctrine: The Uses of Scripture in Modern Theology*, rev. ed. (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 161-67. This does not mean, however, that Vanhoozer endorses Kelsey's own views of Scripture or God.

⁹⁵Vanhoozer also mentions that Calvin himself saw this approach as problematic because the sense of the divine had been corrupted in the human heart by sin. Vanhoozer, "First Theology," 25.

Neither can one adopt a reductionistic *sensus literalis* perspective, which appeals to an initial loyalty to the plain message of Scripture, because it begs the question as to what presuppositions are involved in one's interpretation of that message.⁹⁶ Christian theology, therefore, cannot start with God because it "... prompts the question, How do we know about God? just as starting with Scripture raises the question, Why *this* particular text rather than another?"⁹⁷ This being the case, what are evangelicals to do?

Vanhoozer contends that theological formulation ironically begins with theology itself. Yet to be more precise, it commences with a theology that is wedded to a hermeneutical theory, thus becoming a theological hermeneutics.⁹⁸ Vanhoozer believes that in order to avoid the dangerous pitfalls that arise when one attempts to argue that theology begins with God *or* Scripture, one must recognize that theology commences with both. It does not begin with a *sensus divinitatis*, *sensus literalis*, or even a *sensus fidelium* idea, but with a *sensus scripturalis* approach wherein God and Scripture are accepted and assessed together.⁹⁹ Believers approach Scripture to know God and allow their knowledge of God to guide their interpretation of Scripture. For Vanhoozer then, the first priority to establish in studying theology is theology.

Upon observing the logical implications of this theory, one quickly recognizes the staggering influence that hermeneutical theory and the doctrine of Scripture have in theological formulation. One's presuppositions and potential revisions on these matters can potentially restructure the entire framework of evangelical theology if taken in radical

⁹⁶Ibid., 27-28. Vanhoozer also mentions a *sensus fidelium* approach wherein one begins theological formulation with a preliminary epistemic acceptance of Christianity in general. His criticisms of this view, however, are based on a narrower disagreement with Kelsey's analysis of Christian theology. Vanhoozer, "First Theology," 30-31; idem, "The Voice and the Actor," 74.

⁹⁷Vanhoozer, "First Theology," 16.

⁹⁸Ibid., 38.

⁹⁹Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor," 74.

directions. This is why it is imperative to analyze Vanhoozer's perceptions of these issues before accepting his theological methodology wholesale, especially since he thinks his approach is postconservative by nature. One must observe the parameters that he establishes for hermeneutics, including their relevance to biblical interpretation, as well as his understanding of the nature of the very texts he is interpreting because these are the topics that will dictate the outcome of his principle of "first-theology."

Regarding Vanhoozer's perceptions of hermeneutics, the first factor that must be acknowledged is his belief that the very nature of God acts as the basis for the possibility of communication and interpretation.¹⁰⁰ This is another reason why theistic beliefs precede beliefs about hermeneutics. The existence of the divine sets the epistemic and ontological standards that are necessary for human discourse to take place. Theism thereby "... serves the role of what Kant calls a 'transcendental condition': a necessary condition for the possibility of something humans experience but cannot otherwise explain, namely, the experience of meaningful communication."¹⁰¹ It is important to note, however, that Vanhoozer argues that not just any brand of generic theism is sufficient. Only the Christian view of theism qualifies because the specific portrayal of God as a Trinity, who personally discloses himself to humanity through covenantal relations, sustains all the elements involved in the process of human communication.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰This point is based initially on George Steiner's observation that God somehow underwrites all coherent accounts of the capacity for human communication. See George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 3; Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 198, 456; idem, "The Spirit of Understanding," 212.

¹⁰¹Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 456.

¹⁰²See Vanhoozer, "The Spirit of Understanding," 224-27. Also note that this link pertains to the economic rather than the immanent Trinity. See idem, "From Speech Acts to Scripture Acts: The Covenant of Discourse and the Discourse of the Covenant," in *After Pentecost: Philosophy and Theology of Language and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene, and Karl Möller, in *The Scripture and Hermeneutics Series* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001); republished in idem, *First Theology*, 168. Citings of this article will come from this latter publication.

One way in which Vanhoozer supports this thesis is by detecting a correlation between the persons of the Godhead and the author-text-reader dynamic that occurs in the hermeneutical process. Vanhoozer's point in this argument is that the way in which authors impart their ideas to subsequent readers reflects the way God has revealed himself to humanity through the covenant of salvation. On the one hand, God the Father functions as the author who sends his Word (or the Son) to the world and empowers some by the Spirit to receive the message conveyed by that Word while on the other, a direct correspondence exists in how human authors record ideas in texts by means of language in order to relay those ideas to readers.¹⁰³

Another alternative Vanhoozer uses to support this thesis is the philosophy of Speech-Act theory.¹⁰⁴ As previously covered in the analysis of Grenz, advocates of this idea contend that the purpose of language is not simply to assert propositional equations, but to do things, or commit acts. Words are used to exhort, command, lament, promise, and convince. This is why advocates of Speech-Act theory divide verbal communication (whether literary or not) into categories that emphasize this idea, again those being locutions, illocutions, and perlocutions.¹⁰⁵ Words (i.e., locutions) are either spoken or written in order to express desires, ideas, or actions (i.e., illocutions) in hopes of having an impact upon the listener or reader (i.e., perlocutions). Vanhoozer's point is that these

¹⁰³Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 161, 456. One could also see the same link by substituting the author-text-reader trichotomy with the sender-receiver model, which is prominent in communication studies. According to this idea, "a source (speaker, author) encodes a message into a linguistic signal (speech, text) that serves as the channel that conveys the message (through air, across time) to a destination (listener, reader) that receives the message by decoding the signal." See Vanhoozer, "From Speech Acts to Scripture Acts," 167-68.

¹⁰⁴This concept will also have a significant impact on Vanhoozer's understanding of revelation as well.

¹⁰⁵To see Vanhoozer's analysis of Speech-Act theory, consult Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 208-14, 43-46; idem, "From Speech Acts to Scripture Acts," 172-73; idem, "A Lamp in the Labyrinth," 50-51.

elements are supported again by the triune dynamics involved in divine covenantal discourse. God the Father functions as the speech-agent or locutor who discloses his Son, or the salvific illocution, to humanity and guarantees the intended perlocutionary effects via the work of the Spirit.¹⁰⁶ In the end then, the essential categories of speech-acts likewise derive from the very nature of God.

A subsequent proposal that Vanhoozer derives from this theistic transcendental approach to hermeneutics is that the communicative nature of God is inherited by humanity via the concept of the *imago dei*.¹⁰⁷ Here, Vanhoozer argues that just as God is capable of transmitting information through speech-acts to human beings efficaciously, so can human beings potentially assert ideas or convey actions with each other. This is a crucial point because it establishes a preliminary reason for rejecting postmodern theories of literary non-realism, especially deconstructionism. While conceding that postmodern thinkers are correct to highlight the fact that language is practiced in light of social contexts and affected by cultural biases and prejudices, Vanhoozer argues that it is premature to conclude that language and interpretation are arbitrary endeavors altogether. Despite the fact that sin distorts the *material* uses of language, one should not infer that we no longer possess a *formal* reflection of God that can assure us that communication is still a viable human activity.¹⁰⁸ On the contrary, communicative agency is a key part of

¹⁰⁶Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 457. In other works, Vanhoozer has also tried to show how this correlation between Trinitarian hermeneutics and Speech-Act theory affects specific issues in systematic theology. One such example can be seen in his treatment of the Reformed view of the effectual call to salvation. See Vanhoozer, "Effectual Call or Casual Effect? Summons, Sovereignty, and Supervenient Grace," *TynBul* 48 (1998): 213-51; which is republished in idem, *First Theology*, 96-124. Citings will come this latter publication.

¹⁰⁷Consult Kevin Vanhoozer, "Human Being, Individual and Social," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, ed. Colin Gunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 176-78.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 177.

what constitutes the functional essence of human nature, whether it be depraved or not.¹⁰⁹ Likewise, because genuine communication is possible, Vanhoozer also deduces that postmodern theories are wrong to postulate that meaning is preceded by interpretation because all communicative acts contain propositional content and illocutionary forces that exist *prior to* any subsequent perlocutionary effects they may illicit.¹¹⁰

At this juncture, one must finally notice the climax of Vanhoozer's thoughts on hermeneutics. In light of the arguments that God undergirds the very possibility of human communication (which includes interpretation) and likewise delegates this ability to humanity, Vanhoozer concludes that the hermeneutical task necessarily entails an undeniable ethical mandate. Specifically, this obligation demands that interpreters seek to understand the communicative intents that authors chose to convey because to misinterpret texts *willfully* is akin to attributing actions to authors that they did not commit.¹¹¹ One could say then that to follow the trail of radical postmodern thought, which view texts as independent entities that are truncated from their authors and subject to the interpretive mercies of contemporary readers, is to violate the literary authority of illocutionary forces that exist in communicative acts and thereby commit hermeneutical sin.¹¹² Furthermore, this interpretive law is to be adhered at two levels. At a vertical

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 178.

¹¹⁰Vanhoozer, "From Speech Acts to Scripture Acts," 173-78.

¹¹¹Vanhoozer, "A Lamp in the Labyrinth," 51; idem, "The Reader at the Well," 248-50.

¹¹²An illustration of this point can be seen in Vanhoozer's charge that deconstructionism violates a Christian view of hermeneutics in two ways. It denies a "realism principle," which is the belief that we can know reality accurately thereby holding humanity epistemically liable as well as a "bias principle," which emphasizes the obligation to be aware that all knowledge is contextually influenced and consequently in need for ongoing critical reflection. See Vanhoozer, "The Spirit of Understanding," 229. Note also that these ideals are borrowed from Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prologomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 20.

level, believers are held accountable to the divine Author for understanding the messages he has conveyed in Scripture in order that they may apply them in everyday life and share them with others accordingly. In his own words, “the people of God have been given the privilege and responsibility not only of thinking God’s thoughts after him but of speaking God’s words and acting God’s acts after him.”¹¹³ Yet just as believers are accountable to interpret God’s communicative acts responsibly, all readers likewise should be compelled at the horizontal level to ascertain the illocutionary forces that authors intend to perform through their textual acts.¹¹⁴ Only then, when this hermeneutical ethic is maintained, do interpreters have the legitimate right to move to the subsequent task of applying meaning to their particular contexts and situations.¹¹⁵

The second major segment of revisions, which logically interrelate with Vanhoozer’s approach to literary interpretation and undergird his principle of “first theology,” include his thoughts on the nature and authority of Scripture. Herein, Vanhoozer desires to formulate a new model of biblical revelation that is conducive to his Trinitarian/Speech-Act theory of hermeneutics and sensitive to the fundamental commitments essential to the traditional evangelical understanding of the subject such as verbal inspiration, biblical infallibility, and even inerrancy. His attempts to achieve these

¹¹³Vanhoozer, “The Voice and the Actor,” 69.

¹¹⁴See an in-depth discussion of this point in Vanhoozer, “From Speech Acts to Scripture Acts,” 180-85.

¹¹⁵Here Vanhoozer alludes to E. D. Hirsch, Jr.’s original distinction in literary studies between meaning and significance. Hirsch defined meaning as the willed meaning represented in a text while significance relates to any future relationship or impact that meaning may have upon reader, concept, situation, or different context in general. See E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 8. Note, however, that Vanhoozer’s thoughts are slightly different than Hirsch’s original points since he is dealing with the dynamics of canonical revelation. See his thoughts on Hirsch in Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 74-79, 260-65; idem, “The Bible: Its Relevance Today,” in *God, Family, and Sexuality*, ed. David Torrance (Carberry, Scotland: Handsel Press, 1997), 14-15.

objectives can be seen in his discussion of two critical issues. These include his endorsement of a new postpropositional view of biblical revelation and his subsequent re-evaluation of the particular dynamics involved in the Holy Spirit's ministry of illumination.

With regard to the former subject, the initial item of concern that one must observe in order to understand the nature of Vanhoozer's postpropositionalism is the specific problem regarding the doctrine of Scripture to which he is reacting. Herein, Vanhoozer believes that the dominant Protestant perspectives of Scripture have failed to offer a suitable paradigm that maintains a theological balance between divine action and divine speech. The growing tendency is to treat the personal and cognitive elements of biblical revelation as mutually exclusive ideas.¹¹⁶ For example, thinkers within the Protestant liberal tradition, such as James Barr and John Barton, represent one extreme wherein any notion that revelation is propositional in nature is willfully repudiated. Revelation is viewed merely as a functional dynamic behind Scripture that allows individuals to reflect on their religious experience rather than something intrinsic to the biblical text itself.¹¹⁷ Other thinkers within the neo-orthodox tradition, such as Karl Barth, reject the liberal tendency to collapse revelation into religious subjectivity and argue instead that revelation does not begin with an experience, but with the person of Jesus Christ. The problem, however, is that even in this view, revelation does not reside (propositionally) within Scriptural claims. Instead, the Bible becomes *revelational* only when the Spirit freely chooses to use it to bring people into a divine encounter with

¹¹⁶Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor," 76; idem, "God's Mighty Speech Acts," 156. This again echoes back to the topic of the Scripture principle, or what Vanhoozer calls the identity thesis, this being the confession that the words of the Bible are to be *identified* as the word of God. Vanhoozer, "God's Mighty Speech-Acts," 148.

¹¹⁷See Vanhoozer, "God's Mighty Speech Acts," 144-45; Barr, *Bible in the Modern World*, 120; John Barton, *People of the Book: The Authority of the Bible in Christianity* (London: SPCK Press, 1988), 56.

Christ.¹¹⁸ In further contrast to both Protestant liberalism and neo-orthodoxy are also conservative evangelicals who echo the opposite extreme. Vanhoozer parrots Grenz here in arguing that these thinkers follow the traditional Princetonian paradigm as articulated by Charles Hodge and B. B. Warfield in arguing that revelation is equivalent to the cognitive information or propositional content as revealed in the very words of Scripture.¹¹⁹ So in the end, each of these models embrace variant views regarding the authority and nature of Scripture, but display a common deficiency by fostering an unfortunate cleavage that divides the dynamics of revelation into problematic either-or categories.¹²⁰ Revelation either resides in an activity that God performs *through* Scripture or in the words that are recorded *in* Scripture, but not in both.

The perplexity one faces with this demarcation is that an emphasis on one dynamic proves to be insufficient without the other. To follow Protestant liberal thought and identify revelation within the interpretive activity of Scripture leads to theological ambivalence because spiritual authority is reduced to the diverse and sometimes contrary

¹¹⁸It is also important to note that one of the major reasons Barth was hesitant to accept the idea that revelation resided with human words was because of his rejection of natural theology, or the idea that God could be known through means that were separate from God's interaction within history. To say God could be known by words themselves without God's intervention would be an infringement upon His sovereign freedom. See Vanhoozer, "God's Mighty Speech Acts," 143-45; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: A Selection*, ed. Helmut Gollwitzer (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 50-65.

¹¹⁹See Vanhoozer, "God's Mighty Speech Acts," 143; B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, ed. Samuel G. Craig (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948; reprint, 1970), 157-58; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, abridged ed., ed. Edward N. Gross (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988, reprint, 1992), 76-95.

¹²⁰Vanhoozer also highlights the fact that these variances regarding biblical authority display other variances regarding the nature of God. Protestant liberalism shows leanings toward panentheistic tendencies while Barth embraced a more transcendental approach through his emphasis on Christology and the Princetonians based their views on classical theism and the Reformed tradition. See Vanhoozer, "God's Mighty Speech Acts," 143-45.

commitments of different religious communities, which in turn, blatantly ignores the major Scriptural theme that many communities are unbelieving and willfully choose to mis-interpret God's character.¹²¹ Likewise, neo-orthodox thought falls into difficulties even though it exchanges the locus of revelation from individual religious experience to Christology because in the end, there is semantical equivocation regarding the exact way in which the propositional content of Scripture can become revelation indiscriminately at God's discretion. It fails to give a coherent framework for explaining how the words of the Bible can sometimes be and at other times not be the word of God.¹²² At the other end of the spectrum, evangelicalism's strict focus on propositionalism, which again has in no way received a unified treatment, inadvertently traps biblical revelation within a picture-theory of language that ultimately restricts the effectiveness of biblical literature.¹²³ Vanhoozer argues that in a noble attempt to preserve biblical veracity, conservative evangelicals perhaps reflect an early Wittgenstenian view of language, which views propositions as elementary, atomistic statements that explicate a given state of affairs.¹²⁴ They appear to concur with Wittgenstein's initial argument that propositions mirror the logical form of reality by arguing that Scripture reveals accurate propositional information about God and the world.¹²⁵ The problem with this move, however, is that the literary structures and formats in which the words of Scripture are expressed become

¹²¹Vanhoozer, "God's Mighty Speech Acts," 149.

¹²²Ibid., 150-51.

¹²³Vanhoozer, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature," 64-67. This point is made also in light of Nancey Murphy's observation that classical liberals adopted the same view of language, but oriented its focus to expressions of human subjectivity rather than the external world. See Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor," 75; Nancey Murphy, *Beyond Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996).

¹²⁴Vanhoozer, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature," 66.

¹²⁵Ibid., 66-67; idem, "God's Mighty Speech Acts," 143.

subordinate to the task of formulating empirical equations of the divinely revealed propositional data. So in the end, to focus exclusively on a personal or propositional account of revelation leads to either a denial of an evangelical view of Scripture or a reductionistic understanding of the nature of biblical language.

This troubling dichotomy between objective referentialism and subjective expressivism is what leads Vanhoozer to advocate a postpropositional view of revelation. Yet in doing so, his goal is not to advocate a modified version of classical liberal or neo-orthodox thought nor to deny the evangelical belief that revelation is revealed verbally and cognitively within the words of Scripture. He simply desires to amend the theological and linguistic shortcomings of strict evangelical propositionalism by developing a new model that is more sensitive to the diverse language-forms of Scripture and alert to the interplay between divine action and speech.

Vanhoozer's proposal, which again intersects with his previous thoughts regarding hermeneutics, is that the words of Scripture should be understood in light of the conceptual scheme of Speech-Act theory. Here, the point is that biblical literature should be understood from two vantage points. The first principle is that words (i.e., locutions), divinely inspired or not, are used to convey specific quantities of information, or propositional content. All sentences, paragraphs, or larger segments of literature propound cognitive ideas for readers to consider.¹²⁶ Evangelicals have been loyal to emphasize this point. The problem, though, is that not all sentences reflect assertive, or indicative force.¹²⁷ This leads to the second principle of language, which is that locutionary acts are done for the purpose of expressing different actions, or illocutionary forces. For example, one can use one single set of words to convey a direct assertion, a command, a promise, or a question. This means then that theoretically speakers,

¹²⁶Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor," 76.

¹²⁷*Ibid.*; *idem*, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature," 87-88.

including biblical writers, can use propositions in a variety of ways.¹²⁸ Moreover, in light of both these emphases, the key that Vanhoozer desires to highlight is that the revelational nature of Scripture should be understood as residing in the illocutionary forces of biblical literature as well as the actual locutions themselves because the meaning of divinely-inspired propositions is determined not only by words on a page, but by how authors were led to use them.¹²⁹

Upon equating Scriptural claims with divine speech-acts, Vanhoozer argues that the initial way to discern the illocutionary forces of a passage is to be sensitive to the literary categories, or genre, in which they are recorded.¹³⁰ The reason for this is not because a genre simply is a means of literary communication, but because it is a mode of experiencing and thinking about the world in literary form.¹³¹ A genre represents an overall framework of epistemic and linguistic categories, or cognitive strategy, that an author utilizes to picture his view of reality, or more specifically, to perform a particular communicative action.¹³² Therefore, a genre functions as a hermeneutical guide that sets the literary rules for understanding the illocutionary forces of a given text.¹³³ This is not

¹²⁸Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 210.

¹²⁹Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor," 76-77.

¹³⁰Vanhoozer, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature," 79-85, 131; idem, "From Speech Acts to Scripture Acts," 193.

¹³¹Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 342; idem, "Language, Literature, Hermeneutics," 38-39.

¹³²Vanhoozer makes this point on the basis of the idea of *prosaics* as advocated by Mikhail Bakhtin. This term refers to the practical reasoning that governs the approach of a particular communicative practice. See Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor," 84; Gary Morson and Caryl Emerson, eds., *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 276.

¹³³Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 347; idem, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature," 91-92. Another issue that arises out of this discussion is whether the canon as a whole functions as a specific genre. See discussion of this subject in Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 263-65; idem, "From Speech Acts to Scripture Acts," 193-96.

to imply, however, that only certain kinds of genre in Scripture speak about truth while others do not because this would reveal a failure to distinguish between truth as God knows it and truth as it is described by God through Scripture. On the one hand, truth is essentially unified because it is fully and exhaustively known by God. For the human mind, truth is so complex and multi-faceted that it must be described in diverse literary forms. So the biblical use of various genre does not imply that the Bible contains competing kinds of truth; it shows rather that it is about various kind of fact, whether it be historical, metaphysical, or moral.¹³⁴

This merging of Scriptural claims with the speech-acts of various literary expressions also leads to the question of the locus of meaning. Though in one sense this issue has already been addressed in his argument for hermeneutical morality, Vanhoozer's answer is that meaning resides in the illocutionary forces of the words that the biblical authors chose to convey. One can say then that textual meaning is definite and fixed because it derives from the intended speech-acts of an author.¹³⁵ Nonetheless, in order to understand the meaning of a particular text, one must also recognize the nature of the communicative action in which it is conveyed because “. . . what a speech-act counts as depends not only on the words used but on the intersubjective situation (the circum-stances, conventions, rules, etc.) that render language usable.”¹³⁶ One could then

¹³⁴Vanhoozer, “The Semantics of Biblical Language,” 85.

¹³⁵“There is verbal meaning only where someone means, or has meant, something by using particular words in a specific context in a certain way.” Vanhoozer emphasizes this point in light of an article by Jorge J. E. Garcia. See Vanhoozer, “From Speech Acts to Scripture Acts,” 175; Jorge J. E. Garcia, “Can There Be Texts without Historical Authors?” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 31 (1994): 245-53.

¹³⁶Vanhoozer, “From Speech Acts to Scripture Acts,” 174. Also, this point should not be misinterpreted to mean that Vanhoozer is adopting any type of Schleiermacherian notion of hermeneutics. His point simply is that meaning does not strictly reside with words as linguistic symbols but within the actions that words can perform.

deduce that the “literal” meaning of a text entails the intended goal(s) that authors intend to accomplish with the words they use.¹³⁷

Taking these points into consideration, it is this emphasis on the speech-act dynamic between verbal action and speech that characterizes the main idea behind Vanhoozer’s approach to a postpropositional view of Scripture. It is important to note initially that his model is not anti-propositional or anti-evangelical because he still agrees that propositional content is an inherent part of divine revelation. Likewise, Vanhoozer goes to great lengths to show that his approach is in harmony with biblical infallibility and inerrancy. For example, he argues that all the illocutionary acts of Scripture are always based on trustworthy motives, reliable to convey each divinely-ordained message, and inerrantly describe reality in a variety of different ways.¹³⁸ Vanhoozer’s view neither reveals an implicit surrender to postmodern thought because his view of divine speech-acts maintains the idea that meaning is a determinate entity created by the communicative actions of authors and that readers have a mandate to ascertain them.¹³⁹ Nevertheless, Vanhoozer does argue that his theory is actually “postconservative” for two reasons. One reason is that he believes it transcends previous ways in which many conservatives have understood propositionalism and applied it to the doctrine of Scripture.¹⁴⁰ Another factor

¹³⁷Ibid., 178-80.

¹³⁸See his discussion of these points in Vanhoozer, “The Semantics of Biblical Literature,” 96-103.

¹³⁹Vanhoozer also clarifies that in his view, what is determinate with regards to meaning is the whole communicative act that an author performs in expressing a given meaning. See Vanhoozer, “From Speech Acts to Scripture Acts,” 164.

¹⁴⁰Vanhoozer, “The Voice and the Actor,” 76. Vanhoozer also believes his approach addresses the criticisms of both liberal and neo-orthodox traditions. With regard to the former, speech-acts interrelate God’s activity in history to God’s activity in speaking while with regard to the latter, divine speech-acts preserve the idea of God’s freedom because He freely chose to convey whatever communicative act He so desired within Scripture. See Vanhoozer, “God’s Mighty Speech Acts,” 149-51; idem, “From Speech Acts to Scripture Acts,” 195.

motivating Vanhoozer to adopt this label is a desire to avoid being identified with the movement of postliberalism. Vanhoozer argues that in his view of postpropositionalism, the authority of revelation resides in the communicative practices of the canon, not the interpretive practices of the community.¹⁴¹ Consequently, the postconservative nature of Vanhoozer's postpropositional model lies in how it contrasts with *previous ways* of explicating propositionalism and evades the danger of being misconstrued as a sympathetic capitulation to thinkers such as George Lindbeck.

The corollary issue related to this view of Scripture regards the particular ways in which the Holy Spirit illumines the meaning of Scripture to believers. The reason this subject is so critical to Vanhoozer's understanding of revelation is because it addresses the final element of Speech-Act theory, that being the perlocutionary effects of divine speech-acts. While locutions and illocutions relate primarily to the ways in which revelation functions as both verbal communication and action, perlocutions refer to the effects that illocutionary acts have on the actions or beliefs of the hearers.¹⁴² This question then relates to how the Spirit aids believers in understanding the speech-acts of Scripture and how He uses Scripture to influence believers.

Vanhoozer's initial point of reference with regards to these questions is to emphasize the covenantal nature of discourse. The point here is that language, whether spoken or written, is used for the purpose of relational interaction. When people perform various speech-acts, they do so in order to illicit various responses from those with whom they communicate. So discourse implies a sense of obligation on the part of hearers to do justice to the intended communicative purposes that people express by interpreting them accurately. Taking this ideal to the level of divine communication, Vanhoozer's point is that God has offered a covenantal discourse to humanity through Scripture and verified its

¹⁴¹Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor," 77, 99-100.

¹⁴²Vanhoozer, "God's Mighty Speech Acts," 155.

effectiveness through the person and work of Christ.¹⁴³ This means then that in order to give proper credence to God's salvific communicative acts, which are consummated with Christ, those who become its beneficiaries are responsible to bear an accurate and clear witness to its illocutionary demands and visibly live out its perlocutionary implications.¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, recognizing the human tendency to misinterpret and thereby miscommunicate his speech-acts, the Spirit is divinely commissioned to intervene and subdue this liability to failure by aiding believers in their understanding of the meaning, implications, and relevance of Scriptural speech-acts. How does this occur though?

One preliminary concern that arises before this question can be answered pertains to the nature of biblical authority as it relates to the function of perlocutions in Speech-Act theory. This issue pertains to whether Scripture as a collection of speech-acts can be considered revelation without the element of perlocutionary effects. Simply put, must one include the reader's response to an illocutionary act in the definition of communicative action.¹⁴⁵ Vanhoozer's response is that illocutionary acts are evidenced by God in Scripture regardless of the impact they have on readers, but this does not eliminate the importance of the Spirit's ability to apply the word and bring about the intended perlocutionary results. Vanhoozer, therefore, makes a distinction between the word of God stated and the word of God applied. In the categories of speech-acts, "the Bible *is* the word of God (in the sense of illocutionary acts) . . . and the Bible *becomes* the word of God (in the sense of achieving perlocutionary effects)."¹⁴⁶ Yet the key to this dialectic is that perlocutions proceed from locutions and illocutions, never vice versa.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³Vanhoozer, "From Speech Acts to Scripture Acts," 200.

¹⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 201-02.

¹⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 195.

¹⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 195; *idem*, "God's Mighty Speech Acts," 156.

¹⁴⁷Vanhoozer, "From Speech Acts to Scripture Acts," 200.

Moreover, it is this priority upon illocutions that guides Vanhoozer's understanding of the Spirit's role in biblical interpretation.

In beginning to address the subject of divine illumination, Vanhoozer acknowledges that task of the Spirit is to bear witness to the word for the benefit of the individual believer as well as the church. As represented in the Westminster Confession's claim that biblical authority lies in the fact that the "Spirit speaks through the Scriptures," and the principle of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, which teaches that the "Spirit of God makes the reading, but especially the preaching, of the word an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners," Vanhoozer recognizes that the Protestant conviction is that the Spirit alone enables people to hear the Bible as God's word.¹⁴⁸ Yet in doing so, the question arises as to whether or not the Spirit changes the meaning of texts or the "literal sense" in the effectual use of Scripture.

Vanhoozer highlights two unfortunate sets of responses to this issue before offering his proposal. One segment of thought misconstrues the communicative acts of Scripture with the interpretive activity of the Christian community by modifying the Ricoeurian idea of textual autonomy and adopting a notion of performance interpretation whereby communities assume the functional role of authors and interpret texts as if they wrote them in light of their own contexts.¹⁴⁹ Another approach attempts to reduce biblical interpretation to the simple goal of engendering spiritual formation in light of the perlocutionary effects of Scripture.¹⁵⁰ In either case, Vanhoozer argues that both of these

¹⁴⁸Ibid., 196; idem, "The Spirit of Understanding," 227. Again, this does not mean that the Bible is not God's word until the Spirit helps people to hear it as such.

¹⁴⁹Vanhoozer borrows this idea from Nicholas Wolterstorff and interestingly enough, categorizes Grenz's view of Scripture within this approach. See Vanhoozer, "From Speech Acts to Scripture Acts," 198.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., 199.

approaches obscure the logical coherence of Speech-Act theory by absolving the relationship between authorially-intended illocutions and strategic-perlocutionary effects.

Vanhoozer points out that in the process of divine communicative action (or even human communication for that matter), the perlocutionary effects of Scripture can only exist in light of the previous locutionary acts and illocutionary intents originally inspired by the Spirit. The Spirit then cannot use the biblical text to produce effectual perlocutions that are independent of the original illocutions but precisely by, with, and through them.¹⁵¹ The testimony of the Spirit, therefore, is actually the effective presence of the divinely-inspired illocutionary force.¹⁵² Alluding to John's gospel, Vanhoozer writes that "The Spirit may blow where, but not *what*, he wills. The Spirit is subordinate to the word. Perlocutions 'proceed from' illocutions."¹⁵³ Consequently, perlocutions are the spiritual benefits that occur as the Spirit applies the illocutions of Scripture to the human heart, which in turn, leads to Vanhoozer's specific points about illumination.

Vanhoozer contends that the Spirit's function is to speak through the original illocutions of Scripture at both the generic and canonical levels in order to bring about the divinely-intended perlocutionary effects in the hearts of people, whether that be bringing sinners to salvation or advancing the walk of faith in the lives of believers. In the case of working in the hearts of believers, Vanhoozer believes that the Spirit illumines believers in at least three ways.¹⁵⁴ One, which is a reformulation of the Reformed idea of internal witness, is that the Spirit convicts believers in order to persuade them that Scripture contains the very locutions of God and thereby gives witness to the living Christ. Second,

¹⁵¹Ibid., 199.

¹⁵²Vanhoozer, "God's Mighty Speech Acts," 155.

¹⁵³Vanhoozer, "The Spirit of Understanding," 233.

¹⁵⁴Discussions of these points can be seen in Vanhoozer, "The Spirit of Understanding," 233-34; idem, "God's Mighty Speech Act," 155.

the Spirit grants discernment and understanding to believers so that they can not only comprehend the illocutionary intents of biblical speech-acts at a cognitive level, but also experience the spiritual dynamics as well. Third, Vanhoozer contends that the Spirit progressively sanctifies believers by rooting out the harmful ideologies and attitudes that can hinder proper interpretation and application. In doing so, the Scriptures then have the opportunity to become more effective because believers become more apt to accept its message rather than distort it. Finally, in light of these activities, Vanhoozer also mentions that in order to determine if someone is receiving illumination by the Spirit, one should consider whether that person confesses the divinity and humanity of Christ, which can only be evoked by the Spirit, and whether that person exemplifies a life that follows the general illocutionary expectations of Scripture, which reveals the fruit of the Spirit.¹⁵⁵

Before proceeding to the second couplet of issues that undergird Vanhoozer's theological method, it must be acknowledged at this juncture that Vanhoozer's views of hermeneutics and Scripture begin to bring his theological leanings into focus. His beliefs regarding these issues, including his principle of "first theology," all lead in directions that are undoubtedly faithful to conservative evangelical concerns.¹⁵⁶ Regarding hermeneutics, Vanhoozer shows sensitivity to postmodern criticisms of objectivity but does not lose sight of the atheistic tone that feeds that incredulity. This is why he shows methodological balance in conceding to legitimate contributions of postmodern thought while at the same time rejecting its overall agenda by adamantly arguing that one's theory of hermeneutics reveals one's belief about God and that a Christian view of interpretation must be ethical by default. Likewise, regarding his reformulation of the

¹⁵⁵Vanhoozer, "The Spirit of Understanding," 234.

¹⁵⁶In fact, Vanhoozer believes his approach is robustly Augustinian in that he asserts that we must begin our hermeneutical endeavors with an initial belief in the existence of meaning for only then will we receive deeper insights into what meaning means. See Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 30-32.

doctrine of Scripture, one can fairly say that his approach is “postconservative” in that it challenges former expressions of evangelical propositional revelation. With these points established, however, it is becoming evident up to this point that Vanhoozer’s version of postconservatism is indeed different from Grenz in that he has chosen to adhere to certain commitments that Grenz would consider modernistic. Yet before Vanhoozer’s thought can be fully assessed in such a manner, other factors must be evaluated in order to perceive the entire structure of his postconservative approach.

Restating the Nature of Doctrine and the Role of Reason in the Theological Task

Two other pivotal elements included in Vanhoozer’s theological method that function in harmony with his hermeneutical theory and reformulation of biblical revelation are his thoughts on the nature of doctrine as well as the functionary role that reason has in the task of making doctrinal truth-claims. The importance of examining these factors is two-fold. First, Vanhoozer’s thoughts in these areas help chart the general directions in which he wants to take evangelical theology because they pertain to the ways in which he desires to interpret Scripture, frame theological constructs, and defend evangelical theology against postmodernism. Second, addressing these issues in the present context is partly indicative of where one stands in the current debates between conservatives and postconservatives. Therefore, acknowledging Vanhoozer’s convictions on these subjects can help clarify any additional postconservative tendencies in his theological method and identify any possible differences that further distinguish his approach from other postconservative thinkers, including Grenz.

The first segment of issues pertain to the primary elements involved in the overall process of doctrinal formulation. These factors include the dynamics involved in biblical interpretation and the subsequent developments of systematic harmonization and the conceptualizing of doctrinal formats. With regard to the first subject of biblical

interpretation, Vanhoozer divides his approach into three consecutive stages. First, during the initial task of examining a given text, Vanhoozer argues that in order to evade the errors of the advocates of the Biblical Theology movement, who try to derive theology from words alone, and adherents of historical criticism, who attempt to derive theology from extra-biblical events or experiences, one must approach the task of interpretation by viewing a biblical text as a piece of communicative discourse.¹⁵⁷ Scriptural passages, in other words, should be seen as various attempts on the part of authors to perform certain actions (e.g., to command, promise, lament, worship, warn, etc.) rather than to just convey information. This means that understanding a given text entails more than just parsing verbs or identifying syntactical structures, though it includes these factors. One needs to know not only what authors say, but what authors are doing with the words they use.¹⁵⁸ Moreover, the specific ways to accomplish this goal lead to the next stage of his interpretive method.

Vanhoozer contends that the second step in unraveling biblical texts is to establish the general context in which a discourse is being expressed because this is the only element that initially can disambiguate what kind of communicative act is being performed in a given text.¹⁵⁹ At this juncture, however, Vanhoozer is aware of the difficulty that such an endeavor poses because of the efforts that modernity and post-modernity have made to establish extrabiblical contexts for interpreting Scripture. On one hand, modern thought has attempted through the means of historical criticism to restrict the interpretive context of the Bible to the historical referents to which a biblical

¹⁵⁷Vanhoozer, "Exegesis and Hermeneutics," 57-58. Again, this idea directly corresponds to Vanhoozer's focus on Speech-Act theory.

¹⁵⁸As Vanhoozer states, "texts have both matter (a message, a topic) and energy (the use to which an author puts his message)." *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁵⁹Vanhoozer, "Language, Literature, and Hermeneutics," 35.

passage refers, thus viewing the history behind the Bible as more reliable than the Bible itself.¹⁶⁰ On the other hand, postmodern thought currently abandons any kind of historical restrictions altogether and instead embraces the idea that readers themselves create the contexts wherein biblical texts (or any text) are to be interpreted.¹⁶¹ The problem with both of these approaches is that neither allows the text to make sense within its own context or on its own terms.¹⁶² Consequently, in response, Vanhoozer's solution is to echo the cry of *tota scriptura* and *sola scriptura*.¹⁶³ With regard to the former, Vanhoozer contends that the canon in and of itself with all of its diversity provides a unified and reliable portrait of the Christian worldview (or metanarrative).¹⁶⁴ With regards to the latter, not only does the canon offer reliable information, but it also provides the best context for accurately interpreting the information it offers.¹⁶⁵ In other words, the canon possesses a kind of intrinsic, self-supporting *hermeneutical sufficiency*.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁰Vanhoozer also highlights Hans Frei's objection to historical criticism, which was its ". . . relative neglect of the most important context for determining meaning, namely, the form of the text itself." See Vanhoozer, "Language, Literature, Hermeneutics," 36; Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

¹⁶¹Vanhoozer, "Language, Literature, Hermeneutics," 36.

¹⁶²Ibid.

¹⁶³Ibid., 36-37; idem, "The Bible," 20-21.

¹⁶⁴Vanhoozer, "The Bible," 20. In relation to this point, Vanhoozer defines a "worldview" elsewhere as ". . . a comprehensive interpretation of individual, social, and cosmic reality. It is a comprehensive interpretation of the 'meaning' of life: its origin, its nature, and its destiny." So one can say that the canon is God's authoritative description of reality and that theology includes the reflective and active rendering of that description into various interpretive forms. See Vanhoozer, "The Trials of Truth," 347.

¹⁶⁵Vanhoozer, "The Bible," 20-21.

¹⁶⁶Here, Vanhoozer is borrowing this phrase from one of his students named Tim Ward. See Vanhoozer, "Language, Literature, and Hermeneutics," 36.

Moving to the third and final phase of interpretation, Vanhoozer concludes that once biblical texts are viewed as mediums of communicative discourse and the contextual norm of the Bible is seen to be the Bible itself, one must then commence with an examination of Scripture in light of its various literary contexts. For Vanhoozer, this includes observations at several levels. At one stage, one must observe the specific genre in which a discourse is given. The importance of this task again lies in the fact that communicative acts are mediated through different genre, which portray reality in various cognitive forms for different linguistic purposes. So to ignore a literary genre inevitably causes one to miss the best indicator of a kind of point that an author is making.¹⁶⁷ In conjunction with genre categories, Vanhoozer also argues that interpreters must be aware of the emphasis that biblical discourse places upon the genre of narrative. Herein, Vanhoozer is highlighting the point that Scripture provides all the factors necessary to understand every particular narrative it recounts. Likewise, each narrative provides certain ways of understanding God's interaction with humanity in history. The biblical narratives not only inform one about historical events, they also aid in the formation of one's attitudes towards them.¹⁶⁸ Finally, Vanhoozer believes that the interpretive task is not completed whereupon all the discourses that are scattered throughout the Bible are examined individually. Evangelical interpreters must also discern the ways in which all passages interrelate within the given testaments themselves as well as how both

¹⁶⁷Vanhoozer, "Exegesis and Hermeneutics," 59.

¹⁶⁸Ibid. Vanhoozer also correlates this point to Hans Frei's emphasis on intratextuality wherein one should read one's own world (or life or story) in light of the story world of the biblical text. Applying this to theology, "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." See Vanhoozer, "Language, Literature, and Hermeneutics," 37; and the original summary of Frei in George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 118.

testaments together form one grand, unified discourse.¹⁶⁹ They must pursue the original concern of the New Testament authors and bridge the two testaments by reading Scripture typologically and intertextually.¹⁷⁰ Furthermore, when this is done and Scripture is read canonically, it enforces the belief that the Bible is one unified communicative act, or a complex, multi-leveled speech act of a single divine author.¹⁷¹

Following these perceptions of biblical interpretation, the next major phase that Vanhoozer assesses is the transition from exegesis to systematic theology and the conceptual formulation of Christian doctrines. Before articulating his own concerns on these matters, however, Vanhoozer notes two preliminary challenges facing these endeavors. One obstacle entails the postmodern skepticism that pervades any notion of objective rationality or a universal metanarrative. Postmodernists perceive reason to be a form of rhetoric that masks the self-interest of those who use it and acts as a totalitarian oppressor that suppresses the validity of other view points.¹⁷² The only viable alternative is to allow all worldviews, or narratives, to vocalize their individual stories without

¹⁶⁹Here Vanhoozer is borrowing from Brevard Child's canonical hermeneutical approach. Though not agreeing with every facet of his argument, Vanhoozer concurs with Child's that the final form of the canon provides the appropriate context for biblical interpretation. See Vanhoozer, "Exegesis and Hermeneutics," 60-61; idem, "Language, Literature, and Hermeneutics," 37; Brevard S. Childs, "The *Sensus Literalis* of Scripture: An Ancient and Modern Problem," in *Beiträge zur alttestamentlichen Theologie: Festschrift für Walther Zimmerli zum 70.*, ed. Herbert von Donner, Robert Hanhart, and Rudolf Smend (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1977), 80-93; idem, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (London: SCM Press, 1992).

¹⁷⁰Vanhoozer, "Exegesis and Hermeneutics," 60.

¹⁷¹Ibid., 61. Vanhoozer also makes the point that canonical interpretation is not to be equated with a strict version of *sensus plenior*. Scriptural meaning does not contravene the communicative discourses of the original communicators. Yet as seen in the history of redemption, the divine communicative agent who oversees the canonical structure of the Old Testament can provide further discourse as seen in the New Testament to later "specify" rather than "spiritualize" the actual points of reference. See Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 263-65.

¹⁷²Vanhoozer, "From Canon to Concept," 97.

subsuming them into one grand epistemic scheme. This also means that any attempt to promote one canon (or narrative) or theological system as authoritative is unwarranted as well because these ideas imply that some sources will not be used and some voices will not be heard.¹⁷³ In conjunction with this postmodern crisis, the secondary challenge relates to the ongoing disagreement that exists between evangelicals regarding the actual nature of theology itself. As already seen in the struggles that Bernard Ramm faced during his lifetime, many are uncertain as to how the “system” of ideas in evangelical theology should coincide with the “system” of ideas in Scripture.¹⁷⁴ One contemporary proposal, which various conservatives seem to espouse, views evangelical theology as a set of categorical doctrines that simply summarize what the biblical data teaches on various subjects. For example, Vanhoozer labels Wayne Grudem as a practitioner of this ideal. While agreeing with Grudem’s plea for evangelicals to uphold the centrality and authority of Scripture, Vanhoozer finds Grudem’s idea that the task of evangelical theology is to determine what the entire Bible says about a specific subject as a potentially arbitrary approach.¹⁷⁵

Vanhoozer argues that instead of asking what the relevant parts of the whole Bible say about a given issue, evangelicals must seek to understand all issues in light of the Bible as a complete whole.¹⁷⁶ The reason for this is because Vanhoozer believes evangelical theology as a discipline is lacking if it only deals with disparate bits of ideas and information. It must also explicate how all the messages of the canon are linked

¹⁷³Ibid., 97-98.

¹⁷⁴See Vanhoozer, “The Voice and the Actor,” 62-63, 67-69; idem, “The Pattern of Evangelical Theology,” ix-xv; idem, “Bernard Ramm,” 290-306.

¹⁷⁵See Vanhoozer, “The Voice and the Actor,” 62; Wayne Grudem, “Do We Act as If We Really Believe That ‘the Bible Alone and the Bible in Its Entirety, Is the Word of God Written’?” *JETS* 43 (2000): 5-26.

¹⁷⁶Vanhoozer, “The Voice and the Actor,” 62.

together in order to reveal Scripture's overall continuity and relevance for contemporary society. In his own words,

It is one thing to know how a biblical author spoke or thought about a particular issue in the context of ancient Israel or the early church, quite another to relate those words and thoughts about a particular issue to the message of the Bible as a whole and to the significance of the Bible's teaching for us today.¹⁷⁷

Therefore, when this becomes the objective, Vanhoozer believes that evangelical theology can overcome postmodern incredulity by illustrating how diverse literary narratives (or *perceptions* of reality) can potentially form a single metanarrative (a unified *perception* of reality) and alleviate the methodological problems inherent within segments of conservative theological method by emphasizing the deeper connections between the responses that Scripture provides for various issues. The next question that arises, however, is how systematic theology and Christian doctrine should be developed in order to attain this goal? Though Vanhoozer's answer to this question is somewhat complex, four primary themes that aid in summarizing his response include the ideas of canonical covenantalism, canonical competence, doctrinal drama, and conceptual mimesis.

The phrase "canonical covenantalism" refers to a dynamic that Vanhoozer believes initially substantiates theological formulation. Its inception begins with the idea that the canon is essentially a collection of two divine initiatives, those being divine actions, which imply that God has done something, and divine speeches, which imply that others have recorded those actions.¹⁷⁸ Together, the canonical record of these divine initiatives form an inspired storyline that surveys the historical outworking God's covenant of grace. It begins with the cosmic stage of creation and then works through various plots, conflicts, and finally finds resolution in the climactic act of Jesus Christ.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷Ibid., 62-63.

¹⁷⁸Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor," 63.

¹⁷⁹This canonical unity also disallows the Bible to be reduced to a collection of unrelated dicta on diverse subjects. Ibid., 64; idem, "Exploring the World," 16-17.

The key though, is that this canonical depiction is not merely historical, it is also dialogical. The canon is, in a sense, covenantal because it is the means whereby God's covenant still engages the reader.¹⁸⁰ So to read the canon is to engage in a dialogue with the covenant itself which means that responding to the canon is just as crucial as reading the it.¹⁸¹ The event of reading, therefore, becomes located in the broader event of redemption as recorded in the canon, for God's speaking to readers via the biblical text, and the readers subsequent responses, whether positive or negative, are part of the event of sin and its overcoming.¹⁸² Furthermore, it is because of this point that Vanhoozer calls upon evangelicals to develop a type of "canonical competence."

The fact that the canon functions as the voice of God makes it incumbent upon evangelicals to ensure that their theology reflects his covenantal discourse. This cannot happen, however, if theology only provides theoretical or instrumental knowledge of what the Scriptures teach.¹⁸³ Theology must not simply articulate the concepts that the biblical writers used to describe their views about God, the world, and themselves. It must also transfer the wisdom behind their judgments into contemporary formats.¹⁸⁴ To do so,

¹⁸⁰Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor," 64-65.

¹⁸¹This is why Vanhoozer distinguishes between the redemptive-historical *substance* of the biblical text (i.e., the matter it relates) and its redemptive-hermeneutical *form* (i.e., the manner in which the word is addressed to the reader). *Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁸²Vanhoozer makes this point in light of several other thinkers who have linked the act of reading to the idea of a performance. It is argued that just as actors perform scripts, readers perform texts. *Ibid.*, 65-66; Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); Stephen C. Brown, "New Testament Interpretation as Performance," *SJT* 52 (1999): 179-208; John Webster, "Hermeneutics in Modern Theology: Some Doctrinal Reflections," *SJT* 51 (1998): 336.

¹⁸³Here, Vanhoozer is using Aristotle's original categories of *theoria* (i.e., knowledge of true propositions) and *technem* (i.e., a product of instrumental reason). See Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor," 81.

¹⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 85.

Vanhoozer argues that evangelicals must allow the general framework of the canon as revealed in its literary forms to mold their cognitive activities so that eventually they can be effective in deliberating non-canonical contemporary situations. When this is done, theology takes on a *phronetic* tone. Here, Vanhoozer is using a term that Aristotle used to describe the act of prudence or practical reason.¹⁸⁵ The point is that theology becomes a practice whereby thinkers develop a kind of “canon-sense” realism, or canonical competence, which allows them to use the judgments of Scripture to determine if a given theological concept is legitimate for describing a Scriptural idea.¹⁸⁶

In light of this principle as well as the previous point about canonical covenantalism, Vanhoozer also argues that an effective way to view the task of doctrinal formulation is through the analogy of drama. Though there are numerous ways in which Vanhoozer attempts to solidify this correlation, the primary point of reference is that just as a drama connects the experience of actors with the expectations of an audience, so doctrine connects the drama of salvation with those who currently experience it, live it, and desire to express it in the contemporary context.¹⁸⁷ The purpose of this parallel, however, is not to imply that doctrines merely are existential in nature or that they do not entail propositional content. On the contrary, doctrines presuppose ideas about reality as Scripture describes it and therefore entail statements about what is, of what God has done, and what remains to be done in the drama of salvation.¹⁸⁸ In addition, because doctrines provide direction on how to participate in the drama of redemption, then it is also

¹⁸⁵Ibid., 81.

¹⁸⁶Ibid., 83, 85. In delineating this idea of phronetic theology, Vanhoozer writes that “Whereas *theoria* encourages us to look *beyond* the text . . . , and *technem* encourages us to look *at* and *behind* the text . . . , *phronesis* asks us to look *along* the text.” The point is that theological judgment is dictated by the established standards of the canonical discourse. Vanhoozer, “The Voice and the Actor,” 82.

¹⁸⁷See Vanhoozer, “The Voice and the Actor,” 90-92, 94-101.

¹⁸⁸Ibid., 94.

imperative that they do justice to the various canonical imperatives.¹⁸⁹ The point is that while propositional content is essential, it is not sufficient. Though doctrines do function as cognitive descriptions of canonical discourse, their purpose is not simply to describe the drama of salvation that has already transpired in immutable formats. They are flexible (and thus alterable) constructs that exist for the purposes of illustrating what the covenantal drama should look like in the present, describing how the drama currently changes the lives of its participants, and potentially incorporating more recipients into its ongoing storyline.¹⁹⁰

One final idea that offers clarification to Vanhoozer's understanding of theological formulation is his theory of "conceptual mimesis." Under this category, Vanhoozer argues that systematic theology is an attempt to preserve the meaning of various canonical discourses in intelligible present-day frameworks, and as such, its constructs ideally function as accurate imitations, or mimesis, of the biblical content.¹⁹¹ Systematic theology endeavors to re-present or refashion the various kinds of ideas found in the literary forms of the canon with new idioms and images. Likewise, every concept must recast the diverse canonical discourses coherently so that the overall continuity of Scripture is preserved.¹⁹² When this is accomplished, Vanhoozer argues that the unfortunate stereo-types, which categorize theology as an outdated procedure that merely calculates propositional data, can be evaded because in actuality, theology is more

¹⁸⁹Ibid., 100.

¹⁹⁰Ibid., 93.

¹⁹¹Mimesis is currently used as a literary critical term which means "creative interpretation." Aristotle originally used the word to define poetry as a "creative imitation" of human activity. A poem could represent reality in a way that was unique from other literary categories. See Vanhoozer, "From Canon to Concept," 114-15.

¹⁹²Ibid., 115; Alister McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 64.

oriented toward *sapientia* rather than *scientia*.¹⁹³ In other words, it can be perceived as a discipline that shows how a way of thinking should generate a particular way of living, or how a way of envisaging the world should dictate how one exists in it.¹⁹⁴

The other concluding segment of issues that parallel Vanhoozer's understanding of doctrinal formulation and complete this analysis of his theological approach are his thoughts on the role of rationality in theological development. Here, the primary issue pertains to how theological discourse should function in light of human reason, or even more specifically, philosophical categories of inquiry. The basis for this concern is Vanhoozer's initial contention that theology and philosophy must be understood as amendable disciplines because they both entail the common practice of critically reflecting on the enduring questions of life and solving problems that relate to conflicting world-views.¹⁹⁵ Likewise, subsequent to philosophical or theological observations, both fields present ideas that are assumed to be true (i.e., metaphysical claims), perceivable (i.e., epistemological claims), and defensible (i.e., apologetic claims). The problem, however, that currently complicates any unity between rationality and theology is the

¹⁹³Vanhoozer, "From Canon to Concept," 123; idem, "The Voice and the Actor," 90. Note that Vanhoozer does concede that theology can be viewed as a type of reconstructive science. Adopting an idea by Jürgen Habermas, he agrees that "Theology is a 'reconstructive science' whose aim is to render theoretically explicit the intuitive, pre-theoretical know-how underlying the diverse literary and linguistic competencies of Scripture." The point is that theology entails the ongoing attempt to achieve the competence that the canon displays in its use of various propositions to convey different communicative acts. See Vanhoozer, "From Canon to Concept," 122; idem, "The Voice and the Actor," 90; Jürgen Habermas, "Philosophy as Stand-In and Interpreter," in *After Philosophy: End or Transformation?* ed. Kenneth Baynes, James Bohman, and Thomas McCarthy (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), 296-315.

¹⁹⁴Vanhoozer, "From Canon to Concept," 123.

¹⁹⁵The key difference though is that theology engages these issues in light of biblical language and Christ to which the Bible bears witness. Vanhoozer, "Christ and Concept," 108, 135.

postmodern antagonism toward views of epistemic objectivity and metaphysical realism.¹⁹⁶ Moreover, it is these challenges that lead Vanhoozer to advocate several concepts in order to reconstruct the nature of rationality in a fashion that is sensitive to postmodern perspectives and yet faithful to evangelicalism's commitment to truth via the metanarrative of the gospel. Among these factors, several that stand out include an incarnational perspective of theological discourse, a postfoundational model of epistemology, and a martyr's approach to apologetics.

The first subject, which again can be labeled as an incarnational view of theological discourse, relates to Vanhoozer's understanding of the nature of truth, or in the narrower context of theological method, the nature of theological *truth-claims*. Herein, Vanhoozer's preliminary accusation is that in the noble attempt to convey truth-claims for the purpose of procuring universal acknowledgment, evangelicals have been distracted by postmodern criticisms of rationality.¹⁹⁷ Many have restricted their discussions of truth to the subject of epistemic justification and in doing so, the primary reason for believing something is lost, namely because it is true.¹⁹⁸ In response to this dilemma, Vanhoozer contends that truth is not known to be true simply because it is

¹⁹⁶This does not necessarily mean that modernity, on the other hand, did express extreme sympathy toward evangelical theology and philosophical thought. In fact, it will be argued in chapters to come that the seventeenth-century focus on rationalism and empiricism actually aided in setting the philosophical foundation for the current postmodern mentalities.

¹⁹⁷See Vanhoozer, "The Trials of Truth," 338-39; Alistair McFayden, "Truth as Mission: The Christian Claim to Universal Truth in a Pluralist Public World," *SJT* 46 (1993): 437-56. Vanhoozer also mentions three major axioms that he believes postmodern thought has posed against rationality, those being that knowledge is affected by biases and partiality, that knowledge is often used as a tool to dominate or oppress societies, and that in light of the perspectival nature of knowledge, all truth claims should be accepted inclusivistically. Vanhoozer, "The Trials of Truth," 338.

¹⁹⁸Vanhoozer, "The Trials of Truth," 339.

verified empirically or discovered by the rational capacities of the knower but because the knower is actually discovered by the truth.¹⁹⁹

Vanhoozer bases this idea on the argument that truth is, in a word, Jesus Christ himself as God's self-disclosure in history. It is *personal* because it entails the life and ministry of Christ as well as *propositional* because it includes the titles, descriptions, and confessions that are delegated to him in the biblical canon.²⁰⁰ Correlating this definition of truth to theological assertions, Vanhoozer then argues that the evangelical claim to truth is fundamentally a claim about the ultimate nature of God. The key is that this theological affirmation of truth does not validate or precede truth itself. Truth was incarnated and condescended to human existence to invade our linguistical, contextually-laden, sinful reality long before evangelical truth-claims came to be. Therefore, Vanhoozer argues that theological truth-claims are attempts to describe the overall reality (or metaphysic) that has been incarnated on humanity's behalf and the ways in which Christian convictions and practices presuppose them.²⁰¹ Yet the question that requires attention is whether this can be done rationally?

Vanhoozer recognizes that any explication of the nature of truth also requires further discussion regarding epistemology, especially in light of contemporary debates between CF and nonfoundationalism. According to Vanhoozer, the common problem with both of these major approaches to knowledge is that they assume that rationality is the starting place for discourse on a given subject. For example, with regards to CF, faith must be grounded on previously conceived beliefs that are indubitable and self-evident while in nonfoundational theories such as coherentism, faith is grounded in the continuity

¹⁹⁹Ibid., 340.

²⁰⁰Ibid., 339.

²⁰¹The point is that theology is concerned with both Christian knowledge (what to think) and wisdom (what to do). Ibid., 340-41.

of a given community's system of belief.²⁰² Vanhoozer argues that instead of viewing reason as a means of epistemic verification, it should be viewed as a cognitive tool that provides epistemic guidance for the development of theological discourse. In other words, rationality does not establish a particular epistemic starting point. It pertains to the intellectual standards that should govern all reflective discourse. Rationality should then be viewed as a rulebook for inquiry rather than an irrefutable point of reference.²⁰³

This idea leads Vanhoozer to formulate a postfoundationalist (as opposed to a foundationalist or nonfoundationalist) model of rationality, which includes three theories, or what he calls a three-stranded epistemic cord.²⁰⁴ The first element borrows from Alvin Plantinga's neo-Reformed idea of cognitive reliabilism.²⁰⁵ This principle views a belief as justified if it is the product of reliable interpretation-forming cognitive faculties that are functioning properly in the right cognitive environment. Relating this ideal to belief in God, Vanhoozer argues that this criteria is met because the mind is designed in such a way that it should believe in God when it is exposed to the proper witness, namely Scripture.²⁰⁶ So unless good reasons can be given to believe otherwise, evangelicals are within their epistemic rights to believe in God.

The second element in this postfoundationalist model entails what one could label as interpretive virtues. Vanhoozer's point of emphasis for this phrase is that acts of knowing as well as the acts of interpreting must come under the Lordship of Christ just as much as acts of living. In other words, evangelicals must be cognizant of the fact that

²⁰²Vanhoozer, "Christ and Concept," 102-03, 131-32.

²⁰³Ibid., 132.

²⁰⁴Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor," 87.

²⁰⁵Ibid.; Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

²⁰⁶Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor," 87.

human knowledge is not only perspectival, as postmodern thought is quick to assert, but it can also be sinful. Consequently, Vanhoozer encourages thinkers to be mindful of their cognitive deficiencies and foster interpretive virtues by engendering “a disposition of mind and heart that arises from the motivation of understanding, that is, for establishing cognitive contact with the meaning of texts.”²⁰⁷

At this juncture, Vanhoozer recognizes that his postfoundational approach is still in need of a supplementary principle. Because of the ever present reality of conflicting interpretations, he rightly confesses that it is not enough to think that an appeal to reliable cognitive faculties and a full array of interpretive virtues can solidify a workable epistemology.²⁰⁸ Another corollary must be formulated that can foster dialogue between worldviews and establish procedures for arbitrating their rational consistency. His solution is to advocate a concept known as fallibilism.²⁰⁹ The inception of this idea initially derives from Imre Lakatos’s contention that scientific theories are deemed to be correct if they can withstand perpetual testing and thereby prove to enhance progress in its relevant fields.²¹⁰ Vanhoozer links Lakatos’ view of scientific inquiry to Peter Lipton’s idea of “inference to explanation,” which perceives the process of interpretation as an activity wherein a given view is seen to be rational only if it is open to criticism.²¹¹

²⁰⁷Ibid. Also note that Vanhoozer is borrowing this idea from Linda Zagzebski. See Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 270. Likewise, this point emphasizes Vanhoozer’s previous concern regarding a phronetic theological method that emphasizes *sapientia* over *scientia*.

²⁰⁸Vanhoozer, “The Voice and the Actor,” 88.

²⁰⁹Ibid., 88-89; idem, “Christ and Concept,” 132-42.

²¹⁰See Vanhoozer, “Christ and Concept,” 132-33; Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, eds., *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

²¹¹See Vanhoozer, “The Voice and the Actor,” 88; Peter Lipton, *Inference to the Best Explanation* (London: Routledge, 1991).

The end result of this combination is the contention that while theological assertions are fallible attempts to explicate the divine reality, they can still be rational claims if they can be subjected to critical examination successfully.²¹² In his own words,

What makes a belief rational is not its having been proven, but rather its openness to criticism, its ability to survive critical testing. On this view, rationality is not so much a matter of beginning with well-founded beliefs as of subsequent testing. Evangelical theology, to be credible must be willing to submit its truth claims to the critical tests of the broader academic and ecumenical communities. Such a view of rationality is well-suited to a tradition that acknowledges its interpretations to be subservient to the Scriptures.²¹³

Rational judgments are, therefore, not foundational in the sense of being based on undeniable facts nor are they nonfoundational in that they are not validated simply because they perform a specific linguistic function in a given community. Rational thinking is postfoundational because it is only deemed as reasonable when it can stand the test of time by enduring the onslaughts of intense interrogations. Furthermore, Vanhoozer argues that the constitutive principles, or primary criteria, for determining the rational legitimacy of theological truth-claims are whether they maintain fidelity to the canonical message and provide proper motivation for fruitful Christian living.²¹⁴

This discussion of postfoundational epistemology and the nature of rationality finally lead to Vanhoozer's arguments regarding the way "rational" theological truth-claims should be asserted apologetically. His initial observation is that if the Christian message is to continue to have a voice in the postmodern setting, it must be

²¹²See Vanhoozer, "Exploring the World," 9; idem, "From Canon to Concept," 119.

²¹³Vanhoozer, "Exploring the World," 19. He also points out that this concept of fallibilism highlights the primary character trait of Christian living, namely humility. See Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor," 88.

²¹⁴Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor," 89. One should also notice that Vanhoozer's epistemology is based on the canonical themes of creation, sin, and redemption. Creation grounds our confidence in the reliability of our cognitive functions while sin reminds us that our noetic structures are corrupt and redemption admonishes us to be humble in fallible attempts to interpret both Scripture and the world.

communicated coherently and passionately. In other words, theology must show that truth entails content as well as a way of life.²¹⁵ It must respond to the postmodern critiques against modernistic theories of knowledge as well as the rampant indifference toward the nature of truth.²¹⁶ The way to do this, according to Vanhoozer, is to adopt the mentality of Christ Himself and become an epistemic martyr who stakes one's life on the truth-claims that are asserted.²¹⁷ Moreover, this approach includes several strategies.

One preliminary scheme that Vanhoozer implements is the function of expository epistemology. As the title implies, the purpose of this phase is to expose the control beliefs or presuppositions that guide a given worldview.²¹⁸ Vanhoozer agrees with Rowan Williams that worldviews, or metaphysics in general, are attempts to clarify those basic insights into the nature of reality to which our practices commits us.²¹⁹ Yet this inquiry always leads to further questions regarding the pre-commitments that guide various perceptions of reality, which means that metaphysics is inherently linked to hermeneutics. Truth-claims, in other words, are always grounded in deeper interpretive assumptions. Therefore, the purpose of this stage for Vanhoozer is not simply to expose the core idea of a worldview, such as unbelief, but to identify the explicit commitments that implicitly guide its ideas and practices.²²⁰

A secondary supplement to Vanhoozer's apologetic is seen in the transition from an expository epistemology to a hermeneutical epistemology. Whereas the former

²¹⁵Vanhoozer, "The Trials of Truth," 356.

²¹⁶*Ibid.*, 351.

²¹⁷*Ibid.*, 356-61.

²¹⁸*Ibid.*, 341, 343.

²¹⁹*Ibid.*, 343; Rowan Williams, "Beyond Politics and Metaphysics," *Modern Theology* 11 (1995): 3-22.

²²⁰Vanhoozer, "The Trials of Truth," 344.

focuses on the negative task of interrogating the predispositions of opposing worldviews, this approach centers on the positive task of articulating the actual truth-claims of the Christian faith under the rubric of hermeneutical theory.²²¹ The reasons for linking apologetics with hermeneutics are several. For one, it avoids the postmodern dichotomy between objectivism and relativism by highlighting a new focus on the diversity of biblical language. Instead of appealing to a universally-acceptable paradigm that determines the “real” nature of knowledge or following the opposite extreme, which presupposes that all knowledge is contextual and thereby nonauthoritative, this outlook argues that truth can be described from a variety of different perspectives as seen in the literary diversity of the canon.²²² Another reason Vanhoozer believes this approach is helpful is because it expands the nature of theological truth-claims to include the dynamic of understanding. Theology, in this light, reveals the fact that knowledge as well as understanding are both ethical issues that can only be practiced properly when they are wedded with good epistemic habits. Moreover, the capacity to exercise good epistemic habits only comes when one receives the wisdom of Scripture by faith. Consequently, theological discourse initially is fideistic, but not in the sense that it ignores evidence or rationality. It is fideistic in that it acknowledges the impotence of unaided human reason to interpret reality correctly and the subsequent necessity for trust. Therefore, only when these ideas are conceded can true understanding be obtained.²²³

²²¹Ibid., 341-42, 45.

²²²Ibid., 345; idem, “Language, Literature, and Hermeneutics,” 31-35.

²²³Vanhoozer, “The Trials of Truth,” 347, 358. Here, Vanhoozer is using the ideas of several thinkers, such as John Frame and Paul Helm, to emphasize this point. See John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987); Paul Helm, *Belief Policies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). Likewise, Vanhoozer appears to reflect some of the ideas proposed by Alvin Plantinga. See the comments made in Alvin Plantinga, “Reason and Belief in God,” in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 87-91.

The final corollary, which completes Vanhoozer's thoughts on the apologetic task, is the concept of martyrology. The emphasis in this idea is that defending truth entails more than forensic explanation. It requires defenders to exemplify the practical wisdom of its propositional content in visible, everyday situations. For Vanhoozer, this happens on two fronts. One way of defending the truth as an epistemic martyr is to bear witness, or give a reliable testimony to its claims. When one exemplifies a trust in the truth for others to see, that personification gradually results in a legitimate warrant for others to consider accepting that truth.²²⁴ In conjunction with this approach, Vanhoozer also argues that giving testimony to the truth also requires that one be willing to sacrifice, or suffer on behalf of the truth. Herein, one must defend the truth by believing that it is worth defending, even if it means ultimate repudiation. When this is done, truth is eventually shown to be tenable not because it is philosophically convincing, but because those who embrace it prove to be able to overcome all obstacles.²²⁵

In retrospect, Vanhoozer's revisions to theological method are unique in that they move beyond previous ways of articulating conservative evangelical views of Scripture, epistemology, and apologetics. At least to the point that Vanhoozer himself considers his approach to be postconservative. For example, he weighs his view of a postpropositional model of revelation only to conclude that it is emphatically different from previous conservative perspectives of propositionalism. Likewise, his modified form of nonfoundationalism, which denies the ideas of epistemic certainty and universal rationality, seems to go in directions that some evangelicals would consider problematic.

Yet it is interesting to note that in light of his modifications, his approach is still conservative in many ways. For instance, Vanhoozer's claim that the essence of Christian theism is a presupposed belief-system that establishes the necessity for

²²⁴Ibid., 361-64.

²²⁵Ibid., 364-73.

hermeneutics is a vivid illustration of his commitment to metaphysical realism. In addition, Vanhoozer's adaptation of Speech-Act theory to describe God as a communicative agent reveals his commitments to authorially-intended meaning and biblical inerrancy. It appears then that though Vanhoozer believes postmodern thought has raised significant concerns that necessitate sound responses, he does not think that it poses any irrefutable criticisms against the standard beliefs that mark evangelical theology. Instead, Vanhoozer believes that postmodern thought actually provides a backdrop for clarifying them. Thus, Vanhoozer's approach is, in a sense, conservative, or what one could call confessionally postconservative. His approach is unique in that it abandons certain predispositions of former conservative methodologies, but it is confessional in that it preserves the integrity of the beliefs that conservatives espouse.

With these points in mind, additional questions still remain regarding the implications of Vanhoozer's approach. These include inquiries into how his method deals with various theological issues and how it should be distinguished from other postconservative models, especially in light of Grenz's work. Yet before addressing these concerns or contrasting his views with Grenz's proposals, a final segment will now will examine how Vanhoozer's approach functions in theological dialogue. Specifically, the following section will investigate how Vanhoozer interacts with the same issue that previously was treated in Grenz's thought, namely religious pluralism.²²⁶

²²⁶To see discussions of other theological issues, consult Kevin Vanhoozer, "The Case Remains Unproven: A Response to Philip Clayton's, The Case for Christian Panentheism," *Dialog* 38 (1999): 281-85; idem, "The Love of God: Its Place, Meaning and Function in Systematic Theology," in *Nothing Greater, Nothing Better*, 1-29; republished in idem, *First Theology*, 71-95; idem, "Effectual Call or Causal Effect," 96-124; idem, "The Reader at the Well," 250-56; idem, "The Hermeneutics of I-Witness Testimony: John 21:20-24 and the Death of the Author," in *Understanding Poets and Prophets: Essays in Honor of George Wishart Anderson*, ed. A Graeme Auld (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1993), 366-87; republished in idem, *First Theology*, 257-74; idem, "Body-Piercing, the Natural Sense and the Task of Theological Interpretation: A Hermeneutical Homily on John 19:34," *Ex Auditu* 16 (2000): 1-29; republished in idem, *First Theology*, 275-308.

Vanhoozer's Theological Method in Practice

As seen in the preceding analysis of Grenz, a helpful way to clarify a thinker's approach is to observe the way it interprets various issues and then weigh its subsequent conclusions. Likewise, an effective manner in which to identify the differences between two particular approaches (in this case, Vanhoozer and Grenz) is to note how they assess common issues from their divergent vantage points. In light of these insights, one can examine the dynamics of Vanhoozer's postconservative methodology and recognize how much it is unlike Grenz's rendition by surveying his treatment of religious pluralism, which can be found in his article entitled, "Does the Trinity Belong in a Theology of Religions? On Angling in the Rubicon and the 'Identity' of God."²²⁷

Vanhoozer opens this essay with a brief assessment of the prominent positions surrounding this debate. To do so, he first appeals to the work of Raimundo Panikkar who attempts to illustrate the history of Christianity's relationship to other religions with three sacred rivers.²²⁸ Because of its associations with biblical history, the Jordan represents exclusivism, which is the traditional belief that Christianity is the only true religion, while the Tiber symbolizes the idea that all rivers, or religions, lead to Christianity thereby depicting the view of inclusivism, which advocates the position that Christianity embraces what is true in all other religions.²²⁹ The Ganges finally typifies

²²⁷Kevin Vanhoozer, "Does the Trinity Belong in a Theology of Religions? On Angling in the Rubicon and the 'Identity' of God," in the *Trinity in a Plurastic Age*, 41-71; republished in idem, *First Theology*, 45-70. Citings will come from the latter source.

²²⁸See Vanhoozer, "Does the Trinity," 45-46; Raimundo Panikkar, "The Jordan, the Tiber, and the Ganges," in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (Marykoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1987), 89-116.

²²⁹Vanhoozer also mentions that inclusivism became the official position of the Roman Catholic Church in 1965. Cf., Vanhoozer, "Does the Trinity," 45-46; David Wright, "The Watershed of Vatican II: Catholic Approaches to Religious Pluralism," in *One God, One Lord: Christianity in a World of Religious Pluralism*, ed. Andrew D. Clarke and Bruce W. Winter (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 207-26.

pluralism, which views Christianity as one of many valid religions, because it draws from several sources and flows into various outlets. Based upon these options, Vanhoozer then highlights a fourth “river” which is intensifying the pressure of the pluralism upon evangelical theology. Here, Vanhoozer uses the thought of Paul Knitter who argues that a “theological rubicon” has developed that currently is imploring evangelicals to cross over into a realm wherein other religions are allowed to have equal authority with the theological truth-claims of Christianity.²³⁰ Both exclusivists and inclusivists who have chosen not to cross this rubicon as of yet are criticized by pluralists on two fronts.²³¹ On one hand, they are labeled as soteriological bigots to believe that Christianity is the sole or primary source of salvation while on the other, they are perceived to be epistemic imperialists because they equate Christian belief with objective religious knowledge. Therefore, Vanhoozer concludes that the current dilemma regarding pluralism pertains to the way(s) in which evangelicals can potentially dialogue with “the other,” or views that are not in congruence with Christianity.²³²

Vanhoozer deduces that there are only two viable options to this challenge, those being conversion or conversation.²³³ In other words, evangelicals can either solely strive to make “other” faiths submit to the sameness of Christianity or choose to find common ground that can open doors of opportunity for religious interchange. Though the former goal is always a priority, Vanhoozer recognizes that in the current setting, it cannot be attained without engaging the latter factor as well. The question is how should evangelicals commit themselves to interreligious dialogue? While they accept the

²³⁰See Vanhoozer, “Does the Trinity,” 46; Paul Knitter, “Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions,” in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, 225.

²³¹Vanhoozer, “Does the Trinity,” 48.

²³²*Ibid.*, 47-48.

²³³*Ibid.*, 48.

minimal criteria of rational conversation, which includes a willingness to express one's views and allow others to do likewise, the deeper pluralist assumption is that the only way to ascertain "truth" is by viewing all religions as different expressions of the same fundamental reality.²³⁴ The problem with this idea for Vanhoozer though, is that genuine interaction cannot occur when a given audience assumes they merely are talking about the same thing with different terminology and concepts. So as a potential solution to creating an evangelical non-pluralistic theology of religions, Vanhoozer adopts an idea known as "angling," which attempts to view one's own personal beliefs as well as others from different vantage points in hopes of clarifying the variances between them rather than wrongfully reducing them to one homogeneous belief-system.²³⁵

As implied in the title of his article, the new angle that Vanhoozer chooses to emphasize with regards to pluralism is the subject of theology proper, or the identity of God.²³⁶ One purpose for establishing this new point of reference is to avoid the standard polarities that arise between religious traditions when soteriological issues are discussed. Vanhoozer believes that questions about salvation are actually symptomatic of further questions about God. Yet the deeper intention of this move is to highlight the point that a truly *pluralistic* environment can only be established if a *non-pluralistic* attitude is fostered with regards to different conceptions of God. Interreligious dialogue can only take place if the real differences that exist among various religious conceptions of theism are maintained. Furthermore, Vanhoozer makes the case that Christian Trinitarianism actually provides the foundation for this kind of environment by establishing a balance between religious diversity and the preservation of Christian uniqueness (or what

²³⁴Ibid., 49.

²³⁵Ibid., 49-50. Also, this idea of "angling" derives from Izaak Walton, *The Compleat Angler*, ed. Jonquil Bevan (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985; reprint, London: J.M. Dent, 1993).

²³⁶Vanhoozer, "Does the Trinity," 45, 50, 59.

Vanhoozer refers to as the openness-loyalty dialectic).²³⁷ How does this strategy commence?

Vanhoozer begins by claiming that advocates of pluralism tend to confine the subject of God to generic categories of ontology and experience thereby reducing all religious views of theism to one unified epistemic collage. To substantiate this charge, Vanhoozer initially combines Paul Ricoeur's distinction between *idem* (i.e., Latin for sameness) and *ipse* (i.e., Latin for selfhood) with Robert Jenson's survey of various categories of theism in order to distinguish two competing ways of delineating God's essence, or identity.²³⁸ The first approach is defined in light of the Ricoeurian idea of *idem*, which alludes to the Greek notion of ontological perfection that transcends all temporal flux, and Jenson's concept of a "persistence of the beginning" wherein God's being is perceived to be static or always identified as "Same."²³⁹ Together, these ideas symbolize the conception of God's identity as represented in the early Hellenic interpretation of a divine, timeless Being who possesses a self-same unity and exemplifies a monistic ontology.²⁴⁰ In contrast, a second way of perceiving God's identity is by defining it in terms of dependable and consistent action rather than substance alone. This perspective is articulated in light of the Ricoeurian *ipse*-identity model, which defines identity in terms of personhood and self-constancy, and Jenson's focus on a theistic "anticipation of the end" idea, which defines the essence of God by observing how He consistently reveals His character within history.²⁴¹ Moreover, Vanhoozer's argument is

²³⁷Ibid., 68.

²³⁸Ibid., 50-51; Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blarney (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Robert Jenson, *The Triune Identity: God According to the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982).

²³⁹Vanhoozer, "Does the Trinity," 50-51.

²⁴⁰Ibid., 51.

²⁴¹Ibid.

that there are at least two ways of discussing the personhood or identity of God, either on the basis of ontological continuity or through personal intervention within history.²⁴²

Vanhoozer's charge is that pluralism personifies the former approach by following two consecutive stages. First, pluralists often avoid any kind of descriptive theory of reference whereby God is identified by specific titles or definitive actions because these ideals inevitably lead to doctrinal constructs, which imply that opposing ideals are necessarily wrong.²⁴³ Instead, pluralists such as Maurice Wiles advocate a casual-theory of reference in which the validity of theistic conceptions are determined by how they describe the human religious experience, not by whether they objectively describe God as a Being.²⁴⁴ "Thus one need not conclude from the fact that people are saying different things about 'God' that they are referring to different 'gods.'"²⁴⁵ This obstruction of religious diversity leads to the second stage of pluralistic thought, which is a concerted effort to enforce religious conformity. Because many pluralists believe that all religions ultimately point to the same truth, or same fundamental experience, many are concluding that there actually should be one universal theology of religions. As an example of this ideology, Vanhoozer mentions the work of pluralists N. Ross Reat and Edmund Perry who contend that ". . . the world religions are different expressions of the same central spiritual reality of humanity, God."²⁴⁶ Consequently, much of pluralistic

²⁴²Vanhoozer is not attempting to deny any of the divine attributes of God at this point. He simply is arguing that knowledge of God's nature only comes by examining how God relates to the world rather than strict categories of Greek philosophy. How this knowledge is mediated though will be mentioned momentarily.

²⁴³Vanhoozer, "Does the Trinity," 53.

²⁴⁴Ibid., 53; Maurice Wiles, *Christian Theology and Inter-religious Dialogue* (London: SCM Press, 1992), 39.

²⁴⁵Vanhoozer, "Does the Trinity," 53.

²⁴⁶Ibid., 56; N. Ross Reat and Edmund F. Perry, *A World Theology: The Central Spiritual Reality of Humankind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

thought defines God in terms of an idem-identity model, or sameness, which derives from ontological categories and personal religious experience.

This being the case, Vanhoozer concludes that current pluralists are no less repressive than Christian orthodoxy. For example, many who tend to subsume the otherness of religions into a reductionistic category of mutual identity-sameness actually are guilty of the same violation that exclusivists and inclusivists are accused of committing.²⁴⁷ Likewise, several critics have pointed out that pluralism is still culturally restrictive because it is concerned with religious beliefs only. This means that other belief systems that are not considered to be religious in nature are excluded from the table of worldviews.²⁴⁸ Finally, many pluralists demand that religions be incorporated into the globalized context on their own pluralistic interpretive terms rather than the individual constitutive principles of each religious tradition.²⁴⁹ So in the end, much of pluralistic thought reveals a tendency to demand uniformity rather than foster a respect for variety.

Vanhoozer's proposed solution to this self-destructive trend, which truly deems interreligious dialogue as a moot activity, is to argue that the concept of God should be discussed in light of the Ricoeurian *ipse*-identity model. Whereas pluralists are inclined to discuss God in terms of permanent, common philosophical and subjective categories (i.e, idem-identity approach), Vanhoozer argues that we should define the divine nature in terms of personhood. This means that in light of Christianity, God must be delineated in terms of Trinitarianism.²⁵⁰ However, this claim simply begs another question. What criteria establishes the proper framework for accurately interpreting the nature of the Trinity and sets the boundaries whereby it can be applied to religious dialogue?

²⁴⁷Vanhoozer, "Does the Trinity," 52, 54, 56.

²⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 57.

²⁴⁹*Ibid.*

²⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 58-59.

This question is crucial because Vanhoozer is aware that many theologians currently use the concept of Trinitarianism to support various paradigms for a theology of religions that are in no way sympathetic to Christian orthodoxy.²⁵¹ In light of this problem, Vanhoozer initially appeals to a correlation that Ricoeur makes regarding the relationship between narrative and personhood. Following the work of Wilhelm Dilthey, Ricoeur contends that personal identity is revealed as it manifests itself through history.²⁵² This means that the entire series of events that entail the linear outworking of a person's life function as the hermeneutical gestalt for understanding that person's character. Personhood is, therefore, mediated through the narrative of a person's history. Correlating this idea to Christianity and Trinitarianism, Vanhoozer argues that the canon mediates the narrative that is essential to understanding the dynamics of God's person, both in its unity and triunity. Only the biblical narratives provide the storyline of God's acts within history including creation, the exodus, the incarnation, and the coming eschatological kingdom. Consequently, various Trinitarian models for a theology of religions that attempt to autonomize the function of the Spirit from Christology or reduce the triune persons to obtuse existential dynamics do so with no apparent authority because they ignore the conceptual frameworks of the hermeneutical point of reference, namely the Scriptures.²⁵³

Upon establishing the point that divine-identity should be understood in the context of personhood as opposed to a static monistic substance and that the Christian narrative establishes the criteria for understanding the Christian identity of God as three characters existing in a triune interaction, Vanhoozer's final argument for his non-

²⁵¹For treatments of various examples including the work of Raimundo Panikkar, Rowan Williams, Michael Barnes, and Peter Hodgson, see Vanhoozer, "Does the Trinity," 59-63.

²⁵²Ibid., 65; Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 143.

²⁵³Vanhoozer, "Does the Trinity," 66-67.

pluralistic theology of religions is that Trinitarianism mediates a point of reference for dialogical interaction between various religions. Vanhoozer explicates this argument by emphasizing the nature of covenantal discourse that God is portrayed to convey throughout the biblical narratives.²⁵⁴ Through the Father's plan to covenant with humanity, the Son's acceptance to solidify the covenantal agreement, and the Spirit's application of its results, Vanhoozer argues that a constitutive model is established whereby the divine sameness of the Godhead chooses to interact with the otherness of humanity on terms that acknowledge differences rather than dismissing them. Therefore, "True pluralism, the kind that respects the alterity of the other rather than assimilating it, is possible only on Trinitarian grounds."²⁵⁵ The covenantal persona of the Trinity ironically reflects what pluralism should desire to achieve. Moreover, just as the purpose of the divine covenant is to establish peace with humanity even at the risk of being rejected, evangelicals likewise should present their views passionately, listen to the pleas of contrary voices, and be willing to let their beliefs either be adamantly rejected or potentially accepted. In Vanhoozer's words, "The Trinity is the transcendental condition for interreligious dialogue, the ontological condition that permits us to take the other in all seriousness, without fear and without violence."²⁵⁶

Like Grenz, one must conclude that Vanhoozer is consistent in applying his theological approach to the challenges that pluralism poses for evangelicalism. He follows his apologetic scheme by beginning with his expository epistemic approach, which focuses on assessing the precommitments behind the pluralistic worldview (i.e., an offensive posture), and then moving to the hermeneutical phase whereby he summarizes the non-negotiable Christian commitments that are at stake (i.e., a defensive posture). He

²⁵⁴Ibid., 67-69.

²⁵⁵Ibid., 68.

²⁵⁶Ibid., 70.

then ends his assessment with the noncoercive, martyristic paradigm wherein he displays a willingness to accept whatever consequences may come in light of his arguments (i.e., an ethical posture). Furthermore, Vanhoozer chooses to invest most of his energy emphasizing this third strategy because he wants to highlight both the metaphysical as well as the moral nature of truth. The reason for this is that Vanhoozer is convinced that a Christian view of truth demands upon successful personal application as well as clear articulation and inferential argumentation. In addition, throughout the unfolding of his case, Vanhoozer approaches this issue like any other, that being as though theology and hermeneutical theory are reciprocating issues. His contention is that identifying the Christian God within the world of religions is accomplished by understanding Him as a communicative agent of covenantal discourse as seen in the narrated drama of the canon and that it is only a belief in this particular God that can establish the very possibility for theological dialogue, or any kind of communication for that matter. Finally, Vanhoozer also shows caution in avoiding the epistemic pitfalls of CF by adopting the notion of “angling,” which essentially focuses on rhetorical persuasion rather than constraint.

Presently, with the historical and theological backdrop of the postconservative evangelical movement as well as a critical examination of two diverse postconservative thinkers in place, we can now initiate interaction between Grenz’s and Vanhoozer’s approaches. In doing so, the next chapter will compare the major similarities between their methodologies and subsequently offer individual assessments and critiques. These treatments will then establish the foundation for highlighting the significant diversity of the postconservative movement and how it can potentially hinder or harm future evangelical endeavors. Furthermore, these assessments will lead to a final synthesis in the concluding chapter, which will entail observations regarding the issues that require further consideration in light of both postmodern thought and postconservative evangelicalism.

CHAPTER 4

EVALUATING THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF STANLEY J. GRENZ AND KEVIN J. VANHOOZER

Upon treating Grenz's and Vanhoozer's renditions of theological method as two contrasting models within the growing segment of postconservative evangelicalism, a survey and critical analysis of their approaches reveal two initial features of this new line of thought.¹ One is that postconservatives share common criticisms of previous conservative theological approaches and thereby harbor a mutual reluctance to adopt many of the ways in which earlier evangelical thinkers have articulated and defended fundamental evangelical beliefs. Yet beyond these joint assessments, the second factor inherent within the postconservative spectrum is that it takes divergent theological shapes and forms. The reason for these variations is that postconservative thinkers differ on the level of issues that warrant modifications in light of the postmodern context. Some, such as Grenz, believe that former evangelical methodologies as well as certain evangelical beliefs must be revised while others, such as Vanhoozer, are convinced that only particular ways in which certain conservative beliefs have been expressed require reassessments.

¹Again, the basis for labeling these theologians as postconservative evangelicals derives from Grenz's distinction between evangelical conservative modernists and contemporary postmodern evangelicals, of which he views himself in the latter guild, and Vanhoozer's adoption of the term in his articulation of a postpropositional view of biblical revelation. See Stanley J. Grenz, "An Agenda for Evangelical Theology in the Postmodern Context," *Didaskalia* 9 (1998): 1-2; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal about the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology," in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 74-77.

It is for this reason that an earlier distinction was made between Grenz's formulation of a *postmodern* postconservatism and Vanhoozer's version of a *confessional* postconservatism. Regarding Grenz, he believes that the edifice of conservative evangelical theology is in jeopardy because its theological methodologies as well as many of its doctrinal constructs are laden with problematic modernistic versions of rationalism and metaphysics, which have been repudiated and deemed untenable by contemporary forms of postmodern thought. This explains why Grenz's approach to postconservative theological method can be perceived as exceedingly postmodern in nature because he tends to be highly critical of many conservative commitments and noticeably aggressive in implementing alternative postmodern concepts into his views of ontology, epistemology, hermeneutics, and even Scripture. Postmodernism then, becomes a type of contextual grid that attacks the apparent deficiencies in various conservative doctrinal beliefs as well as the ways in which they have been formulated.

In contrast, Vanhoozer develops his perceptions of postconservative methodology in directions that allow him to preserve many of the beliefs that Grenz chooses to jettison. His contention is not that conservative evangelical beliefs themselves are the theological infants of modernistic outlooks. Rather, it is certain approaches that have been used to explicate and defend them that reveal relational roots to modernity. So for Vanhoozer, the postmodern context does reveal the need to re-evaluate the apologetic, hermeneutical, and epistemic factors inherent within evangelical theology, but it has no authoritative bearing on the fundamental doctrines undergirding the evangelical tradition. Vanhoozer, therefore, offers a confessional approach to postconservatism that actually is committed to the corpus of conservative evangelical beliefs.² For further clarification then, one could say that Grenz is advocating an approach that actually redefines various

²This distinction between postmodern and confessional postconservatism is not made in order to imply that Grenz's approach is in no way confessional in nature. The point of this taxonomy simply is that Grenz's perception of postconservatism is not as sympathetic to certain core evangelical beliefs as Vanhoozer's approach.

portions of the theological content of evangelicalism (i.e., *theological* postconservatism) while Vanhoozer primarily desires to propose a new method of expressing, constructing, and defending that content (i.e., *methodological* postconservatism). Consequently, this distinction between Grenz and Vanhoozer displays a intriguing dynamic in the evolution of postconservative thought, namely that in some cases, postconservatism is not altogether nonconservative.

With these general comments aside, critical interaction with Grenz's and Vanhoozer's theological approaches can now proceed. To begin, this discussion will commence with a survey of the helpful advances these thinkers are making in the field of theological method as well as the specific ideas that both have in common to their particular proposals and those that are contrary to each other. From here, analysis and critiques will then be provided regarding their individual projects including appraisals of their interpretations of evangelical theology, assessments of the major factors and sources that Grenz and Vanhoozer use to support their arguments, and final deductions regarding various clarifications that require further attention in the future.³ In turn, these assessments hopefully will offer some clarification regarding the specific divergences of postconservative thought.

Assessing the Significant Similarities and Variances of Grenz's and Vanhoozer's Postconservatism

Grenz and Vanhoozer indeed are on the cutting edge of the entire discussion regarding evangelical theological method. The primary reason for this is because they both are aware of the many challenges that the postmodern culture has created for evangelical theology and are willing to engage this intellectual climate rather than ignore

³In all fairness, this last point could result in potentially premature judgments since both thinkers are still developing their ideas through new publications. So it must be acknowledged that the points to be emphasized in this chapter are argued in light of what Grenz and Vanhoozer have asserted thus far in their academic careers.

or simply dismiss it.⁴ This is why they invest much of their time examining the issues of metaphysics, such as the nature of truth, epistemology, and reality as well as the subjects pertinent to human communication including the philosophy of language and hermeneutics. They realize that these subjects are highly complex due to post-Kantian theories of knowledge as well as post-Wittgenstenian and Derridian perspectives of language and that previous evangelical commitments to ideas such as the correspondence theory of truth, metaphysical (and literary) realism, reconstructive interpretation, and CF are considerably minority positions in the present-day culture.⁵ They, likewise, are cognizant of the threats that postmodernism poses regarding an evangelical understanding of the relationship between Christian doctrine and Scripture as well as the capacity for evangelicals, who currently reside in a pluralistic context, to make biblical and theological truth-claims that are exclusive in nature. Moreover, it is for these reasons that many of their contributions to theological method reflect comparable concerns and points of emphasis.

Regarding the major similarities between Grenz's and Vanhoozer's thought, both share mutual criticisms of previous approaches to theological method that have been

⁴Again, the works wherein Grenz and Vanhoozer give their most detailed summaries of postmodernism include Stanely J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in this Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

⁵Each of these issues have received clarification and treatments except for the term "reconstructive interpretation." Herein, this idea, which is known also as an objectivist hermeneutic, refers to the potential capacity of a reader, or interpreting subject, to accurately configure, or reconstruct, the authorially-intended, permanently fixed meaning of a given text in its original socio-cultural context. See Thomas Guarino, "Revelation and Foundationalism: Toward Hermeneutical and Ontological Appropriateness," *Modern Theology* 6 (1990): 223-24. Also note that this view is dependent upon the view of literary realism, which again is defined by Vanhoozer as the belief that literary meaning exists within a given text independently of a given reader's use of that text. See Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 25-26.

prominent within conservative evangelicalism.⁶ They are convinced, albeit at different levels, that for the latter part of the nineteenth and most of the twentieth centuries, many evangelicals have been defending their theological systems against the modern era and ironically using ideals of modernity to do it.⁷ In doing so, Grenz and Vanhoozer concur that at least three specific concepts have received the most prominence.

One prevailing idea again is the theory of foundationalism. According to Grenz, this epistemic model, which previously found its seminal development in the thought of Descartes, gradually was implemented into evangelical theology through the initial efforts of the Princetonian theologians, such as Charles Hodge and B. B. Warfield, who desired to respond to two major problems. One was the skeptical attitude that had been fostered toward Christianity via the Enlightenment's focus on the autonomy of human reason. The other problem, which was more immediate for these theologians, was the German movement of Protestant liberalism. Herein, religious experience was being proposed as a new alternative to human rationality as the universally-accessible component of human existence.⁸ As a solution, Grenz contends that the Princetonians argued that the proper basis, or foundation, for Christian theology was to be found in a pristine, error-free Bible that functioned as the divine deposit, or storehouse, of divine

⁶See their general comments in Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 61-72; idem, "Beyond Foundationalism: Is a Nonfoundationalist Evangelical Theology Possible?" *CSR* 30 (2000): 62-65; idem, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 184-90; Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in the Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster Press, 2001), 28-37; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Exploring the World: Following the Word: The Credibility of Evangelical Theology in an Incredulous Age," *TrinJ* 16 (1995): 8-11; idem, "From Canon to Concept: 'Same' and 'Other' in the Relation Between Biblical and Systematic Theology," *SBET* 12 (1994): 106-07; idem, "The Voice and the Actor," 62-65.

⁷See Grenz, "Beyond Foundationalism," 63-64; Vanhoozer, "Exploring the World," 8-9.

⁸See Grenz, "Beyond Foundationalism," 62-63.

revelation.⁹ Similar to this assessment, Vanhoozer agrees that in “. . . exegesis, theology, and apologetics alike, many evangelicals accepted a Cartesian view of rationality, at least to the extent that they sought absolute foundations and certain conclusions.”¹⁰ Yet he also argues that evangelicals, including the Princetonians, have not fallen prey to the philosophical pitfalls of foundationalism by simply defending the veracity and reliability of Scripture, but by trying to validate Scripture with the philosophical categories of the world instead of vice versa.¹¹ So while Grenz and Vanhoozer take various routes in expressing their thoughts on the role of foundationalism in evangelical theology, they both conclude that it has been the dominant epistemic approach to defending traditional conservative evangelical beliefs and is in serious need of revisions in order to survive the onslaught of postmodern theories of knowledge.¹²

In conjunction with the role of foundationalism, Grenz and Vanhoozer also concur that due to the influence of modernity on evangelical theology, a predetermined form of scientific inquiry was transposed onto the task of biblical interpretation and

⁹Ibid., 63. Also see Grenz’s more in-depth treatment of this theory in Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 69-77.

¹⁰Vanhoozer, “Exploring the World,” 8-9.

¹¹Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Christ and Concept: Doing Theology and the ‘Ministry’ of Philosophy,” in *Doing Theology in Today’s World: Essays in Honor of Kenneth S. Kantzer*, ed. John D. Woodbridge and Thomas E. McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 132. It is this problem of viewing rationality as an objective starting point rather than a guideline for ongoing, critical thinking that Vanhoozer also argues that debates about truth become consumed with concerns regarding epistemic justification for believing truth rather than the actual nature of truth itself. See Vanhoozer, “The Trials of Truth: Mission, Martyrdom, and the Epistemology of the Cross,” in *First Theology: God, Scripture, and Hermeneutics*, by Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 338-39.

¹²Their mutual concern with foundationalism can also be seen in the fact that they both criticize it and offer alternative approaches to epistemology in their articles on theological method in the John Stackhouse volume. See Stanley J. Grenz, “Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic: Theological Method after the Demise of Foundationalism,” in *Evangelical Futures*, 119-29; Vanhoozer, “The Voice and the Actor,” 86-89.

doctrinal formulation. This initially can be seen in their summaries of Charles Hodge. Grenz asserts that Hodge, along with later evangelical thinkers, came to view the theological discipline as a science in the modern sense of the term whereby scientists observe the ordered phenomena of nature with their physical senses. Theologians were simply to reflect this ideology by uncovering the doctrinal facts as revealed in Scripture.¹³ Likewise, Vanhoozer agrees that Hodge, as well as future conservative evangelicals, accepted the modern idea that theology, if it was to be credible, must imitate the natural sciences and thereby likened theology to an inductive science where the mind conforms to the biblical data.¹⁴ Furthermore, both Grenz and Vanhoozer see this quasi-empirical approach to theological investigation as being echoed in the works of more contemporary evangelicals. For example, Grenz again finds traces of this methodology in the work of Carl Henry, Gordon Lewis, and Bruce Demarest while Vanhoozer also agrees with Grenz that even Wayne Grudem reflects this approach because he argues that the purpose of theology is to discover what the Bible teaches about any given topic.¹⁵ This being the case, Grenz and Vanhoozer also comply that this perception of doctrinal formulation is in need of serious reassessments due to postmodern criticisms of interpretive objectivity.

A final point wherein Grenz and Vanhoozer find consensus is in the role of propositional revelation within conservative evangelicalism. Both argue that due to the

¹³See Grenz, "Beyond Foundationalism," 64; Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 60-63.

¹⁴See Vanhoozer, "Exploring the World," 9; idem, "From Canon to Concept," 107.

¹⁵Again, Grudem articulates this point in Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 21; idem, "Do We Act as if We Really Believe that 'the Bible Alone and the Bible in Its Entirety, is the Word of God Written?'" *JETS* 43 (2000): 5-26. Note though that Vanhoozer is more sympathetic to Grudem's approach than Grenz. See their discussions in Grenz, "Beyond Foundationalism," 64-65; idem, *Renewing the Center*, 154-59; Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor," 62-65.

role of foundationalism as well as the scientific model of theological inquiry, the Princetonians came to view Scripture as a collection of supernatural propositions that contain eternal facts about God's person and his activity in history.¹⁶ This idea gained further momentum when later postfundamentalist evangelicals mounted their response to the movement of neo-orthodoxy, which showed hesitancy to view revelation as a cognitive deposit of divine truth.¹⁷ The problem with this concept in Grenz's mind is that it inadvertently silences the voice of Scripture in doctrinal development because once a given theological system is organized in such a way that it accurately describes the immutable truths of the Bible, there is no longer any need to re-examine the Scriptures for new insights or ideas.¹⁸ Vanhoozer, on the other hand, finds the concept of propositional revelation in need of revision because it tends to treat all the diverse types of biblical literature as one single literary genre, namely didactic literature.¹⁹ So in the end, both thinkers see propositional revelation, as it has been articulated by most conservatives, to be in need of reconsideration and modifications, but for noticeably different reasons.

Recognizing at this juncture that both of these thinkers are considered "postconservatives" and that they agree that modernity has influenced conservative evangelicalism via epistemological foundationalism, modernistic versions of scientific inquiry, and propositional revelation, the next question that arises is whether they agree on the solutions to these issues. The answer is emphatically no. All of these similar

¹⁶See Grenz, "Beyond Foundationalism," 64; Vanhoozer, "God's Mighty Speech-Acts: The Doctrine of Scripture Today," in *First Theology*, 133.

¹⁷Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 93-94; Vanhoozer, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature: Truth and Scripture's Diverse Literary Forms," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 64.

¹⁸Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 63.

¹⁹See Vanhoozer, "From Canon to Concept," 107; idem, "God's Mighty Speech-Acts," 143.

criticisms regarding conservative evangelical theology notwithstanding, Grenz and Vanhoozer diverge onto different paths in developing their solutions to these challenges.

For example, both thinkers take opposing approaches in their assessments of Scripture as it relates to propositional revelation. The most effective way to understand their differences is to parallel their ideas as they are explicated in light of the Spirit's relationship to the Bible.²⁰ To begin, Grenz believes that the conservative tendency to make a one-on-one correspondence between the words of Scripture and the words of God fosters a short-sighted hermeneutic wherein contemporary readers settle for the forensic tasks of exegeting and systematizing the contents of biblical texts. Though these activities are essential, they are incomplete because they neglect the need to discern the ongoing dynamic of Spirit's use of Scripture in the contemporary context.²¹ The key idea to note in this argument is that Grenz does not believe the authority of Scripture lies in the intrinsic nature of the inspired texts themselves because this lapses back into the fallacy of foundationalism. Instead, the Scriptures are authoritative for the church because the Spirit chooses to use those texts on a continual basis throughout the history of the Christian church. Furthermore, this divine-speaking through Scripture is not done solely within the confines of the canon, but through the joint efforts of the theological traditions of the church and the cultural context in which the present-day church exists.²²

²⁰Cf. their treatments in Stanley J. Grenz, "An Agenda for Evangelical Theology," 9-12; idem, "The Spirit and the Word: The World-Creating Function of the Text," *TToday* 57 (2000): 357-74; idem, "Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic," 124-29; Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 64-115; Vanhoozer, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature," 53-104; idem, "God's Mighty Speech-Acts," 127-58; idem, "From Speech Acts to Scripture Acts: The Covenant of Discourse and the Discourse of the Covenant," in *First Theology*, 159-203; idem, "The Spirit of Understanding: Special Revelation and General Hermeneutics," in *First Theology*, 220-35.

²¹See Grenz, "An Agenda for Evangelical Theology," 9-10; idem, "The Spirit and the Word," 358-59.

²²For example, see his summaries in Grenz "Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic," 126-29; idem, *Renewing the Center*, 208-11.

This means that Grenz not only repudiates the traditional understanding of propositional revelation as it has been articulated in conservative evangelicalism. His view also necessitates a re-definition of the Reformed idea of *sola scriptura* because Scripture is viewed as the church's authority because it is divinely used, not because it is divinely inspired, and because this divine speaking via Scripture is performed *in conjunction with* other sources.²³

Vanhoozer, on the other hand, argues that propositionalism requires more attention not because it is a faulty idea that silences the function of the Spirit in divine inspiration or illumination. Rather, the problem is that conservative evangelical forebearers inadvertently have fostered an unhelpful wedge between divine content and divine action.²⁴ Grenz would most likely agree with this point. Nonetheless, Vanhoozer's solution is not to make a distinction between understanding what a biblical author wrote and understanding how the Spirit later speaks trans-canonically. This would make an unhealthy bifurcation between the content of Scripture and the Spirit's role in inspiring that content. Vanhoozer argues, instead, that the Spirit's voice is heard within the propositional content as communicated through the biblical authors, but that communication does not provide synthetic doctrinal equations nor is it confined to indicative assertions. It occurs through the progressive recollection of God's covenantal discourses with humanity as it is revealed within the rich diversity of the various literary categories of the canon.²⁵ Moreover, the difference between Grenz and Vanhoozer regarding the issue of Scripture is that the former argues that the content of Scripture is

²³This brings up an obvious question. How can Grenz claim to be preserving the original purpose of *sola scriptura* when he argues that Scripture is not the sole means whereby the Spirit speaks?

²⁴Vanhoozer, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature," 63-67; idem, "God's Mighty Speech Acts," 130-31.

²⁵Vanhoozer, "From Canon to Concept," 121-22.

communicated as the Spirit continually speaks while for Vanhoozer, it is conveyed through the variety of genre in which the Spirit originally spoke.²⁶ For Grenz then, a postconservative view of Scripture places the value of the biblical text upon its divine function rather than its form, thereby abandoning previous conservative emphases on infallibility and inerrancy, while Vanhoozer's postconservative approach attempts to retain these ideas but offer further clarification regarding the ways in which propositional content is conveyed through various kinds of literary discourse.

One helpful way to clarify and illustrate this fundamental difference between Grenz and Vanhoozer is to compare the ways in which they apply Speech-Act theory to their particular views of Scripture.²⁷ For Grenz, the Spirit uses the locutions of Scripture to deliver illocutionary forces to the contemporary readers of the Christian community. Yet these illocutions can potentially transcend, though not contradict, the original illocutionary intents of the biblical writers. The reason Grenz argues in this fashion is because he views biblical authority as valid only if the Spirit continually appropriates Scripture. Therefore, in vintage Ricoeurian style, Grenz sees the textual locutions of Scripture as continually exhibiting new illocutionary acts at the Spirit's discretion.²⁸ Vanhoozer repudiates this idea because it completely misconstrues the idea of Speech-Act theory as it relates to the very concept of divine inspiration. He argues that the locutions, which the biblical authors recorded, as well as their original illocutionary intents, cannot be distinguished from the ministry of the Spirit because it is the Spirit that

²⁶Cf., Grenz, "An Agenda for Evangelical Theology," 10-11; Vanhoozer, "The Spirit of Understanding," 227-28.

²⁷Among the many works that contain their thoughts on this topic, concise treatments can be found in Grenz, "The Spirit and the Word," 360-62; idem, "Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic," 124-25; Vanhoozer, "From Speech Acts to Scripture Acts," 194-200; idem, "The Voice and the Actor," 75-77.

²⁸Grenz, "The Spirit and the Word," 362. Also, because this idea defines biblical authority in terms of how the Spirit continually uses Scripture, the importance of inerrancy becomes obsolete. See Grenz, "An Agenda for Evangelical Theology," 10.

supernaturally led them to perform their particular speech acts in the first place. To then divide the speech-acts of Scripture into initial authorial discourse and a type of ongoing pneuma-discourse actually eradicates the possibility of speech-acts altogether because illocutions can only occur on the basis of the locutionary content from which they derive. Consequently, the Spirit's illocutions must always coincide with the textual locutions that the biblical authors were led to record.²⁹ So for Grenz, the speech-acts of Scripture are reliable because the Spirit continually uses them to perform illocutionary acts while for Vanhoozer, they are trustworthy because they originally were performed by the Spirit and still illicit supernatural perlocutionary effects.

This conflict of interests between their views of Scripture also leads to various ideas regarding the nature of doctrinal formulation and theological truth. Grenz, for instance, believes that to see theological language and doctrinal tenets as constructs that describe a set of immutable, irrefutable beliefs as revealed in Scripture is to fall prey to the project of modernity. This leads Grenz to reject the concept of metaphysical realism because he believes that though Christian theology assumes a certain givenness to the world, this givenness is not a static actuality that exists co-temporally with our linguistic constructions of the world.³⁰ Grenz argues, instead, that rather than theology objectively describing reality as it exists beyond our socio-cultural paradigms, it organizes and explicates the entire religious framework of the Christian community including its texts, beliefs, experiences, and traditions.³¹ Note that here, Grenz sees theology as an activity that does not move simply from Scripture to interpretation, but constantly reciprocates between Scriptural interpretation, communal life, doctrinal traditions, and cultural

²⁹See Vanhoozer, "From Speech Acts to Scripture Acts," 199; idem, "The Spirit of Understanding," 233.

³⁰Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 245-46; idem, "Eschatological Theology: Contours of a Postmodern Theology of Hope," *RevExp* 97 (2000): 350.

³¹Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 16.

contexts. In doing so, the truthfulness of theology does not lie in its capacity to offer an objective analysis of Scripture's portrayal of reality. It resides in its ability to show how all the elements of the Christian experience point to the future hope of the eschatological end, or *telos*.³² Only in this light can any form of realism or objective truth be fully embraced because in the future world, all the present limitations upon human language and knowledge be will eradicated. Consequently, for Grenz, the truthfulness of doctrines and theological language is reduced to how they potentially explicate the functions and beliefs of the Christian community.

In contrast, what demarcates Vanhoozer's view of theological language and doctrinal formulation from Grenz's is his focus on metaphysical realism as it relates to the objectivity of biblical revelation, or what one could call "canonical realism."³³ While Grenz is only a deferred eschatological realist in the sense that the Bible describes the real world only as the Spirit uses it to reflect the future new creation, Vanhoozer can be labeled as a critical realist in that he believes the authorially-intended content of the canon accurately and propositionally describes the world both as it is now and how it will be. In addition, Vanhoozer views theological language as an enterprise that focuses on developing cognitive models that correctly, though not exhaustively, illustrate the canonical descriptions of the world.³⁴ The key, though, is that while Vanhoozer agrees with Grenz that the theological task cannot be reduced to gathering indicative data from Scripture for synthesizing acontextual doctrinal assertions, he differs from Grenz in that

³²Grenz, "The Spirit and the Word," 364-65.

³³Herein, the idea is that the canon gives a multi-leveled, God's-eye perspective of the world and furthermore, this divine portrayal of reality exists independently of and prior to the ways in which it is interpreted and understood by later readers and interpreters. The basis of this idea comes from combining Vanhoozer's definition of hermeneutical realism with his perceptions of communicative action as it relates to the literary categories of the canon. See Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 48; idem, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature," 93.

³⁴Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor," 93-94.

he believes that theology still does move from canonical first-order “truth” to second-order doctrinal constructs. Furthermore, Vanhoozer argues that theology can be “true” when it echoes the Christian worldview as presented in Scripture’s literary forms and yes, propositional content.³⁵ Yet the question that still arises is how they believe that theological truth-claims can be epistemically justified in light of the postmodern setting.

This dilemma leads to final divergences regarding their epistemic alternatives to foundationalism. On the one hand, Grenz is forced to repudiate the correspondence theory of truth because of his non-realist metaphysic, which in turn leads him to embrace nonfoundational models of epistemology including communitarian versions of coherentism and pragmatism.³⁶ Because there is no universally-accessible means to gain an acontextual, objective perspective of the world and because of the postmodern skepticism toward discovering an all-encompassing metanarrative, Grenz contends that the most effective way to show the supremacy of Christianity is to convey its epistemic consistency by explicating its belief-framework. This includes an ongoing presentation of how Christian doctrines and texts come together to foster a particular community and superior religious experience. In doing so, Grenz argues that this epistemic coherence can aid in validating Christianity against other religious perspectives because it engenders a vision of communal existence that transcends all others.³⁷

Vanhoozer, on the other hand, believes that foundationalism is an insufficient model, but again concludes that nonfoundational models are unsatisfactory for Christian theology as well. Coherentism, for example, focuses on logical consistency but provides

³⁵Vanhoozer, “The Semantics of Biblical Literature,” 104.

³⁶See Grenz, “Beyond Foundationalism,” 77-82.

³⁷See Stanley J. 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*, ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 105-10.

no convincing criteria whereby one model can be shown to be more legitimate than another while pragmatic theories of knowledge and truth fail because for Vanhoozer, Scripture is “true” regardless of the potential results it may illicit.³⁸ This leads Vanhoozer to postulate a postfoundational, as opposed to a nonfoundational, view of epistemology, which again he labels as fallibilism.³⁹ Here, Vanhoozer argues that Christianity is proven to be reliable and true as it engages other worldviews and withstands the criticisms of the contemporary context.⁴⁰ As this process continues, Vanhoozer contends that the Christian worldview, or metanarrative, reveals its truthfulness and thus proves to correspond and accurately reflect the world in which we live.

Therefore, while Grenz and Vanhoozer agree that a contextually-sterile form of objective *knowledge* does not exist, they disagree upon whether objective *truth* exists and whether it can be known. While one can argue that human knowledge is mediated through a particular context, it is something entirely different to argue that knowledge cannot perceive existing truth, or that truth does not exist outside of our linguistic perceptions of it. Grenz believes that the only way to show the truthfulness of Christianity, including biblical claims and theological assertions, is to relate them to the eschatological expectations of a future redeemed community. This means that in the context of the correspondence theory of truth, Grenz cannot concede that Christianity is truer than any other religious tradition. Vanhoozer, on the other hand, embraces the correspondence view of truth because he believes that the canon entails divine-communicative acts that necessarily convey God’s interactions with humanity as well as his descriptions of reality. Consequently, Christianity can successfully show its epistemic

³⁸See Vanhoozer, “Christ and Concept,” 102-03; idem, “The Semantics of Biblical Literature,” 97.

³⁹Vanhoozer, “Christ and Concept,” 132-42; idem, “The Voice and the Actor,” 87-89.

⁴⁰Vanhoozer, “The Trials of Truth,” 367-68.

superiority and truthfulness as it exploits the shortcomings of other worldviews and endures all external attacks and criticisms.

One helpful way to clarify this difference of opinion regarding epistemology and truth is to compare the ways in which Grenz and Vanhoozer choose to address the issue of pluralism.⁴¹ For Grenz, showing the superiority of Christianity comes by establishing its common bond with other religions, namely communal interaction. Grenz argues that the Christian community is the zenith of all religious groups because it worships the Triune God through the person of Christ and the work of the Spirit. Christianity thereby is superior to other faiths not because it is right and others are wrong, but because it constitutes “. . . a more complete appraisal of the human situation and a more definitive disclosure of the divine intention.”⁴² Juxtaposed to this approach, Vanhoozer does not choose to address pluralism through the common theme of community, but through the potential act of dialogue.⁴³ Yet in doing so, his intention is not simply to comply to epistemic ambivalence or capitulate to postmodern tolerance. Rather, he argues that the Christian worldview, as expressed in Scripture, is the only one that truly fosters a healthy environment for potential conversation between various ideologies because it is based on the fact that God has chosen to communicate with an opposing audience, namely humanity.⁴⁴ Other religions that currently uphold the pluralistic banner do not do so consistently. Instead of fostering diversity, they demand uniformity to a common set of generic tenets that domesticate religions into one common

⁴¹Again, this issue is addressed in Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 249-86; idem, “The Universality of the ‘Jesus-Story,’” 85-111; Vanhoozer, “Does the Trinity Belong in a Theology of Religions? On Angling in the Rubicon and the ‘Identity’ of God,” in *First Theology*, 45-70.

⁴²Grenz, “The Universality of the ‘Jesus-Story,’” 110.

⁴³Vanhoozer, “Does the Trinity Belong,” 48.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 67-68.

epistemic collage. Moreover, Grenz argues that Christianity is superior because it illustrates truth as it will exist in the future while Vanhoozer contends it is true because it provides the only way to maintain epistemic consistency in the present.

In summary, Grenz and Vanhoozer provide complex projects that display both the commonality of postconservative thought as well as its diversity. Their works show how the postmodern setting is forcing evangelical thinkers to come to grips with the methodological entanglements of their theological forebears and choose to take various directions in order to address needed areas of improvement. They also provide a helpful reminder that the theological task entails spiritual application and not just forensic observations. Yet in surveying their approaches to postconservative theological method as well as their major differences, there appears to be an underlying boundary that sustains the fundamental demarcation between Grenz's and Vanhoozer's approaches, that being their perceptions of postmodernism in general.

Essentially, postconservatism exists as a growing set of responses to the challenges that postmodern thought continues to pose against evangelical theology. It is only natural then to conclude that Grenz and Vanhoozer, as representatives of this segment of evangelicalism, develop their proposals in light of their perceptions of postmodernism. In so doing, it also must be kept in mind that if one is more sympathetic to postmodern concerns, then one's adaptation of postmodern ideas will be more aggressive and the opposite dynamic would be true as well.

Here is where the fundamental source of contention between Grenz and Vanhoozer appears to exist. Grenz believes that postmodernism is a means of deliverance from modernity. Though he rejects the intrinsic skepticism toward a universal metanarrative, he is convinced that many of the postmodern criticisms against foundationalism, objectivity, truth, and language are fundamentally accurate. In one sense, Vanhoozer agrees with Grenz that postmodern thought has leveled legitimate

denunciations against some of these ideas, but his positive assessments appear to stop here. He does not share Grenz's optimism of postmodern ideas because he sees this phenomenon as driven by presuppositions that are anything but congenial to Christian theology. Therefore, the basic wedge that appears to polarize Grenz from Vanhoozer regarding theological method is that Grenz shows a greater tendency to implement postmodern concepts than Vanhoozer, which in turn leads them to postulate conclusions that are mutually exclusive. This is why Vanhoozer can agree with several postmodern ideas but still choose to uphold ideals prominent within evangelical theology such as inerrancy, the correspondence theory of truth, and metaphysical realism and thereby promote a conservative-confessional version of postconservatism while Grenz can choose to abandon them in exchange for a more thoroughgoing postmodern model.⁴⁵

Be this as it may, there are still many issues and questions that warrant further investigation and attention. As these two thinkers continue to develop their methodologies as well as their theological systems, more clarification surely will come to light. Nonetheless, at this stage of their thought, certain concerns and criticisms should be highlighted and discussed. In the following sections, critical analysis of Grenz's and Vanhoozer's approaches will be provided in hopes of identifying the strengths and weaknesses of their proposals as well as offering more insights into how their thoughts show the divergences within postconservative thought altogether.

Reflections and Concerns Regarding Grenz's Theological Method

In light of the amount of literature that Grenz has produced as well as the future works he plans to publish, it must be acknowledged that his contributions to postconservative theological method continue to offer insights into the practice of

⁴⁵In looking at Vanhoozer's approach and Grenz's criticisms against evangelical conservatism, it would probably be safe to assume that Grenz would consider Vanhoozer to be an evangelical modernist in postconservative sheep's clothing.

evangelical theology, especially as it relates to the postmodern context. He, along with other postconservatives and conservatives alike, are aware that evangelical theology must be formulated in a way that is sensitive to the cultural context but still consistent in maintaining a commitment to the Christian metanarrative as revealed in Jesus Christ. It is in attempting to meet these challenges that Grenz also is correct in many of his observations regarding the complexities involved in theological discourse. He rightfully acknowledges that the major postmodern shifts in philosophy reveal an insensitivity within various segments of evangelicalism regarding many of the intricate dynamics involved in hermeneutics as well as epistemology. He reminds us that the noetic and interpretive elements involved in textual interpretation and doctrinal construction function within contextual and even communal boundaries rather than non-biased epistemic paradigms. Likewise, Grenz's insights into postmodern thought have fostered renewed investigations regarding the relationship between theology and the Christian community. Here, Grenz follows a growing trend within evangelical circles to emphasize the important role of tradition within the ongoing development of evangelical theology.⁴⁶

⁴⁶Again, the primary essay to consult regarding his thoughts on this issue is Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, "Theological Heritage as Hermeneutical Trajectory," in *Ancient and Postmodern Christianity: Paleo-Orthodoxy in the 21st Century*, ed. Kenneth Tanner and Christopher Hall (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 215-39. Thinkers who reflect Grenz's proposals include Henry H. Knight III, *A Future for Truth: Evangelical Theology in a Postmodern World* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 117-37; Robert Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 174-201. For responses that differ from Grenz's approach, see D. H. Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition and Renewing Evangelicalism: A Primer for Suspicious Protestants* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Charles P. Arand, "The Church's Dogma and Biblical Theology," in *A Confessing Theology for Postmodern Times*, ed. Michael Horton (Wheaton: Crossway, 2000), 15-27; Trevor Hart, "Tradition, Authority, and a Christian Approach to the Bible as Scripture," in *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology*, ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); 183-204; David K. Clark, *To Know and Love God: Method for Theology*, in *The Foundations of Evangelical Theology Series* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003), 221-57. Finally, for a concise overview of this issue in general, see Robert Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 71-82.

In turn, Grenz's proposals are forcing evangelicals to reassess the importance of contextualization as it relates to the task of communicating evangelical theology with contemporary ideals and constructs that do not engender conclusions which are antithetical to the overall Christian message.

Yet all the progress and advancements instilled by Grenz's contributions notwithstanding, serious questions still remain regarding his decision to implement such a significant amount of postmodern thought into his reformulation of evangelical theology. Specifically, his sympathy toward the postmodern ethos and particular approach to postconservative theology illicit concerns regarding the reliability and legitimacy of his claims in several crucial areas. These include the accuracy of his assessments regarding the historical trajectory of evangelical theological method, the validity of the ways in which he utilizes certain sources and contemporary ideas to support his particular view of Scripture, and the potential continuity that his perceptions of truth and doctrine can maintain with the Protestant evangelical tradition as a whole.

With regard to the first area of concern, it is highly questionable as to whether Grenz's historical analysis of evangelical theology and subsequent charge that the majority of conservative evangelicals actually are modernistic rationalists is entirely justified. This is a crucial point because along with his assessment of postmodernism as a whole, this accusation is what convinces Grenz that he has legitimate warrant to formulate a new postmodernistic approach. Because previous evangelical conservatives utilized modernistic methodologies that are now perceived as untenable, he deems it necessary to revise evangelical theology in light of the setting that has revealed these shortcomings, namely various facets of postmodern thought. Nonetheless, if Grenz's categorization of conservatives as modernists can be shown to be reductionistic or misleading at best or completely inaccurate at worst, then one can develop a legitimate concern regarding whether Grenz's alternate proposals actually are moving evangelical theology in a positive direction.

Again, in retrospect, the basis of Grenz's portrayal of conservatives as evangelical modernists begins with his initial assessment of the theological methodology of the Princetonian tradition.⁴⁷ Grenz concedes to the growing historiographical consensus that the nineteenth and early twentieth century Princetonian theologians postulated their theological approaches in light of the prominent epistemic ideals of their day including CF, Scottish Common-Sense realism, and the inductive-empirical approach to scientific inquiry.⁴⁸ Beginning with the thought of Charles Hodge, Grenz argues that the Princetonians critically implemented certain features of Common-Sense realism into a modified scientific version of theological inquiry.⁴⁹ Theology became viewed as an empirical exercise whereby theologians examined and analyzed the literary content of Scripture in order to synthesize the divinely-revealed propositional data into doctrinal constructs. In so doing, Scripture was perceived to be the reliable epistemic foundation that could undergird the authority of doctrinal formulations. This is why later thinkers such as Warfield and A. A. Hodge spent much of their time defending the ideas of biblical inerrancy and infallibility by appealing to evidence and scientific arguments. If

⁴⁷See Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 69-77; idem, "Beyond Foundationalism," 63-65.

⁴⁸The literature propounding this theory continues to grow. The seminal essay that began to popularize this idea came from Sydney Ahlstrom, "The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology," *Church History* 24 (1955): 257-72. Later essays began to build on Ahlstrom's conclusions such as Ernest Sandeen, "The Princeton Theology: One Source of Biblical Literalism in American Protestantism," *Church History* 31 (1962): 307-21; Samuel Pearson, "Enlightenment Influence on Protestant Thought in Early National America," *Encounter* 38 (1977): 193-212; Mark Ellingsen, "Common Sense Realism: The Cutting Edge of Evangelical Identity," *Dialog* 24 (1985): 197-205. Currently, many evangelicals also have promoted the major points of this thesis including George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism 1870-1975* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 109-18; Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 83-107; Alister McGrath, *A Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 1996), 169.

⁴⁹Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 71-72.

the veracity of Scripture was proven to be fraudulent, then theological observations would be groundless as well. Therefore, in a sense, theology was perceived to be a science because of the challenges of the new scientific age.

Taking this assessment even further, Grenz contends that this modernized version of theological inquiry along with the new focus on biblical inerrancy overflowed into the modernist-fundamentalist debates of the early twentieth-century and the later postwar neo-evangelical movement. Beginning with the fundamentalist movement, the doctrine of inerrancy proved to be the primary banner that was uplifted and heralded in response to the growing challenges of German liberalism and historical criticism.⁵⁰ Then as gradual rifts within various fundamentalist ranks eventually led to the new evangelical movement, Grenz argues that later conservative thinkers chose to preserve the focus on inerrancy and continue to develop the Princetonian-rationalistic viewpoint of systematic theology whereby theologians simply use the laws of logic to examine the cognitive information conveyed in Scripture and postulate coherent systems that explicate and harmonize all the given information.⁵¹ The problem, however, is that despite the success that this approach had in defending the credibility of Christianity in the past, Grenz concludes that it must now be revised since it only responds to questions that are relevant to the Enlightenment rather than the current postmodern setting. Moreover, Grenz believes that this proposal substantiates his demarcation between evangelical modernists, or those who desire to uphold the Princetonian-modernist approach, and postmodern evangelicals, or those who desire to modify theological method in light of postmodern thought.⁵²

⁵⁰Ibid., 79.

⁵¹Again, Grenz cites Carl Henry, Gordon Lewis, Bruce Demarest, and Wayne Grudem as examples who follow this perspective. Ibid., 92-102, 123-34; Grenz, "Beyond Foundationalism," 64-65.

⁵²Grenz, "An Agenda for Evangelical Theology," 1-2.

The major question that arises, nonetheless, is whether this accusation that conservative evangelicals are modernists is completely valid. For example, the specific consensus to which Grenz adheres regarding the old Princetonian tradition is beginning to show serious defects in light of further research. Two such contributors, who are beginning to show the complexities of the Princetonian thinkers and argue that their theological approaches were not newly formed models of scholastic rationalism, include Peter Hicks and Paul Helseth. Hicks, for instance, has provided an analysis of Charles Hodge's thought and concluded that his much criticized correlation between theology and science is somewhat unfounded.⁵³ The very use of the word science as well as his adaptation of an inductive method to systematic theology were not implicit capitulations to the Enlightenment, but attempts to emphasize the fact that the Bible, including its narratives and claims, possessed a canonical and theological symmetry. Hicks argues that the reason Hodge made this parallel was not because he wanted to adapt theology to empirical observation, but because he desired to establish Scripture as the starting point for theological inquiry.⁵⁴ Furthermore, another reason for emphasizing this point was to develop a response to the speculative approaches of the rationalists and the mystical method of Schleiermacher and his school who allowed no divine external source to control their theologizing.⁵⁵

Parallel to Hicks' work, Helseth also has examined the work of the major Princetonian theologians in order to show that they were not substituting the heritage of the Reformed tradition for a sterilized form of epistemic rationalism via Enlightenment

⁵³Peter Hicks, *The Philosophy of Charles Hodge: A 19th Century Evangelical Approach to Reason, Knowledge, and Truth* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1997), 120-23.

⁵⁴Ibid., 122.

⁵⁵Ibid.

philosophy.⁵⁶ Instead, Helseth contends that the intellectualism of old Princeton had more to do with the dynamics involved in the unitary operation of the soul, including the will, the mind, and the emotions than an accommodation to the anthropological and epistemological assumptions of Common Sense realism or Baconian Inductivism.⁵⁷ Consequently, Helseth argues that the standard postconservative critique of the propositional model of theological formulation is unwarranted because it fails to acknowledge the fact that the Princetonian conception of knowledge corresponded with the Augustinian and Reformed conviction that the reception of revealed truth entailed both rational and *moral* elements, which, in turn, was a foreign concept to the epistemic approaches of Enlightenment thinking.⁵⁸ Likewise, Helseth claims that postconservatives misconstrue the basic purpose of doctrine, which the Princetonians were striving to preserve, namely that they must derive from a reliable source in order for faith to exist.⁵⁹

⁵⁶For exposure to his works, see Paul Kjos Helseth, “The ‘Intellectualism’ of Old Princeton: a Question of Epistemological Context,” *PTR* 4 (1997): 42-49; idem, “The Apologetical Tradition of the OPC: A Reconsideration,” *WTJ* 60 (1998): 109-29; idem, “B. B. Warfield’s Apologetical Appeal to ‘Right Reason’: Evidence of a ‘Rather Bald Rationalism?’” *SBET* 16 (1998): 156-77; idem, “‘Right Reason’ and the Princeton Mind: The Moral Context,” *The Journal of Presbyterian History* 77 (1999): 13-28; idem, “B. B. Warfield on the Apologetic Nature of Christian Scholarship: An Analysis of His Solution to the Problem of the Relationship Between Christianity and Culture,” *WTJ* 62 (2000): 89-111; idem, “Re-Imagining the Princeton Mind: Postconservative Evangelicalism, Old Princeton, and the Rise of Neo-Fundamentalism,” *JETS* 45 (2002): 427-50.

⁵⁷Helseth, “The ‘Intellectualism’ of Old Princeton,” 49.

⁵⁸Helseth, “Re-Imagining the Princeton Mind,” 440.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 441. Interestingly enough, Helseth also mentions an interaction he had with Grenz wherein he claimed that the problem with the Princetonian methodology was not so much its implementation of Common Sense realism, but its indebtedness to the method of empirical science. Helseth’s response is noteworthy because he claims that Grenz’s move is problematic because it is typically argued that the Princetonians practiced a method of empirical inquiry precisely because of their use of Common Sense realism. So it seems that Grenz inadvertently is surrendering the essential factor that normally is used to repudiate the Princetonian approach. See Helseth, “Re-Imagining the Princeton Mind,” 433 n. 45.

With these observations taken into consideration, if it is incorrect to link the theological methodology of the old Princetonian thinkers to various epistemic and ontological commitments of the Enlightenment era, then it also is problematic to label later twentieth-century evangelical thinkers who have developed this approach as modernistic rationalists as well. Thinkers such as Carl Henry, Millard Erickson, Gordon Lewis, Bruce Demarest, and Wayne Grudem indeed have modified and implemented the theological methodologies of their nineteenth century forebears. Nonetheless, to equate their emphases on propositional revelation, rationality, and inductive inquiry with the epistemic shortcomings of modernity is to ignore the vast differences between the nonChristian ideals of the modern era and the evangelical responses to those ideals. As Chad Brand has argued with regards to the accusation that Carl Henry is a modernist,

The “modern” situation . . . raised questions not broached in earlier times in the church. The rise of modern natural science, historicism, and positivism have created apologetical problems for the church not heretofore encountered. Henry’s discussions of revelation and truth are a response to this scenario. And while this one set of concerns may be relatively new, it is not a novelty for the church to be forced to face deadly objections in the intellectual world, questions which may not be addressed specifically and straightforwardly by biblical texts. . . . Henry’s work is a continuation of the polemical tradition which has ancient roots, and not one which is modernistic in orientation.⁶⁰

Therefore, contrary to Grenz’s taxonomy, conservative evangelicals are not necessarily modernists because they successfully engaged the questions and assumptions of modernity. This is the task of evangelical theology in any historical setting. Furthermore, to assert that they faced those obstacles by succumbing to the humanistic predispositions that dominated that era is a highly questionable deduction to establish because, in actuality, conservatives discount the modern as well as the postmodern eras because their intellectual moorings are both perceived to be mutually hostile to Christianity.

In conjunction with this misrepresentation of conservatives as evangelical modernists, a second major concern regarding the formulation of Grenz’s theological

⁶⁰Chad O. Brand, “Is Carl Henry a Modernist? Rationalism and Foundationalism in Post-War Evangelical Theology?” *TrinJ* 20 (1999): 16-17.

method relates to the manner in which he misuses pertinent sources and contemporary topics in order to revise the evangelical doctrine of Scripture. Two primary examples that display this trend the most include his modified use of the Westminster Confession (hereafter WC) and his implementation of the philosophy of Speech-Act theory. Again, with regards to his postconservative take on Scripture, Grenz wants to move beyond the traditional understanding of divine inspiration including the concepts of inerrancy and infallibility because he is convinced that they are steeped in a foundationalistic paradigm that inadvertently robs the Bible of its theological potency. Grenz argues that the gradual perception of the Bible as a stationary deposit of pristine divine data that merely requires interpreters to dissect and extract its content in order to formulate intricate systems of theological loci ultimately silences the divine voice of Scripture.⁶¹ The dynamic work of the Spirit in divine revelation becomes subject to particular theological expressions of that revelation.⁶² Therefore, in order to reinforce the dynamic of Scripture as an entity that is continually used by the Spirit and also evade the alleged modernistic presuppositions behind the conservative emphasis on inerrancy, Grenz concludes that evangelicals must acknowledge that Scripture is authoritative not because of its intrinsic nature or veracity, but because it is the instrument of the Spirit's voice.⁶³ In other words, the focal point for understanding the relationship between the Spirit and Scripture should not be inspiration, but illumination.⁶⁴ Moreover, it is at this juncture that Grenz draws from the WC and Speech-Act theory to develop his view, but in the process, seriously misconstrues both sources.

⁶¹See Grenz, "Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic," 124; idem, *Renewing the Center*, 206.

⁶²Grenz, "An Agenda for Evangelical Theology," 9-10.

⁶³Ibid., 10.

⁶⁴Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 118.

To begin, Grenz attempts to justify his concept of the Spirit continually speaking through Scripture by appealing to the WC wherein it states that,

The Supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but *the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scriptures*.⁶⁵ (emphasis mine)

Grenz rightly observes that in this statement, the Westminster divines were attempting to preserve the Reformation ideal of binding the Word with the witness of the Spirit. They indeed desired to keep Scripture and the Spirit together in order to provide the foundation for understanding in what sense the Bible is to be read as a text.⁶⁶ However, Grenz then projects this point to unwarranted limits by interpreting the WC to be implying that the authority of Scripture is somehow divorced from its divine origin or inspired character. He contends that the Protestant principle seems to emphasize the fact that the Scriptures are not binding because the Spirit divinely-authored them, but because the Spirit continues to speak through them to the Christian community.⁶⁷ Consequently, this speaking is not bound to what the inspired authors wrote because the biblical text can convey new, though not contradictory, meanings in different cultural contexts at the Spirit's discretion.⁶⁸

Regardless of the validity of Grenz's theory, this attempt to use the WC to de-emphasize the concepts of inspiration, infallibility, and inerrancy as well as foster a dichotomy between what the biblical authors originally *said* and what the Spirit *says* radically misrepresents this creed's intentions. This initially can be seen in the fact that

⁶⁵Philip Schaff, ed., "The Westminster Confession," in *The Evangelical Protestant Creeds*, vol. 3 of *The Creeds of Christendom*, 6th ed. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1931; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 605-06.

⁶⁶Grenz, "The Spirit and the Word," 358.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Ibid., 362.

the WC couches its description of Scripture, including its relationship to the Spirit, in terms that Grenz repudiates. For example, in his earlier work, Grenz shows disdain for calling the Scriptures themselves the Word of God and chooses to agree with Peter Rainbow and Donald Bloesch that the early church distinguished between God's words and the words of Scripture.⁶⁹ Yet in sections two and five, the WC clearly espouses the view the Scriptures are the actual Word of God and were given by divine inspiration.⁷⁰

More specifically though, with regard to Grenz's interpretation of the phrase "the Spirit speaking through Scripture," before concluding with this statement, the WC claims in section four that "The authority of the Holy Scripture . . . , does not depend upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the Author thereof."⁷¹ So the Spirit's role in speaking functions via divine *authorship*, or in the giving of the text, not in a new kind of speaking that is distinct from the inspiration of the text. This idea is enforced again by the statement in section six that "The whole counsel of God . . . , is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men."⁷² The point to observe in these quotes is that the WC restricts the divine act of speaking to the texts themselves as they were given. Furthermore, the WC does endorse the idea of divine illumination, but it is not formulated in such a way that the Spirit conveys meanings

⁶⁹See Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 131.

⁷⁰Schaff, "The Westminster Confession," 601-03. It can also be argued that though the original authors were unaware of the intricate arguments that would arise due to historical study and scientific inquiries, they were committed to a preliminary form of propositional revelation because the very character of the WC as a seventeenth-century document accentuates this view. See John H. Leith, *Assembly at Westminster: Reformed Theology in the Making* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1973), 77-78.

⁷¹Schaff, "The Westminster Confession," 602.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 603.

through the Bible that transcend the literary intents of the biblical authors. Instead, the Spirit is necessary for giving people “. . . saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word.”⁷³ The Spirit does not change the Scriptures to fit the questioning heart, but changes the heart to understand the Scriptures. The WC’s claim that the Spirit speaks through Scripture, therefore, cannot be used to argue that divine speech moves beyond what has been spoken.⁷⁴ As John Gerstner has aptly summarized,

For the Westminster divines the final judge in controversies was not the bare Word of God interpreted by human logic, but the Holy Spirit surely assisted the devout interpreter and spoke in the Word He had inspired. Nevertheless, the divines never appealed to something the Spirit was supposedly saying apart from the sound exegesis of His word. They never attacked an exegesis as not coming from the Spirit but as not coming from the text In a word, Westminster is saying, What God has joined together-Word and Spirit- let no man put asunder. It is the Spirit who enables the saint savingly to understand the Word and it is the Word that enables him to understand that it is the Spirit who is enabling him.⁷⁵

Upon misusing the WC to act as a starting point, it is also important to note that Grenz subsequently misapplies the concept of Speech-Act theory in the process of articulating his alternate view of revelation. In keeping with his emphasis on the Spirit continually speaking new messages through Scripture, Grenz formulates an alternate postfoundationalistic approach wherein the Spirit speaks new messages to the Christian community by appropriating the manifold diversity of writings that constitute the Bible, or its locutions, in order to perform ongoing illocutionary acts.⁷⁶ However, the key

⁷³Ibid., 603-04.

⁷⁴Even Clark Pinnock recognized this fact in his earlier work. Correlating the WC to the Formula of Concord, Pinnock claimed that “our source of authority is the Holy Spirit speaking by Scripture, the product of His own creative breath: *Deus locutus* and *Deus loquens* (God has spoken; God is speaking) Scripture is itself the divine utterance, and stands above everything before and after it.” Clark Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation: The Foundation of Christian Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 115.

⁷⁵John H. Gerstner, “The View of the Bible Held by the Church: Calvin and the Westminster Divines,” in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 400.

⁷⁶Grenz, “Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic,” 125.

revision in Grenz's approach is that he does not view the Spirit's illocutions as centering solely on the original illocutions of the biblical authors because the Scriptures take on an autonomous textual life of their own as the Spirit uses them in new contexts and settings.⁷⁷ So in implementing this idea into his postmodern approach, the reliability of the Bible does not rest in its ability to always give accurate information, but in the fact the Spirit chooses to use it to communicate with God's people.

The difficulties with this application of Speech-Act theory are two-fold. One major shortcoming is that Grenz fails to acknowledge that the Scriptures themselves are speech acts. Grenz claims that "the biblical texts bear witness to God's acting and speaking to the communities of faith in the biblical era. But God acts and speaks today too, and the Bible is the Spirit's chosen vehicle for speaking authoritatively to us."⁷⁸ Here, Grenz acknowledges the fact that the Spirit somehow conveys discourse through the Scriptures, but apparently chooses to dismiss the fact that the Bible itself is a collection of divinely-inspired, covenantal discourses, or speech acts. Its various literary genres are all various forms of communicative expressions, which means that they are modes of speaking. Therefore, whatever Grenz wishes to do in articulating the dynamic of the Spirit's speaking, he must do so in light of the fact that the texts that the Spirit chooses to use are previously established forms of speech. This unfortunate move on Grenz's part leads to the second problem with his application of Speech-Act theory, which is a failure to maintain the functional distinction between locutions and illocutions. In developing this idea, Grenz asserts that when acknowledging the Spirit's capacity to speak through Scripture, it must be recognized that this dynamic refers to an illocutionary rather than a locutionary act.⁷⁹ Yet the problem, which ironically is highlighted by

⁷⁷Grenz, "The Spirit and the Word," 362.

⁷⁸Ibid., 361.

⁷⁹Ibid.

Vanhoozer in an engagement with Grenz's approach, is that an illocution in and of itself is not an act of speech, but rather a particular force behind a given statement. An illocution is the contextual force, whether it be promising, commanding, comforting, or encouraging, that a given locutionary statement is intending to make. Consequently, even though locutions and illocutions are dependent upon each other, speaking itself is not an illocutionary act.⁸⁰ The ambiguity that remains then with regards to Grenz's proposal pertains to the specific way in which the Spirit's illocutionary forces can be conveyed independently of the previous illocutions that were originally established by the initial locutions of the biblical authors.⁸¹

At this particular juncture, the central point that must be highlighted, however, regarding Grenz's utilization of Speech-Act theory as well as the WC is not simply his misuse of them, but the direction in which he desires to go with regards to revising the doctrine of Scripture. The deeper purpose behind Grenz's emphasis on the Spirit "speaking" is not simply to re-emphasize the Protestant conviction regarding the relationship between the Spirit and the Word, but to relocate the basis of biblical authority as it has been traditionally understood in evangelical theology. Early on, Grenz launched his seminal thoughts on this objective by rejecting former attempts of previous evangelicals who attempted to defend the authority of Scripture by appealing to verifiable miracles, historical evidence, and fulfilled prophecies and argued instead that

All such attempts to establish the role of Scripture in theology . . . , are ultimately unnecessary. In engaging in the theological task, we may simply assume the authority of the Bible on the basis of the integral relation of theology to the faith community. Because the Bible is the universally acknowledged book of the Christian church, the biblical message functions as the central norm for the systematic articulation of the faith of that community. Consequently, the divine nature of Scripture or its status vis-à-vis revelation need not be demonstrated in the prologomenon to theology. Sufficient for launching the systematic-theological

⁸⁰Ibid., 198; J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962; reprint, 1978), 99-108.

⁸¹Vanhoozer, "From Speech Acts to Scripture Acts," 198.

enterprise is the nature of theology itself as reflection on community faith. And sufficient for the employment of the Bible in this task is its status as the book of the community.⁸²

Grenz's point is that biblical authority is primarily pragmatic or functional in nature rather than ontological. The Bible is not authoritative because its words derive from the mind of God nor does it contain inerrant, first-order language that provides a foundational point of reference for subsequent second-order theological reflection. Rather, the Scriptures are used by the Spirit in conjunction with the church's theological traditions as well as its contemporary cultural setting in order to explicate the Christian belief framework. This is why Grenz wants to focus on how the Spirit continues to speak as opposed to how the Spirit may have spoken. Nevertheless, as R. Albert Mohler, Jr. has observed, the troubling axiom that Grenz creates with this ideal is that "The Bible draws its authority essentially from the community of faith rather than vice versa."⁸³

These revisions to the evangelical doctrine of Scripture finally lead to a third set of problems, which entail Grenz's postmodern revisions to the nature of doctrine and truth itself. Again, in review, Grenz couches his postconservative approach regarding these issues in terms of his modified version of eschatological realism and epistemic nonfoundationalism. With regard to his idea of realism, because Grenz believes that no simple one-to-one correlation exists between language and the present world, he argues that the concept of realism must be perceived in terms of the relationship between human knowledge and the future world.⁸⁴ Following the work of Wolfhart Pannenberg, Grenz contends that epistemic objectivity will only exist in the eschatological future and, therefore, concludes that all Christian truth-claims can only escape their socio-linguistic

⁸²Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 94.

⁸³R. Albert Mohler, Jr., "Reformist Evangelicalism: A Center without a Circumference," in *A Confessing Theology for Postmodern Times*, 140-41.

⁸⁴See Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 23; Grenz, "Eschatological Theology," 350.

and contextual limitations only because they give reference to the future new creation. Consequently, Grenz is a nonrealist in the sense that he denies that present reality exists outside of our socially constructed realities, but is a quasi-deferred realist in the sense that he believes that true objectivity will one day exist in the eschaton.

With regard to his view of epistemology, Grenz believes that theories of knowledge must jettison any remnant of foundationalism in exchange for epistemic approaches such as coherentism and pragmatism, which in turn, leads him to define the nature of truth and doctrine in light of a modified version of George Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic approach to theological discourse.⁸⁵ Herein, doctrinal constructs are not propositional reflections that accurately describe the first-order claims of biblical revelation, but linguistic expressions of a given community's theological identity. This means that doctrines only have epistemic authority within the communities that create them. Taking this idea a step further, Grenz attempts to preserve the uniqueness of the Christian metanarrative by arguing that the church does not show its epistemic superiority to other communities by claiming to possess universal truth as revealed in Scripture, but by exemplifying its future hope of redemption in the present through communal acceptance and Christian love.

The overarching concerns that surface regarding this complex view of doctrinal formulation pertain to its surrender of the universal nature of truth and its abandonment of the concept of metaphysical realism altogether. Regarding the subject of truth, though Grenz asserts that evangelicalism cannot abdicate the metanarrative of the gospel via the person and work of Christ, his adaptation of postmodern thought reduces the nature of truth as well as the corollary subject of doctrine to functional rather than ontological categories. In other words, the claim that Christianity is true does not refer to a belief that it is an objective, universal fact. Instead, it means that it has a particular relevance within

⁸⁵Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 199-203; idem, "Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic," 116-22.

the Christian community and has the ability to provide certain results, whether it be an effective communal environment or a coherent framework of beliefs. Yet the question that this model fails to answer, at least at this juncture, is how doctrines, or theological truth-claims, can demand cognitive allegiance from all people in all communities. It appears that Grenz is left with a theory that perceives truth to be something that primarily happens as opposed to something that coincides with reality.⁸⁶

This perplexity regarding the nature of truth-claims, in turn, relates to the further problems with Grenz's conception of realism. The notion of eschatological realism is helpful in that it aids in emphasizing the importance of eschatology in theological reflection. Nevertheless, Grenz's argument that the future world is more *objective* than the present one is ambiguous at best for at least two reasons, which D. A. Carson has highlighted.⁸⁷ One is that Grenz does not have a legitimate warrant to merge the categories of eternity and reality. "The mere fact that this world is passing away and the eschatological world is final and eternal does not mean that the latter is more 'real' than the former and therefore better known."⁸⁸ There is no reason to conclude then that something that is temporary is not just as real as something that is eternal. Yet even if one were to concede to Grenz's point that the future world will be more objective than the present, Carson also emphasizes the fact that human knowledge will still be mediated and finite in the eschatological future. If limited knowledge is the obstacle to epistemic objectivity, then the new creation cannot solve that problem. In response to these

⁸⁶For a thorough criticism of the pragmatic theory of truth as it relates to George Lindbeck's postliberal project, see F. Leron Schults, "Truth Happens? The Pragmatic Conception of Truth and the Postliberal Research Program," *PTR* 4 (1997): 26-36.

⁸⁷See D. A. Carson, "Domesticating the Gospel: A Review of Stanley J. Grenz's *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era*," *SBJT* 6 (2002): 92-93.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 92.

criticisms, Grenz does not provide any substantial argumentation against Carson's insights, but simply asserts that his view follows the tradition of Christian thought as represented in Augustine and C. S. Lewis.⁸⁹ So it still remains to be seen as to how this particular perspective can possibly sustain the voice of evangelicalism in the current pluralistic setting.

In final summary of Grenz's overall approach to theological method, it is clear that his postconservative tendencies are unquestionably postmodern in nature. Grenz represents a growing number of nonconservative evangelicals who endorse the postmodern critique of truth, objectivity, epistemological foundationalism, and metaphysical realism. In doing so, Grenz's proposals also show the alarming ideas that many postconservatives are willing to implement as alternatives such as the redefinition of evangelical identity in terms of the spiritual vision of the Christian community rather than propositional-doctrinal commitments or any preliminary convictions regarding the cognitive authority intrinsic to the content of Scripture. Grenz's thought also displays the increasing trend among many postconservatives to view doctrinal boundaries and models of epistemic certainty as harmful to evangelical theology because they foster doctrinal elitism instead of an environment that welcomes theological advancements.

Nonetheless, further work is still necessary in order to clarify certain parts of Grenz's approach. For instance, Grenz's views of truth and Scripture lead to serious implications for the nature of language, which Grenz has yet to fully answer. Likewise, the specific way in which Grenz believes the Spirit speaks to the Christian community through the means of theological traditions, culture, and Scripture simultaneously remains highly abstract and in need of more attention. Moreover, Grenz's approach also leaves the intratextual as well as the extratextual nature of doctrine in serious jeopardy.

⁸⁹See Stanley Grenz, *Toward an Undomesticated Gospel: A Response to D. A. Carson*, page 6 [on-line]; accessed 7 January 2003; available from <http://www.modernreformation.org/monthly/grenzresponse.html>; Internet.

Regarding the former issue of intratextuality, Grenz spends much time emphasizing the point that theologians must articulate the overall framework of the Christian belief-mosaic in the contemporary cultural context. Yet in pleading for a generous orthodoxy, Grenz appears to establish little, if any, criteria for determining whether a particular doctrinal belief or claim potentially violates the intratextual harmony of the Christian faith.⁹⁰ Furthermore, in relation to the subject of extratextuality, Grenz's reduction of biblical authority to communal spirituality and redefinition of doctrine in terms of Wittgenstenian and Lindbeckian philosophy forces him to argue that the metanarrative of Christianity should be defended on terms of pragmatism and communal success rather than naïve appeals to universal truth. These concerns notwithstanding, though, it remains to be seen how Grenz's version of postconservative theology will advance and possibly alter the evangelical tradition as the early twenty-first century continues to unfold.

Reflections and Concerns Regarding Vanhoozer's Theological Method

Like Grenz, Kevin Vanhoozer's contributions to theological method also provide guidance and potential options that evangelicals possibly can use in order to move forward in the postmodern setting. For instance, his critical work in the areas of hermeneutics and postmodernism has supplied helpful insights regarding the complexities of the philosophy of language. Also, by offering conversant familiarity with Kantian and existential thought as well as the schools of poststructuralism, deconstructionism, and literary pragmatism, Vanhoozer has been able to show the metaphysical and theological correlations that exist between views of hermeneutical theory and theistic convictions. In

⁹⁰Using history as an example, Arius argued in the fourth century that Christ was not divine in the same sense as the Father and used the Bible to support his point. Ultimately, the church had to decide not only to endorse the authority of the Scriptures, but to agree upon a certain way of reading and interpreting them by concluding that they taught that the Son and the Father are equally divine. Applying this issue to Grenz's understanding of doctrine, it seems rather problematic that one can maintain a sufficient criteria that would be capable of making similar doctrinal adjudications.

turn, these insights act as a supplementary basis whereby Vanhoozer can use Christian theism, or more specifically Trinitarianism, as a paradigm to formulate a more refined defense of authorial intent and hermeneutical realism. In addition to the apologetic value of his work and in contrast to Grenz, Vanhoozer likewise retains a strong loyalty to conservative evangelical perspectives of Scripture, truth, and knowledge. For example, though he follows in suit with Grenz in using the philosophy of Speech-Act theory to explicate the dynamics involved in biblical revelation, he strives to preserve the standard dynamics involved in the traditional evangelical and even Reformed understanding of the subject. In addition, he furnishes legitimate criticisms of previous evangelical treatments of propositional revelation that warrant further investigation. So much so that if various evangelicals are unwilling to adopt his solutions, they are compelled in light of his thought to offer alternative solutions. Finally, Vanhoozer's work in the field of theological method is influential within evangelical circles because again, as opposed to Grenz's approach, he advocates theories that are sensitive to postmodern criticisms but at the same time, committed to the traditional corpus of historical evangelical beliefs.

Juxtaposed to the many positive elements that Vanhoozer's work offers for the future of evangelical theology, certain concerns still remain regarding specific elements of his approach. Some simply exist because Vanhoozer's thought is currently in process for like Grenz, he is still developing his own perspectives. Yet others come to the forefront in light of the major themes that Vanhoozer himself emphasizes throughout the majority of his work. These points aside, though, at least four issues arise regarding the direction and coherence of Vanhoozer's methodology. They include the validity of certain criticisms he mounts against other conservative evangelical approaches, the level of wisdom behind his decision to adopt the postconservative label, the actual meaning of *meaning* as it applies to his hermeneutical approach and reformulation of biblical revelation, and the implications of his postfoundational view of rationality and subsequent proposals regarding the nature of doctrine.

With regard to the first area of concern, Vanhoozer mistakenly follows several of the cursory criticisms that Grenz makes regarding previous and current conservative approaches to theology, though to a lesser degree. This initially can be seen in his statements that link Cartesian rationalism with evangelical attempts to seek absolute epistemic foundations and certain conclusions.⁹¹ As shown in the discussion of Grenz's approach, however, it is not altogether conclusive that the old Princetonian or postwar evangelical focus on Scripture as an epistemic foundation for theological inquiry was a methodological corollary or implicit capitulation to the Enlightenment. Rather, the intentional correlation between certainty, foundationalism, and Scripture was in fact an attempt to structure a careful response to the skepticism of modernity. Nevertheless, Vanhoozer unfortunately adopts several of the axioms pertinent to Grenz's definition of evangelical modernism and thereby instigates misplaced criticisms toward various conservative approaches.

One such example can be seen in his comments regarding evangelical theologian Wayne Grudem.⁹² In similar Princetonian and conservative fashion, Grudem writes in his work on evangelical theology that systematics is a discipline that attempts to answer the question, "What does the whole Bible teach us? about any given topic."⁹³ Later in his presidential address to the Evangelical Theological Society, Grudem again highlights this idea by admonishing evangelical scholars to provide more works that discuss what the entire Bible teaches regarding pertinent contemporary issues.⁹⁴ Though

⁹¹Again see Vanhoozer, "Exploring the World," 8-9; idem, "God's Mighty Speech Acts," 143.

⁹²Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor," 62-63.

⁹³Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 21. Grudem also points out that this definition is not original with him, but is taken from his former theology professor at Westminster Seminary, John Frame.

⁹⁴Grudem, "Do We Act as if," 6.

more sympathetic to Grudem's approach than Grenz because of its Reformed focus on *sola scriptura* and *tota scriptura*, Vanhoozer believes that this *whole Bible* methodology tends to reduce evangelical theology to a conglomeration of disconnected topics and therefore falls prey to the quandary that previously haunted Bernard Ramm.⁹⁵ Theology becomes a study of an arbitrary set of issues with no apparent point of reference to establish any kind of systemic coherence. In response to Grudem's alleged shortcomings, Vanhoozer argues that even though the Bible is the superior source with regards to theological formulation, understanding specific issues from an evangelical standpoint should not be reduced to asking what the relevant parts of the Bible say about a particular issue. Instead, evangelicals should develop their responses to various issues in light of their cumulative understanding of the nature of God, or more specifically, the Bible as a unified whole.⁹⁶ This ideal then leads Vanhoozer to propose his canonical-linguistic approach wherein theology is formulated in light of the overall narrative of redemption rather than mere texts that directly address various subjects.⁹⁷

The problem with this assessment is that Vanhoozer's perception of Grudem is reductionistic. When examining Grudem's work, it is not entirely clear that his emphasis on understanding what the whole Bible teaches about a given subject necessarily leads to the notion that the Bible merely is an arbitrary collection of statements addressing assorted subjects. Ironically, it seems that this approach actually promotes the basic point that Vanhoozer wants to emphasize, namely canonical symmetry. Grudem clearly states that systematic theology includes the ability to gather all the results from Old Testament theology, New Testament theology, biblical theology, historical theology, and philosophy in order to construct precise theological statements that reflect what the canon

⁹⁵Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor," 62.

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷Ibid., 63-64.

teaches.⁹⁸ Moreover, these theological summaries are not mutually exclusive categories possessing no cognitive continuity because the very reason they are formulated is so the Bible can be understood holistically. As Grudem states, “If we have accurately understood the teachings of God in Scripture we should expect our conclusions to fit together and be mutually consistent.”⁹⁹ Consequently, Vanhoozer’s criticisms seem to be out of place. Grudem is not advocating that evangelicals must start from scratch every time a new issue arises within contemporary culture nor is he ignoring the cultural-linguistic nature of doctrinal language. His point is that theology is a discipline that seeks to understand all biblical texts in light of their contextual relationship to both redemptive history and the canon as a whole. Furthermore, it seems then that one actually must assume Grudem’s approach in order to follow Vanhoozer’s logic because one cannot understand the canon as a whole or the nature of God as revealed in redemptive history without first examining the individual texts that make up the canon. So in the end, at this stage of theological method, Vanhoozer’s proposal perhaps is a more sophisticated formulation of Grudem’s concerns instead of something entirely different.¹⁰⁰

Another disconcerting set of criticisms against conservative evangelical theological method that Vanhoozer mounts relates to his thoughts regarding fundamentalism. Herein, Vanhoozer scolds the movement for fostering an uncritical hermeneutic wherein the original meaning of biblical texts is equated with how fundamentalist communities interpret them.¹⁰¹ Fundamentalists are portrayed as interpreters who publicly proclaim the authority of the text but actually practice the

⁹⁸Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 22.

⁹⁹Ibid., 31.

¹⁰⁰In fairness to Vanhoozer’s concern, though, it does seem that Grudem’s treatments of theological method tend to neglect many of the hermeneutical complexities involved in biblical interpretation and the dynamics of doctrinal formulation.

¹⁰¹Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 425.

authority of the reader. Additionally, Vanhoozer argues that this attitude is compounded even further by a simplistic picture-view of meaning which sees the meaning of a biblical passage as synonymous with its referent, or more specifically, with its empirical or historical correspondence.¹⁰² Regardless of the validity of these accusations, the problem with Vanhoozer's assessments is that he fails to analyze the mediating position between fundamentalism and liberalism, namely evangelicalism.¹⁰³ Though he does address the lack of clarity regarding the evangelical understanding of propositional revelation as it relates to inerrancy, hermeneutics, and literary genre, Vanhoozer's particular attacks on the shortcomings of fundamentalism may hold weight with regards to the movement itself, but whether they totally dismantle the commitments to historical accuracy or hermeneutical certainty remains inconclusive. Evangelical scholars, especially as represented in the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, have offered interpretive models that address the complexities of epistemology, language, and hermeneutics that most fundamentalists ignore. Vanhoozer is aware of this but simply chooses not to highlight them in his repudiation of fundamentalism. So while his rejection of fundamentalism may or may not be warranted, his abandonment of their approaches altogether is somewhat premature since evangelical scholars have offered significant and sophisticated defenses of certain commitments which fundamentalists would endorse.

In conjunction with these problematic assessments of conservative approaches, a second major concern regarding Vanhoozer's work is his adaptation of the term "postconservative" to describe his theological approach. In one sense, this deduction is more of a cautionary observation rather than a strict criticism because his use of the term is confined to two specific contexts. Again in review, one reason he uses the title is to

¹⁰²Ibid., 426.

¹⁰³This observation has been noted by other evangelical scholars. For example, see Elliott E. Johnson, review of *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* by Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *BibSac* 156 (1999): 365.

distinguish his postpropositional view of Scripture from certain conservative treatments of propositional revelation while the other is to distinguish his overall approach from the school of postliberalism wherein the authority of doctrine lies in the community rather than the text.¹⁰⁴ Yet despite his clarifications, when one compares his thought with other postconservative thinkers who currently advocate postmodern models of evangelical theology, one can see that Vanhoozer's approach preserves the mainline doctrinal commitments that conservatives would embrace and many postconservatives would denounce. In fact, his methodology is not only loyal to the evangelical tradition, it is a highly sophisticated defense of Reformed theology. Consequently, in light of the fact that the growing postconservative segment of evangelicalism is proposing various theological as well as methodological tenants that are antithetical to traditional evangelical theology, one could misconstrue Vanhoozer's adoption of the term as a sign that he is joining this growing coalition as it is being defined by thinkers such as Roger Olson, Clark Pinnock, Stanley Grenz, William Abraham, and Robert Webber.¹⁰⁵ However, one can observe in his work that his theological commitments diverge significantly from these thinkers and thereby see that Vanhoozer's use of the label is highly qualified at best or somewhat of a misnomer at worst.

¹⁰⁴Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor," 76-77, 82. Herein, it is also unfortunate that Vanhoozer uses the term postpropositional to describe his view of Scripture. Granted, he is only trying to demarcate his focus on divine speech-acts from the traditional emphasis on indicative content. A more useful term for his approach, though, could be performative propositionalism as opposed to previous views of strict cognitive propositionalism, because his focus on both divine action and speech does not move in the directions that other postconservatives, including Grenz, desire to go.

¹⁰⁵Fortunately, Roger Olson recognizes that Vanhoozer's adoption of the term is an example of the fact that one can be a postconservative and not be "left" or "right," but solidly evangelical. See Roger Olson, "Reforming Evangelical Theology," in *Evangelical Futures*, 201. Yet despite this praise of Vanhoozer's work, the question that still remains for Olson and other postmodern postconservatives to answer is how far left an individual can go and still be considered evangelical, postconservative or not.

Aside from questionable segments of Vanhoozer's treatments of other approaches, a third major area of concern regarding his thought pertains to a certain ambiguity that exists in his work on hermeneutical theory. Specifically, this has to do with his definition of meaning. In his work *Is There a Meaning in This Text*, Vanhoozer again uses Speech-Act theory to conceptualize his definition of meaning and argues that essentially it is made up of the various illocutionary actions that a given author, or speaker, conveys in a given speech, or text.¹⁰⁶ Subsequently, this allows Vanhoozer to substantiate his commitment to hermeneutical realism, which entails the belief that meaning exists within texts independently of and prior to any act of interpretation because it resides within the authorial speech-acts rather than the responses of a given reader.

Though this argument is helpful in establishing an evangelical commitment to authorial intent in the practice of hermeneutics, the lingering question that arises in the development of this theory is whether meaning actually resides in a text itself, or in the speech-acts represented by a text. As Clarence Walhout has mentioned in response to Vanhoozer's work on the meaning of meaning and how it relates to his title question of whether there is a meaning in a text,

One could argue that if meaning does not exist apart from illocutionary actions, then meaning is not lodged in the text per se but appears only in and through the actions of authors and readers. The text is crucial to the meaning but does not have the meaning "contained" with it. Thus, one could answer no to the title question and still retain Vanhoozer's arguments.¹⁰⁷

Walhout's point is that technically, if one were to argue that meaning exists solely within illocutionary acts, then one possibly could conclude that meaning does not reside in texts themselves, but within the illocutions embedded within texts. This would mean then that

¹⁰⁶See his discussions in Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 218-29. Applying this idea to Scripture, Vanhoozer argues that the Bible contains the record of God's speech-acts or discourse with and through humanity via the covenantal structures of redemptive history.

¹⁰⁷Clarence Walhout, review of *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* by Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *CSR* 29 (1999): 423.

one could endorse Vanhoozer's overall arguments regarding meaning, speech-acts, and hermeneutical realism and ironically still argue that meaning does not reside within texts. Instead, meaning derives from communicative acts and illocutionary forces that are later conveyed through texts.

In one sense, this concern primarily is semantical in nature. Yet the possible implications of this dichotomy could be threatening to the traditional evangelical view of verbal inspiration. Does meaning somehow exist within the words of Scripture, the communicative acts behind the words of Scripture, or both.¹⁰⁸ Vanhoozer's work does not explicitly make this distinction, but in light of the many complexities surrounding contemporary discussions of meaning, further clarifications may prove to be helpful. One possible solution, which again is proposed by Walhout, is to distinguish two ways in which meaning is transmitted. "If one wants to say that there is meaning in the text and also that meaning is a property of a communicative action, then one is speaking on the one hand of meaning in an object and on the other of meaning in an action."¹⁰⁹ So Vanhoozer perhaps could resolve this tension by explicating different ways in which meaning exists. In one context, meaning can be seen as deriving from texts while in another it is the direct result of communicative actions. Most likely, however, Vanhoozer would argue that this issue entails a both-and rather than an either-or response.

Finally, a fourth point that complicates Vanhoozer's methodology as it relates to the evangelical tradition is his particular implementation of a postfoundational epistemology to the formulation of Christian doctrine. Vanhoozer's initial motivation for making this move is to avoid the methodological traps that have ensnared evangelical

¹⁰⁸Vanhoozer gives some preliminary responses to this dilemma in his earlier developments of propositional revelation wherein he argues that the text is the communicative vehicle or linguistic form whereby an author communicates a given idea for a certain purpose. So one cannot commence with a discourse without using words, or texts, to do so. See Vanhoozer, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature," 90-93.

¹⁰⁹Walhout, review of *Is There a Meaning*, 423.

theology in the past. He believes that previous attempts to establish epistemic foundations for theological inquiry have surrendered ground to modern thought and, in turn, made theology subordinate to philosophical categories. Though this criticism is echoed in various forms by other postconservatives, Vanhoozer's response is unique because he does not believe nonfoundational theories such as coherentism or pragmatism are the solution. He, instead, adopts a Lactosian form of fallibilism and a modified version of Plantinga's reliabilism and concludes that Christianity gradually reveals its truthfulness as it withstands the criticisms of conflicting worldviews and ideologies.

The difficulties, however, with this move are two-fold. First, Vanhoozer's criticisms against certain kinds of foundationalism are warranted, but his wholesale rejection of foundationalism in all its expressions is inconclusive. One need only examine the ongoing work of various evangelicals to see that despite the drawbacks of certain kinds of foundationalism, other forms still offer potential aid.¹¹⁰ In fact, Vanhoozer's espousal of epistemic fallibilism is not antithetical to more modest expressions of foundationalism. One evangelical thinker who exemplifies this point is Millard Erickson, who has argued that certain beliefs do not have to be indisputable in order to function as noetic foundations.¹¹¹ Foundational beliefs can be subject to scrutiny, susceptible to error, and potentially conflict with derived, or nonbasic beliefs.¹¹²

¹¹⁰For example, recent treatments of this point can be seen in David K. Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 153-64; J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), 110-28.

¹¹¹Millard Erickson, "Foundationalism: Dead or Alive," *SBJT* 5 (2001): 29.

¹¹²Erickson, "Foundationalism," 29-30. To support this point, Erickson also quotes Robert Audi who states that noetic foundations must be "... epistemic unmoved movers, but not unmovable movers. Solid ground is enough, even if bedrock is better. There are also different kinds of bedrock, and not all of them have the invulnerability apparently belonging to beliefs of luminously self-evident truths of logic." See Erickson, "Foundationalism," 29-30; Robert Audi, *The Structure of Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 138.

Therefore, basic beliefs can be epistemically justified but still be under cognitive surveillance in case they prove to contradict later derived beliefs. What this case study shows is that Vanhoozer's criticisms of CF do not necessarily have to lead him to abandon foundationalism altogether in order to adopt a modified form of fallibilism.

This leads to the second element of concern, which is Vanhoozer's corollary argument that doctrinal formulations are inherently "unfinalizeable" because they are confined to temporal and cultural constructs.¹¹³ Just as noetic structures and epistemic beliefs must prove their truthfulness by enduring constant examinations and interrogations, so must subsequent linguistic constructions of those beliefs, otherwise known as doctrines, be in a constant state of interpretive flux. They are the flexible axioms that believers in different contexts produce to express the wisdom of Scripture. Yet because they are linguistically and epistemically pliable, they exist in an ongoing state of revision as believers continue to grow in their understanding of canonical revelation and participate in the process of doctrinal development, or what Vanhoozer calls the dynamics of the divine drama.¹¹⁴

In one sense, this point obviously is true. Intrinsic to the very nature of Christian doctrines is the fact that they are developed and explicated in contexts and formats that are distinct from the inspired texts of biblical revelation. Furthermore, to deny this fact is to fall prey to simplistic theories of doctrine that tend to ignore the multifaceted character of doctrine as a historical phenomenon.¹¹⁵ The question that

¹¹³Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor," 80-81.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, 93-101.

¹¹⁵Alister McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine: A Study in the Foundation of Doctrinal Criticism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 36. Other excellent works that discuss this dynamic in more detail include Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Development of Christian Doctrine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969); Peter Toon, *The Development of Doctrine in the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979); Craig Blaising, "Doctrinal Development in Orthodoxy," *BibSac* 145 (1988): 133-40.

lingers over Vanhoozer's proposal is how doctrines can exactly gain any authority since they are uninspired and unchanging while Scripture itself is not. Vanhoozer attempts to solve this dilemma by arguing that the covenantal dialogue that occurs via the voices of the canon functions as the parameter-setting source for theological discourse. Appealing to the work of David Yeago, Vanhoozer believes that the biblical authors provide multiple judgments or perceptions that can be summarized or described by a variety of concepts and ideas.¹¹⁶ Therefore, deeming a doctrinal construct as orthodox is determined by its ability to transfer the wisdom of the original judgments as revealed in Scripture to the contemporary scene. Nonetheless, how does one determine the fixed nature of these "wise judgments" without using exegetical deductions and even doctrinal constructs to do so. Regardless of postmodern skepticism to the contrary, Christian orthodoxy historically has entailed a locus of beliefs that represent an accurate expression of reality in general and more specifically, the historical faith of the church.¹¹⁷ Moreover, these beliefs are explicated by doctrinal formulations. So while one can easily sustain the fact that Christian doctrines do develop, Vanhoozer's approach offers an incomplete case because it does not delineate the exact way in which theological ideas can in some way be viewed as finalized not because they possess a superior authority to Scripture, but because they accurately and consistently reflect the ideas conveyed by Scripture.

Notwithstanding these gaps in Vanhoozer's approach, time will tell how his ground-breaking work in theological method will develop further and whether his version of confessional postconservatism will gain more momentum than other postmodern versions as seen in Grenz's work. Though he shares commonality with other

¹¹⁶See Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor," 82-85; David S. Yeago, "The New Testament and Nicene Dogma: A Contribution to the Recovery of Theological Exegesis," *Pro Ecclesia* 3 (1994): 152-64; reprinted in *Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, ed. Stephen Fowl (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 87-100.

¹¹⁷See Blaising, "Doctrinal Development," 136.

postconservatives in criticizing conservative commitments to CF, certain forms of propositional revelation, and theological inquiry, his proposals will still indeed provide interesting settings within evangelical circles because while conservatives may be hesitant to adopt his alternative views of revelation, epistemology, and apologetics, they will still wrestle with his views since they preserve their fundamental theological beliefs. On the other hand, though, the majority of postconservative thinkers probably will continue to struggle with his project altogether.

In summary, upon recognizing all of the various contributions as well as concerns that both Grenz and Vanhoozer are bringing to the forefront, their versions of postconservative evangelical theology continue to highlight two fundamental challenges pertinent to contemporary discussions of evangelical theological method. On the one hand, they show that the disconcerting interrogations that the postmodern setting poses against all the foundational elements germane to Christian theology including epistemology, hermeneutics, metaphysics, and doctrinal formulation cannot be ignored by any professing evangelical, whether in the academy or the pew. On the other hand, their approaches also show the seemingly irretractable divergence of responses that are embedded in various segments of postconservative thought. Grenz's work represents a particular approach that is somewhat more sympathetic to postmodernism and willing to revise both theological commitments as well as interpretive methodologies while Vanhoozer's thought typifies an attempt to preserve conservative theology through new postmodern-sensitive theories. Nevertheless, the insightful work that these thinkers continue to offer has in no way provided all the answers or solidified a consensus that all confessing evangelicals can endorse. Instead, their proposals illicit the need to give more attention to several further considerations, to which we now turn.

CHAPTER 5

CLARIFYING POTENTIAL COMPONENTS FOR A HOLISTIC EVANGELICAL THEOLOGICAL METHOD AMIDST A FRAGMENTING EVANGELICAL TRADITION

In order to maintain a voice amidst the current pluralistic culture, evangelicals are forced to expend much of their energy engaging the task that the postmodern ethos disdains the most, namely, developing a specific methodology capable of delineating the universal nature of the Christian metanarrative.¹ Yet at the risk of sounding overly foreboding and possibly reflecting Grenz's charge of being gloomy and pessimistic, it appears that an even greater challenge is now confronting evangelicals.² This ordeal entails the need to overcome the increasing lack of consensus regarding the specific theological and epistemic commitments that should be preserved and utilized in communicating the evangelical tradition to the postmodern mind.

¹Reformed theologian Michael Horton highlights this dilemma when he observes that "there is a growing reluctance. . . , to identify a *Wissenschaft* to which Christian discourse must pay homage. The repudiation of universals for particulars and of the grand narrative for our communal narratives sees the specter of modern foundationalism in any attempt to establish such a petit-narrative on the illusory bedrock of methodological certitude." As a result of this growing perspective, it is believed that "Christian discourse, which theology at least ought to be concerned with, doesn't require an alien science to dictate its object, epistemological criteria, and ends, any more than its content." See Michael S. Horton, "Introduction," in *A Confessing Theology for Postmodern Times*, ed. Michael S. Horton (Wheaton: Crossway, 2000), 9.

²Grenz makes this accusation against American evangelicals in Stanley Grenz, "Beyond Foundationalism: Is a Nonfoundationalist Evangelical Theology Possible?" *CSR* 30 (2000): 57-58; idem, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 7.

Presently, evangelical thinkers continue to splinter into various methodological camps as they struggle to come to theological grips with this challenge. In doing so, many conservatives still stand united in their unyielding allegiance to metaphysical realism, a correspondence view of truth, and a biblicized form of epistemological foundationalism as expressed in a commitment to inerrancy and propositional revelation. Yet on the other hand, the growing number of postconservative thinkers consistently reveal diverse perspectives concerning the validity of these convictions. While they all agree that twentieth-century postfundamentalist evangelicalism is in need of considerable revisions due to its problematic affiliations with modernity, there is ongoing debate regarding the potential solutions that should be applied.³

This, again, is why a study of Grenz and Vanhoozer is so helpful. Their proposals regarding theological method highlight these variances. Grenz's work currently pioneers the segment of postconservative thought that repudiates many of the primary epistemic and metaphysical assumptions of conservative evangelicalism as well as certain doctrinal commitments intrinsic to its historic theological identity. In contrast, Vanhoozer's work represents a version of postconservatism that is critical of certain ideas adopted by conservative evangelicalism, but is still sympathetic to others. Likewise, Vanhoozer's thought typifies a desire among other confessional postconservative evangelicals to preserve doctrinal axioms that Grenz and others prone to his ideals see as expendable. Therefore, in observing these conflicts of interests, it appears that a potential

³Millard Erickson points out that one reason this lack of consensus exists is because many postconservatives are unclear in articulating the exact nature of theological method. While this ambiguity is partly due to the fact that postconservatism is still relatively new to evangelical circles, Erickson observes that thinkers, such as Pinnock and Grenz, must provide further clarifications in order to substantiate their particular approaches. See his specific suggestions regarding these problems in Millard J. Erickson, *The Evangelical Left: Encountering Postconservative Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 56-59.

impasse lies in the future not only for conservative evangelicals as they diverge from the growing number of postconservatives, but also between postconservatives themselves.

As a result of this reality, it appears that Roger Olson's original distinction between evangelical traditionalists and reformists is blurred somewhat.⁴ The idea that conservatives value traditional interpretations and look with suspicion on any potential revisions while progressive postconservatives seek to foster new theological advancements and show a willingness to change previous doctrinal paradigms proves to be a reductionistic assessment because of the very dynamic that exists among various postconservative thinkers.⁵ Some, such as Vanhoozer, are willing to re-evaluate theological approaches as well as doctrinal beliefs in hopes of refining and potentially changing previous ways of interpreting various topics. This can be seen in his re-examinations and subsequent reformulations of propositional revelation and hermeneutical theory. Yet at the same time, he consciously maintains a doctrinal fidelity to both the evangelical and Reformed *traditions*. What Vanhoozer's work shows then is that evangelicals can sustain a genuine commitment to uphold a particular theological tradition and yet still foster doctrinal development and significant revisions that are in continuity with that tradition's overall belief framework. Consequently, one, in fact, can be a traditionalist and a reformist simultaneously.

Since this is the case, it appears that other existing factors must be at work which demarcate the more postmodern versions of postconservative thought. To claim as Olson does that contemporary thinkers in this vein merely desire to allow more light to be shed on evangelical theology simply will not do. Other evangelicals agree that orthodoxy is an entity that goes through stages of development and evolves via the church's

⁴Again, see Roger E. Olson, "The Future of Evangelical Christianity," *CT* 42 (February 9, 1998): 41.

⁵It is also a problematic distinction because conservative evangelicals also recognize the realities of doctrinal development as well.

reflection on biblical revelation. The problem that conservatives as well as confessional postconservatives, such as Vanhoozer, have is not with allowing light to be shed upon theological understanding, but with the kind of “light” that thinkers such as Grenz, Pinnock, and Olson allegedly are shedding.⁶ So the question remains as to what drives this “movement?” Likewise, whatever the answer(s) may be, one also must determine the legitimacy of those reasons and discern the outcome that its agenda could possibly have on the future of evangelical theology.

**Leading a New Evangelical Movement or Altering the
Evangelical Tradition: Clearing the Theological Fog
Regarding Postconservative Evangelicalism**

Since its inception, postfundamentalist evangelicalism has become one of the most influential expressions of Protestant Christianity. Yet despite all of its success and progress, it also has been an entity that has struggled to maintain a unified set of doctrinal moorings. Again, as stated in the introductory chapter, the reason for this ongoing difficulty is that even though evangelicalism always has entailed certain theological orientations, it also has been and still is a trans-denominational entity. Moreover, the complexities created by such a vast amount of diversity have fostered at least two sets of debates regarding evangelical identity that continue even to this day.

One concern pertains to identifying the theological forebears of evangelicalism as it currently exists. Because of its broad network of churches, parachurch ministries, and institutions, disputes exist regarding the specific doctrinal and historical factors that eventually led to the American evangelical phenomenon. One prominent debate that

⁶This is why, for example, Erickson argues that postconservatives such as Grenz, Olson, and others must provide more non-subjective reasons for believing that Christianity is true. Erickson, *The Evangelical Left*, 84. Also see similar criticisms in Paul Kjos Helseth, “Re-Imagining the Princeton Mind: Postconservative Evangelicalism, Old Princeton, and the Rise of Neo-Fundamentalism,” *JETS* 45 (2002): 448-50; Gordon R. Lewis, “Is Propositional Revelation Essential to Evangelical Spiritual Formation?” *JETS* 46 (2003): 279-83.

highlights these disagreements entails the conflicting historical assessments of George Marsden and Donald Dayton. Marsden has argued that pre-war evangelicalism, as it emerged out of the late nineteenth century, was a coalition that reflected a merging of Reformed heritages, which were outgrowths from the eighteenth and nineteenth century awakenings in America.⁷ Only later in the mid-twentieth century after Fuller Seminary began to abandon its original goal of preserving the Old Princeton tradition did the influences of American revivalism and pentecostalism become significant factors within evangelicalism.⁸ Dayton, on the other hand, contends that as evangelicalism began to develop during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it entailed a gradual collection of reactions against Reformed orthodoxy as seen in the movement of pietism, Wesleyanism, the Holiness movement, and finally in the arrival of Pentecostalism.⁹ Regardless of the accuracy of either view, however, what this debate shows is that there are diverse assessments regarding the collage of theological traditions that actually contributed to the formation of postfundamentalist evangelicalism.¹⁰

⁷See George Marsden, "Fundamentalism and American Evangelicalism," in *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, ed. Donald Dayton and Robert K. Johnston (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1991), 23.

⁸Ibid.

⁹See Donald W. Dayton, "The Search for the Historical Evangelicalism: George Marsden's History of Fuller Seminary as a Case Study," *CSR* 23 (1993): 12-33.

¹⁰Michael Horton points out that the Marsden-Dayton debate is so tangled because evangelicalism can be assessed either as a common set of beliefs or as a network of churches and parachurch organizations. In the former context, evangelicalism is defined by its relationship to the basic tenets of the magisterial Reformation while in the latter, it is described in relation to its affiliation with pietism and revivalism. Therefore, potential tensions can rise because one can argue that pietism and revivalism were troublesome declensions while another can claim they were improvements. Michael S. Horton, "Reflection: Is Evangelicalism Reformed or Wesleyan? Reopening the Marsden-Dayton Debate," *CSR* 31 (2001): 132 n. 2. Also see his interaction with Roger Olson regarding American evangelicalism in Roger Olson, "Response: The Reality of Evangelicalism: A Response to Michael S. Horton," *CSR* 31 (2001): 157-62; Michael S. Horton, "Response to Roger Olson's Reply," *CSR* 31 (2001): 163-68.

Alongside these complications regarding the historical trajectory of its past, the other set of concerns that has permeated twentieth-century evangelicalism include the attempts to clarify the specific doctrinal constructs essential to preserving its theological integrity. Probably the most dominant concern that typifies this cluster of issues is biblical inerrancy. For the past four decades, articulating the exact way in which the Bible is divine revelation and therefore completely trustworthy in all its claims has been the primary battlefield for American evangelicals. Beginning with Fuller Theological Seminary's departure from the position of inerrancy in the early sixties, this issue began to motivate evangelicals to provide numerous defenses of the full veracity of Scripture.¹¹ In turn, this wave of emphasis also sparked responses to the contrary as seen in the later influential thesis of Jack Rogers and Donald McKim.¹² Eventually, the growing concern instilled by this issue led approximately three hundred evangelical scholars to meet in Chicago in 1978 to form the coalition known as the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI) in order to establish a unified voice within evangelical ranks.¹³ Despite this endeavor, however, as evangelicalism entered the last two decades of the twentieth century, disagreements regarding inerrancy still remained and were joined by further

¹¹Two of the most influential works at that time were John Warwick Montgomery, ed., *God's Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1973); Harold Lindsell, *Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976).

¹²The Rogers-McKim argument against inerrancy can be seen in Jack Rogers and Donald McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979). Among the many responses that were given to their proposal, the most judicious and concise one was offered by John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).

¹³Helpful anthologies that survey the early work of the ICBI include Norman Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980); Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus, eds., *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible: Papers from ICBI Summit II* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984).

divergences on other issues such as classical theism, the exclusivity of the gospel, and the doctrine of the atonement.¹⁴

In time, the ferment created by these multiple attempts to clarify evangelicalism's historical heritage and delineate its core theological commitments reached an even higher level of intensity with the budding of the postmodern setting, thereby setting the ideal stage for the new postconservative shift.¹⁵ The lack of conformity in defining evangelicalism's theological identity finally found the perfect bedfellow in postmodern philosophy with its emphases on pluralism and the social nature of knowledge. Thinkers who desired to move beyond standard conservative commitments to biblical inerrancy and Augustinian-Reformed views of sovereignty and providence began to see elements of postmodern thought as the key to doing so and thereby decided to "... no longer make their chief role that of defending historic orthodoxy, especially Reformed scholasticism, against the acids of modernity."¹⁶ Instead, postconservatives have chosen to embrace strong perspectival views of knowledge as well as the postmodern skepticism towards epistemic certainty and therefore desire for the theological non-negotiables of the evangelical tradition to be as generic as possible so that potential advancements and changes to various doctrinal issues can still qualify to dwell under the grand tent of the evangelical tradition.¹⁷ The overriding concern, though,

¹⁴The initial heralding of these growing differences can be seen in an article by Robert Brow, "Evangelical Megashift," *CT* (February 19, 1990): 12-14.

¹⁵At this juncture, the discussion of postconservatism relates to its more radical postmodern versions as represented by Grenz, Pinnock, Olson, Abraham, Webber, and others. Vanhoozer's rendition of a confessional postconservatism is to be excluded.

¹⁶Roger E. Olson, "Postconservative Evangelicals Greet the Postmodern Age," *Christian Century* 112 (1995): 480.

¹⁷This idea of viewing evangelicalism as a overarching tent that can encompass the various persuasions of postconservatives is used by Olson. See Olson, "Response: The Reality of Evangelicalism," 160-61.

is whether postmodern postconservatives must advocate an overall revolution in the evangelical tradition, or remake the tent, in order to accomplish this goal.

Because of the imperative nature of this concern, at this juncture a helpful distinction between a tradition and a movement should be highlighted. In a contemporary addendum to the works that Richard Quebedeaux and James Davison Hunter provided regarding the beliefs of evangelical college and university students during the seventies and eighties, two professors from Calvin College, James M. Penning and Corwin E. Smidt, recently have offered an updated assessment of the changes that have occurred as students have entered the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.¹⁸ Before furnishing the results of their research, Penning and Smidt offer a preliminary summary of American postwar evangelicalism and in doing so, make a crucial distinction between a tradition and a movement.¹⁹ A tradition is defined as a given standard or characteristic way of interpreting and responding to the world, which can change rather slowly, only if the beliefs that make up a given tradition prove to require revisions in light of different cultural factors.²⁰ A movement, on the other hand, is described as a social phenomenon wherein a particular group within a given tradition intentionally seeks ongoing change whether it be to recapture the past or to transform the future.²¹ Therefore,

In short, a religious movement is only a segment of the tradition. An evangelical movement does not (nor can it) encapsulate the evangelical tradition, but it can seek to steer the tradition in a particular direction. The evangelical tradition is generally much more diverse and less cohesive than the particular evangelical movements that seek to guide and change it.²²

¹⁸James M. Penning and Corwin E. Smidt, *Evangelicalism: The Next Generation: Does Conservative Protestantism Have a Future?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002).

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 13-14.

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹*Ibid.*, 14.

²²*Ibid.*

The reason this distinction is so helpful is because it aids in clarifying the true objective that postmodern postconservatives must fulfill in order to be successful. Because postconservatives desire to have such a large amount of methodological breathing room in which to work, they are forced to reduce the essentials of evangelical identity to a minimal level. Again, Olson attempts to do this by limiting the doctrinal essentials of evangelicalism to the trustworthiness of Scripture, the deity of Christ, and the necessity of grace in salvation.²³ Yet as R. Albert Mohler, Jr. has observed, these axioms are so reductionistic that “Most mainline liberals would affirm these three points, at least in some nuanced form,” and therefore evangelicalism could potentially “. . . encompass most sectors of Protestant liberalism.”²⁴ So returning to Penning and Smidt’s taxonomy, it does not seem that the more radical postconservative thinkers can simply attempt to formulate new directions or a movement for the evangelical tradition to explore without also bringing about serious modifications to the tradition itself.

This reality can be seen in the fact that if postconservative thought in its more postmodern extremes continues to gain momentum, conservative evangelicalism may become a twenty-first century version of fundamentalism. Herein, it is ironic to note the similarities that exist between evangelicalism’s initial struggles with fundamentalism and postconservatism’s accusations against conservative evangelicalism. On the one hand, the new evangelicals of the early twentieth-century chose to distinguish themselves from the overall movement of fundamentalism for several reasons.²⁵ One was the general

²³Olson, “The Future of Evangelical Theology,” 47.

²⁴R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “Reformist Evangelicalism: A Center without a Circumference,” in *A Confessing Theology for Postmodern Times*, 142-43.

²⁵These reasons come from a combination of treatments as seen in Mohler, “Reformist Evangelicalism,” 132-33; Robert E. Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 26-32; George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism: 1870-1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

mentality of rigid antiecumenism as revealed in an over-zealous focus on separatism. Another was an unhealthy distraction with secondary issues at the expense of ignoring more weightier theological topics. Finally, there was an unfortunate loss of interest among many fundamentalists regarding various social issues due to the fact that Protestant liberalism had begun to place such a high regard on humanitarian endeavors.

Upon recognizing these factors, it appears that history may repeat itself somewhat through the growing wedge between conservative evangelicals and postconservative thinkers. Many postconservatives who continue to implement postmodern ideals into their theology see conservatives as thinkers who foster an unhealthy skepticism (or separatism) toward nonevangelical theologies and belief systems by viewing them as mere objects of critical examination. Likewise, it has been charged that conservatives are distracted by undue debates that do not really call into question the core commitments of the evangelical tradition even though they often give the impression that they do.²⁶ It seems then that conservative evangelicals are now the recipients of similar criticisms that their predecessors once made against fundamentalists. Furthermore, it is possible that as certain postconservatives continue to stretch the bounds of evangelicalism, conservative evangelicals eventually could become viewed as a new segment of neo-fundamentalists. Yet despite this possibility, the more pressing concerns that require attention are whether postconservative tendencies in their more radical forms are capable of retaining any theological continuity with the essence of evangelical Christianity and if so, how.

Aside from the more confessional approaches to postconservative thought as seen in Vanhoozer, the persistent themes that permeate the Grenzian or Olsian veins of postconservatism are a dismissal of conservative theology due to its alleged outdated

²⁶See Olson, "The Future of Evangelical Theology," 40, 47.

focus on the passing epistemic enemies of modernity and a sympathetic but critical implementation of postmodern thought to theological formulation. The key point, however, that overshadows both of these deductions is a failure to acknowledge the philosophical *continuity* between modernism and postmodernism. Postconservatives are efficient in emphasizing the discontinuities that exist such as the postmodernism's rejection of CF and the notion that the world, or reality in general, is objectively discovered. Yet they either consciously evade or unintentionally miss the fact that postmodernism is actually the natural outcome of the modernistic worldview.

One particular thinker who has provided a considerable argument supporting this point by highlighting the connections between modernism and postmodernism is Brian Ingraffia.²⁷ Ingraffia argues that during the modern era, thinkers such as Descartes chose to develop their explications of God on the basis of human reflection, reason, and metaphysics. In doing so, formulations of God became the results of humanity's attempts to gain an understanding of God independently of divine revelation, thus creating a new concept that Ingraffia labels as ontotheology.²⁸ Ingraffia then argues that subsequent thinkers, such as Feuerbach, mounted their assaults against theism and the Christian worldview by attacking the inconsistencies of ontotheological perspectives as opposed to the God portrayed in the Bible. Subsequently, Nietzsche pioneered further attacks on ontotheology as well as the rationality that created it and thus set the groundwork for

²⁷See Brian Ingraffia, *Postmodern Theory and Biblical Theology: Vanquishing God's Shadow* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); idem, "Deconstructing the Tower of Babel: Ontotheology and the Postmodern Bible," in *Renewing Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene, and Karl Möller, The Scripture and Hermeneutics Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 284-306.

²⁸Ingraffia, *Postmodern Theory*, 4. Note, however, that the term ontotheology is not original with Ingraffia. Instead, it derives from the earlier work of Martin Heidegger. Yet in explicating this idea, Ingraffia observes that "the God of the Bible may have been confused or even falsely equated with the God of Greek philosophy by many of the Church Fathers and medieval theologians, but only after the advent of modern philosophy does the god of ontotheology replace the God of the Bible." *Ibid.*, 5.

future thinkers such as Heidegger and ultimately Derrida.²⁹ In establishing this trail, Ingraffia effectively argues that postmodern thought continues the agenda of modernism because it rejects the idea of the Christian God, but does so by rejecting the ontotheological tradition previously established within the modern era. In his own words,

Postmodern theory not only continues the modern opposition to Christian theology, but also goes on to criticize the secularization of Christian theology in modern ontotheology. However, postmodern theory relies on the ontotheology it deconstructs for its rejection of biblical Christianity. The rejection of Christianity in both modernism and postmodernism has been for the most part based upon a profound misunderstanding of biblical revelation. Christian faith has all too easily been conflated with ontotheology in modernism and then criticized for being ontotheology in postmodernism.³⁰

The point to observe then is that the current postmodern hostility toward Christianity directly derives from previous misconceptions of God that originated within modernity.

This being the case, postconservatives appear to be on the horns of a serious dilemma. Many of the postmodern ideals that they are willing to adopt such as epistemic coherentism, metaphysical nonrealism, and non-correspondence theories of truth are supported by anti-Christian underpinnings.³¹ This does not mean that some of these topics are not useful at all or cannot be modified to fit particular theological niches. Vanhoozer's thought shows that this is possible. Nevertheless, several influential

²⁹Ibid, 4, 8-9. In contrast to Ingraffia's work, though, there are more sympathetic treatments of postmodern thinkers who have attacked the concept of ontotheology. For example, see Merold Westphal, "Overcoming Onto-Theology," in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, ed. J. D. Caputo and M. J. Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 146-69; idem, *Overcoming Onto-Theology: Toward a Postmodern Christian Faith* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001). Also see Ingraffia's comments regarding Westphal in Ingraffia, "Deconstructing the Tower of Babel," 286.

³⁰Ingraffia, *Postmodern Theory*, 6.

³¹This is why postconservatives, such as Grenz, are criticized because their revisions in epistemology and ontology mitigate against their subsequent attempts to make any substantial theological claims. As Gordon Lewis observes, "If Grenz is asserting metaphysical propositions, he is inconsistent with his anti-metaphysical stance and his stance against any objective use of language for the reality of God." See Lewis, "Is Propositional Revelation Essential," 280-81.

postconservatives tend to see many postmodern ideals as epistemic saviors for evangelical theology when, in fact, they are outgrowths of views antithetical to Christianity in general. This is why it seems highly unlikely that aggressive adaptations of postmodern thought can sustain a theological methodology which can maintain any significant continuity with the evangelical tradition. Only if the face of evangelical theology dramatically changes to suit postconservative ends can this possibly occur.

In light of this, evangelicals cannot simply ignore the challenges that contemporary culture poses for the Christian faith nor can they expect the postmodern tendencies in postconservatism to dissipate for the sake of orthodoxy. Instead, conservatives as well as confessional postconservatives must continue to formulate models that provide alternative solutions to these challenges. Yet in doing so, they also must strive to articulate the fundamental unifying presuppositions that should exist within any given theological framework that bears the title of evangelical. Establishing these convictions will not guarantee interpretive agreement on every single theological issue that arises, but they can act as mutual points of reference for keeping theological perspectives accountable to the Christian gospel. To accomplish these tasks, though, at least three subjects require further attention; those being more precise treatments of a Christian view of revelation and knowledge as well as viable explications of the development of orthodoxy that give careful attention to the confessional nature of Christian theology. Moreover, in light of how Grenz, Vanhoozer, and other evangelical thinkers are attempting to engage these challenges, the next section will attempt to highlight certain commitments essential to the first two issues while the final section will then offer several proposals regarding the third.

Validating Certain Epistemic Categories in Light of Biblical Revelation

Vanhoozer is right in contending that the initial points of reference for evangelical theology begin with particular commitments concerning Scripture, God, and

hermeneutics as a collective unit rather than consecutive categories.³² Richard Lints also echoes this sentiment in summarizing the approach of the Reformed scholastics by claiming that “methodological considerations are normally postdogmatic rather than predogmatic. It is more often the case that one first establishes the substance of a theological framework and only afterward reflects on the methods used to substantiate that vision.”³³ The overall point being emphasized here, which actually should be appreciated by postmodern intellectuals, is that predispositions regarding a certain subject dictate the manner in which that subject will be examined. This holds true for all interpreters, whether they be Protestant liberals, postliberals, conservative evangelicals, or postconservatives. It also is true that theological commitments concerning what is known entail coinciding assumptions regarding the way knowledge actually operates.³⁴ Applying this dynamic to evangelical theology then, it must be conceded that perceptions regarding the nature of noetic structures as well as truth in general inevitably develop in conjunction with preconceived theological persuasions.³⁵

³²Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “First Theology: Meditations in a Postmodern Toolshed,” in *First Theology: God, Scripture, and Hermeneutics*, by Kevin Vanhoozer (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 38.

³³Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prologomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 279.

³⁴Roderick Chisholm highlights this point by claiming that assertions about the world entail views about what is known as well as how something is known. See Roderick Chisholm, *The Problem of Criteria* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1974), 48; and Lints’ discussion of this point in Lints, *Fabric of Theology*, 280.

³⁵Again as Chisholm argues, this means that all types of knowledge reason from belief to reasons for believing rather than vice versa. In other words, beliefs normally are accepted first and only then do investigations commence to determine the validity of those beliefs. See Chisholm, *The Problem of Criteria*, 48. Lints then takes this point to the biblical-doctrinal level and argues that “as one looks at the biblical text as a whole, it ought to be apparent that certain beliefs . . . inevitably form. On the basis of those beliefs, the belief-formation process itself becomes susceptible to critical scrutiny. Only after the process has worked is one able to develop some methodological insights into how the process ought to work.” Lints, *The Fabric of Theology*, 280-81.

Recognizing this delicate interaction between theology and rationality, it is incumbent upon evangelicals not only to formulate theological methodologies that can preserve Christian orthodoxy, but also to articulate and utilize specific epistemic values that can support those approaches.³⁶ To fulfill these objectives, at least two issues must be addressed. First, the task must commence with an initial examination of the source that is the primary subject of theological reflection and potential cognitive apprehension, namely divine revelation. This discussion must include responses to both modern and postmodern objections to the idea as well as provide models that improve upon the shortcomings of previous evangelical expressions. Second, whatever dynamics are emphasized regarding the nature of biblical communication, it likewise must be remembered that they dictate the ways in which related epistemic and ontological categories are to be understood as well. These points being the case then, what must first be emphasized regarding the doctrine of Scripture.

To begin, accepting the concept of divine revelation implies a belief not only in God, but in a God who has the capacity to disclose Himself. In one sense, of course, this is seen in the supreme revelation of the Triune God through Jesus Christ for it is in Him that we observe the disclosure of God the Son in human form. Nevertheless, as Christ Himself and the subsequent Christian church have noted, it is through the means of the prophetic and apostolic witnesses of the biblical canon that we receive the proper frameworks for understanding who Christ is, who we are, and how we can come to know

³⁶This one reason why evangelicals are investing so much time in discussing the nature of truth and how it can be communicated to the postmodern generation. For example, see D. A. Carson, ed., *Telling the Truth: Evangelizing Postmoderns* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000); Millard Erickson, *Truth or Consequences: The Promise and Perils of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001); Peter Hicks, *Evangelical Truth: A Creative Proposal for a Postmodern Age* (Leicester, England: Apollo, 1998); David K. Clark, *To Know and Love God: Method for Theology*, The Foundations of Evangelical Theology Series (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003), 353-83. Also see the discussion of the general postmodern attitude toward truth at the popular level in Paul Copan, *True for You but not for Me* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1998).

God in an intimate way. Therefore, biblical revelation stands as the initial point of reference that must be acknowledged in order for theology to proceed.

This commitment faces immediate challenges, however, because it entails several underlying assumptions which are deemed problematic by postmodern thought. For one, it reveals a predisposition to accept the idea that a transcendent subject has the capacity to convey information as well as personal identity through the immanent means of human language. It also implies some form of the complicated idea of metaphysical realism because the messages distributed by means of biblical language possess an inherent authority for all peoples and communities, thus promoting an authoritative metanarrative. This, in turn, finally leads to the postmodern maze of epistemological complexities that exist regarding the capacity to ascertain the meaning of a given metanarrative. So upon recognizing these formidable criticisms, it appears that evangelicals must provide a tenable way of describing the capacity for divine speech, then move to a coherent explanation of biblical authority, and finally wrestle with the intricacies of nonrealism and the nature of truth-claims.

With regard to the issue of divine speech, both the modern and postmodern minds oppose the idea of divine action or causality. This negative appraisal toward supernatural intervention, whether in speaking or in acting, developed serious momentum in the modern era via the progressive advancements in science, the subsequent emphasis placed upon human agency, and especially the troubling shadow of theodicy.³⁷ As a result, divine action became an empirically ludicrous notion. Then as modernity gave way to the postmodern era, the rejection of divine action shifted. Instead of viewing it as a fallible notion because it was scientifically and rationally outrageous, it became categorized as a mere construction of a given religious tradition. So for modernists as well as postmodernists, any real form of divine intervention is necessarily incoherent.

³⁷Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 50.

The question then is if there is a valid response that can be formulated to these challenges. Here, two points are helpful in clarifying the possibility of divine speech.

The first idea has been emphasized in a recent work by James K. A. Smith entitled *Speech and Theology*.³⁸ Herein, Smith attempts to provide a response to the deconstructionist argument, as represented Derrida, which characterizes all theological language as inadequate attempts to solidify finite paradigms of transcendent entities. Terming this strategy as negative theology, Derrida argues that theologians of this persuasion are “. . . faced with the challenge of how to speak of a God who exceeds all categories and transcends all conceptual determinations.”³⁹ The objective is to discover a way in which one can speak of God without reducing all of God to that which is spoken. This is a crucial perplexity in its own right. However, the key point to highlight in the present discussion of the possibility for divine speech is in Smith’s recognition that this skepticism toward theological language applies to biblical language as well. He writes, “This same incommensurability attends not only to our ‘talk of God’ but also the very possibility of God’s self-revelation, insofar as any revelation must occur in terms which must attend to the finitude of the receivers of such a revelation.”⁴⁰ Smith’s claim is that to deny the possibility of theology’s capacity to refer to God, in some limited sense, necessarily entails God’s inability to communicate with humanity because in both instances, infinity must be described with finite means.

Upon establishing this correlation, Smith then contends that the mystery of the incarnation functions as the paradigm for solving the overall dilemma of negative

³⁸See James K. A. Smith, *Speech and Theology: Language and the Logic of Incarnation* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

³⁹*Ibid.*, 4. Also, see Jacques Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking: Attestations,” in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, ed. Harold Coward and Toby Foshay, trans. Ken Krieden (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 73-142.

⁴⁰Smith, *Speech and Theology*, 153.

theology. At the first advent, Christ took on humanity and thereby showed God's ability to provide an account wherein he could maintain his transcendence and yet reveal an immanent appearance without reducing one dynamic to the other.⁴¹ Furthermore, Smith concludes that this incarnational form of divine speech demands human theological speech as a response. Just as we affirm that we love him because he loved us, we also should affirm that we speak, because he has spoken first.⁴² This means that doctrinal discourse, or human summations of Scriptural claims, is not only possible, but mandatory. Moreover, the primary factor in Smith's overall argument that helps establish a defense of divine speech is the incarnation itself. The divine choice to speak the divine logos in the limited finiteness of humanity proves that transcendence and immanence can co-exist. Yet in pressing this argument further, one must not only provide an explanation of how divine action can be mediated through human form, but how it also can utilize human speech in particular.

It is at this juncture that Smith's contributions are supplemented by a second major work by Michael Horton entitled *Covenant and Eschatology*.⁴³ Horton follows the current trend to apply Speech-Act theory to the concept of biblical revelation and argues that the capacity to speak necessarily entails the ability to commit certain acts, whether it be promising, warning, or encouraging. With regards to biblical revelation, however, Horton contends that to say that God speaks is not true in a univocal sense because God as Spirit does not possess the necessary tools for speech as we conceive of them in literal terms. Rather, it is true in an analogical sense because speech is really a corollary action of communication in general, which can occur in many other ways than just physically

⁴¹Ibid., 154.

⁴²Ibid., 155.

⁴³Especially see chapter 5 in Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, 121-46.

uttering words or sentences.⁴⁴ People can effectively convey messages (or speak) with hand signals, bodily gestures, codes, and other devices. So in actuality, the real challenge is not necessarily in substantiating God's capacity to speak, but in defining the criteria that qualifies something to be an act of communication. From here, Horton contends that the means whereby divine speech occurs is through divinely-deputized speakers who speak within the context of the covenants that God established with humanity throughout redemptive history.⁴⁵ In his own words, "X (the utterances of a prophet or an apostle) counts as Y (the utterances of God) in context C (the biblical covenant/canon)."⁴⁶ Whether it be a narrator describing the history of one of the patriarchs, a worshiper sharing an emotive response to Yahweh in worship, a prophet delivering a message to a nation, or an apostle recording a letter for a church, each act of human speech represents a divinely inspired act of communication that has a particular function within the canon.⁴⁷

⁴⁴Ibid., 128. Here, Horton is emphasizing the analogical nature of biblical language in order to distinguish his approach from certain views of propositional revelation as seen in such thinkers as Carl Henry. Horton argues that Henry inadvertently merges the idea of the literal, or normal, meaning of a biblical text with a sense of reference that is univocal in nature. Yet the problem Horton has with this correlation is that it fails to distinguish between descriptions of God and the transcendent essence of God apart from those descriptions. See Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6 vols. (Waco: Word, 1976; reprint, Wheaton: Crossway, 1999), 1:232-38, 3:455-81; Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, 75-76, 189-90, 292 n. 1.

⁴⁵This idea of divine-deputization reflects the views of Nicholas Wolterstorff. Horton is cautious, though, not to use it in the exact same sense because for Wolterstorff, divinely deputized speech potentially can convey portions of noematic content that are, in fact, untrue or mistaken. Horton's response to this idea is that the only reliable route to ascertaining knowledge about God is through the trustworthy accounts of divine discourse. See Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 202-22; and Horton's clarifications in Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, 156-65.

⁴⁶Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, 129.

⁴⁷Horton also notes that not all Scripture has to be appropriated as divine *address* in order to be a part of divine *discourse*. Such examples of this dynamic would include the erroneous criticisms of Job's friends. Ibid., 159.

Putting Smith's and Horton's thoughts together then, it appears that one can surmise a conceivable case for the possibility of divine speech. On the one hand, it is possible for God to disclose himself through the limitations of human language without compromising his transcendence because the divine logos was able to be revealed through the finite medium of human existence. On the other, the particular way in which God uses human speech is by commissioning speakers to convey his messages in the context of the covenants that he has authorized. Scripture is then comprised of a diverse mosaic of divine communicative acts that are given by the Spirit through the words of the biblical writers for the purpose of providing an accurate, though not exhaustive, portrait of who God is, what he has done, and what he is going to do in the future.⁴⁸

This stance, in turn, opens the door for the traditional evangelical stance regarding biblical authority. In fact, the belief in divine speech implies an authority for Scripture in at two least two contexts, which David K. Clark highlights in his recent work on theological method.⁴⁹ One is an obvious focus on moral authority, or a sense of obligation to concede to a superior power. Because the Bible entails divine speech, it thereby possesses divine authority over its hearers because of whose speech it entails. The other fundamental element entails what Bernard Ramm once called veracious authority.⁵⁰ Herein, the argument is that one is epistemically justified to accept a given account because of the reliability of the witness, which in the context of divine speech would be God.⁵¹ Notwithstanding these correlations and as seen in the work of Grenz

⁴⁸Horton comments that the canon essentially contains two types of divine discourse, or distinct illocutionary forces, namely commanding and promising. *Ibid.*, 136. This idea also aligns well with Vanhoozer's hermeneutical approach.

⁴⁹Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 60-62.

⁵⁰Bernard Ramm, *The Pattern of Religious Authority*, 5th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 21. This point also is highlighted by Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 61.

⁵¹Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 61.

and Vanhoozer, usually when these claims to authority are made, the natural accusation that arises is that they simply are lapses back into modernistic thinking and outdated versions of foundationalism.⁵² Therefore, in order to respond to these contemporary criticisms, one must recognize that in order to advocate a commitment to Scripture, one must simultaneously treat the issues of epistemology and ontology and it is here where many discussions regarding biblical authority normally go awry.

Virtually all contemporary discussions regarding the nature of knowledge at one point or another wrestle with the issue of noetic certainty, or more specifically, epistemological foundationalism. After the majority of these discussions have ended, normally it is then concluded that foundationalism is a theoretical dinosaur that has now died and become an extinct species due to the fact that it cannot survive in the environment of postmodern thought.⁵³ The notion that human reason can ascertain ideas and beliefs with absolute certainty by first basing them on a solidified set of self-evident, indubitable, universally-acceptable “facts” has been unmasked to be either a naïve pretense or more commonly as an intentional attempt to monopolize the market of ideas. As a result, many thinkers now diverge into new territories and probe alternative

⁵²It is even argued by many that this approach reflects the epistemic commitments of classical liberalism. The only difference is that the basis for certainty is Scripture itself rather than religious experience. For an treatment of this accusation, see Rodney Clapp, “How Firm a Foundation: Can Evangelicals be Nonfoundationalists?” in *The Nature of Confession: Evangelicals and Postliberals in Dialogue*, ed. Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), 90-92; Nancey Murphy, “Philosophical Resources for Postmodern Evangelical Theology,” *CSR* 26 (1996): 184-89; Roger Olson, “Whales and Elephants: Both God’s Creatures But Can They Meet?” *Pro Ecclesia* 4 (1995): 165-89.

⁵³At this time, virtually all evangelicals are aware of Wolterstorff’s classic disavowal of CF wherein he concludes that “on all fronts foundationalism is in bad shape. It seems to me that there is nothing to do but give it up for mortally ill and learn to live in its absence. Theorizing is without a foundation of indubitables.” Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*, 2nd. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984; reprint, 1999), 56.

epistemic approaches such as reliabilism, coherentism, and pragmatism and in one sense, this shift away from CF is positive because it highlights the fact that all knowledge is affected by cultural as well as temporal limitations.

Yet the problem that often arises within evangelical circles regarding this move is that many conclude that because CF is self-refuting, all other forms should be jettisoned as well. At this juncture, discussions of foundationalism often become bogged down in reductionistic rhetoric that fails to clarify the subtle differences between various foundationalistic models.⁵⁴ Inevitably, this tendency then leads to discussions of the nature of Scripture and the value that ideas such as biblical inerrancy and propositional revelation can have in nonfoundational approaches to theology.⁵⁵ In turn, it is then argued that these ideas once were effective in responding to modernistic attacks on Christianity, but are now outdated and in need of revisions in order to respond to new postmodern challenges.⁵⁶ Consequently, foundationalism is deemed unsalvageable even in any kind of modified formats.

⁵⁴The truth is that foundationalism is a complex model of epistemology. For excellent discussions of its diversity, see William Alston, "Two Types of Foundationalism," *Journal of Philosophy* 73 (1976): 165-85; Timm Triplett, "Recent Work on Foundationalism," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 27 (1990): 93-116; Douglas Ottati, "Between Foundationalism and Nonfoundationalism," *Affirmation* 4 (1991): 27-47; W. Jay Wood, *Epistemology: Becoming Intellectually Virtuous* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), 98-104; J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), 112-21.

⁵⁵For example, see Jonathan R. Wilson, "Toward a New Evangelical Paradigm of Biblical Authority," in *The Nature of Confession*, 151-61; Henry H. Knight, III, *A Future for Truth: Evangelical Theology in a Postmodern World* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 53-56, 90-97.

⁵⁶See Wilson, "Toward a New Evangelical Paradigm," 155; and the essays in Stanley Hauerwas, Nancey Murphy, and Mark Nation, eds., *Theology without Foundations: Religious Practice and the Future of Theological Truth* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994).

Despite this trend, repudiations of soft versions of biblicized foundationalism are inconclusive because they typically are based on arguments against CF only. As Jonathan Wilson has stated in a discussion regarding the relationship between inerrancy and foundationalism, “Foundationalism looks for a foundation separate from any particular convictions that a Christian may have. In other words, a foundationalist epistemology seeks to ground knowledge in truths that anyone can accept.”⁵⁷ This assessment is true with regards to CF and is even a fair criticism toward certain forms of evangelical apologetics. However, it does not provide sufficient warrant for rejecting any link whatsoever between foundationalism and the Bible.⁵⁸ To argue that Scripture can in no way function as an noetic foundation for theological inquiries falls into the previously discussed problem of ontotheology because it falsely equates modernistic definitions of knowledge and metaphysics with the divine nature of revelation. The truthfulness of Scripture is not based upon its ability to coincide with an objective rationality possessed by all autonomous thinkers, but because it derives from the mind of an omniscient, all-powerful, transcendent God who has provided a God’s-eye summary of the world.⁵⁹ Revelation thereby entails divine speech through the intrasystemic structures of the canon in order to convey extratextual depictions of ontological realities. It is in this light then that the use of concepts such as inerrancy or infallibility are crucial in formulating this

⁵⁷Ibid., 157.

⁵⁸Note that Wolterstorff has highlighted several difficulties one faces in trying to use the Bible as an epistemic foundation in the classical Cartesian sense. See Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*, 58-62. Yet his criticisms do not seem to apply to softer forms of foundationalism.

⁵⁹Nancey Murphy notes, however, that not all of those who can be labeled as Scriptural foundationalists are necessarily inerrantists or infallibilists. See Nancey Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 16-19. This is why it is so important not to divorce the Spirit’s speaking through biblical texts from the Spirit’s original inspiration of those texts.

softer form of foundationalism because they undergird the belief that divine interpretations of the world can be trusted. Likewise, the idea of propositionalism is still a valuable concept not because it characterizes the Bible as a spiritual textbook, but because it highlights the fact that the revelatory nature of Scripture cannot be separated from the words and literary formats that are used within Scripture.⁶⁰

In light of this renewed paradigm of biblical authority, which preserves a certain commitment to a soft foundationalist epistemology, certain perceptions regarding the nature of reality and truth also are geared in certain directions. Specifically, a pledge to biblicized foundationalism appears to point towards a critical realist position regarding metaphysics and a modified view of the correspondence theory of truth.⁶¹ With regard to the former, to endorse the actuality of divine speech, as previously defined, implies the belief that there are things that are true regardless of how human or social constructions may perceive those truths. Yet second of all, because of the authority of divine speech, it also must be conceded that truths that exist can be described accurately, though not

⁶⁰Also, in response to the surging criticism that undue focuses on propositionalism tend to neglect the importance of spiritual devotion in theological inquiry, Gordon Lewis argues that a belief in inspired statements of revelatory content is what undergirds the very possibility of a Christian spirituality. See Lewis, "Is Propositional Revelation Essential," 269-98; idem, "An Integrative Method of Justifying Religious Assertions," in *Evangelical Apologetics*, ed. M. Bauman, B. Hall, and R. Newman (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1996), 69-88.

⁶¹This link between soft foundationalism, critical realism, and correspondence theory should not be interpreted, however, to mean that one must endorse a biblicized expression of foundationalism in order to sustain the latter two ideas. Vanhoozer's project shows that this does not necessarily have to be the case. Yet even another example that illustrates this is the recent work of Alister McGrath. McGrath argues that nonfoundational forms of epistemology do not automatically have to entail the subsequent abandonment of realism in its more critical forms. The reason for this being that "correspondence with reality does not depend upon *a priori* beliefs, but upon *a posteriori* conclusions resulting from an empirical engagement with the real world." See Alister E. McGrath, *Reality*, vol. 2 of *A Scientific Theology* (Cambridge: T & T Clark, 2002; reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 38.

necessarily exhaustively, with human language.⁶² Therefore, divine speech appears to align with the idea of what William P. Alston calls “alethic realism.”⁶³ Herein, a statement, proposition, or belief is true if and only if what the statement, proposition or belief claims to be the case actually is the case.⁶⁴ This is an imperative point because it applies perfectly to the reliability of divine speech. Though it obviously clashes with versions of postmodern nonrealism, it must be argued that divine speech is not perspectival in the same sense of human speech because even though biblical language does indeed discuss subjects from particular points of view, it must be remembered that the divine speaker’s use of language in Scripture is not limited to the prejudices of a given community nor hampered by the epistemic shortcomings of depraved humanity.⁶⁵ God is capable of condescending to self-disclosure and successfully communicating through the means of cognitive schemes, such as language, even though the very ideas being conveyed exist independently of the means being used to describe them.

⁶²Clark adds a helpful insight regarding this point with regards to the postmodern fear of absolutism. He states that since only God is infinite, his knowledge alone is comprehensive and thus absolute in the truest sense of the word. So a commitment to absolutism in this light does not necessarily lead to the subsequent conclusion that theologians likewise can obtain an absolute perspective of a given issue. On the other hand, though, this does not mean that because human knowledge is always limited, it also is always inaccurate. See Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 449 n. 3.

⁶³William P. Alston, *A Realist Conception of Truth* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 5.

⁶⁴Ibid. Elsewhere, Alston also provides an excellent defense of the fundamental premises undergirding the various expressions of realism as an epistemic model. He argues that many of the objections to realism are formulated in ways that do not actually refute the concept per se because they are driven by false suppositions regarding the essential components of the idea. See William P. Alston, “What Metaphysical Realism is Not,” in *Realism and Antirealism*, ed. William P. Alston (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 97-115.

⁶⁵Again, as seen in the argument provided by Smith, these obstacles would have to apply to the possibility of the incarnation as well. Yet as the life, death, and burial of resurrection of Christ have shown, imperfect vehicles can be used to convey perfect messages.

Summarizing this discussion then, the evangelical concept of revelation helps to establish preliminary epistemic commitments that go against the philosophical currents of postmodernity. Even further, these proposals show how vast the divergences are becoming between certain forms of postconservative thought. Arguments regarding the nature of Scripture are being merged into discussions regarding the communal interactions with Scripture thereby leading to modified views of nonrealism and theories of truth that possess serious relativistic tones. Yet persistent claims not to sound relativistic do not change the fact that they do.⁶⁶ Additionally, another issue that feeds this tendency to capitulate to postmodern thought and abandon the previous evangelical commitments to a thoroughgoing biblicism is the issue of hermeneutics. More specifically, this subject not only entails questions regarding biblical interpretation, it also includes concerns regarding the ways in which theological ideas can develop and yet still maintain a certain continuity with confessional orthodoxy. Recognizing the implications of such concerns, it is imperative that they receive further attention and refinements.

Integrating Hermeneutics with the Dynamics of Doctrinal Development: A Proposal

The primary reason that the subjects of epistemology and metaphysics are so complex in contemporary philosophy and theology is because for the postmodern mind, both are interlinked to the activity of interpretation.⁶⁷ The reason for this is because all

⁶⁶Regarding this point, Paul Helseth mentions that Grenz once commented to him that it is inappropriate for evangelicals to accuse certain postconservatives of being sheer subjectivists because this reads them through the lenses of Enlightenment presuppositions. Nonetheless, Helseth argues that it has yet to be shown that embracing the concept of objective truth is necessarily revealing an indebtedness to modernistic thought. See Helseth, "Re-Imagining the Princeton Mind," 447 n. 135.

⁶⁷For critical analysis of this point, see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. and ed. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1989; reprint, New York: Continuum, 1996), 307-41; Richard Rorty, *The Linguistic Turn: Recent Essays in Philosophical Method* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).

ways of seeing have been deemed as ways of knowing. Whereas the project of the Enlightenment strove to discover truth *out there* via human reason, the postmodern shift has taken the next logical step and concluded that diverse thinkers use their contextually-laden forms of reason to create different kinds of truths. So while modernity made the thinking subject superior to God, postmodernity ensures that one thinker is not superior to another. In turn, all truth-claims are validated by their usage in a given community rather than their capacity to hold all other communities epistemically accountable.

When laying these perceptions at the door of evangelical theology, several perplexities arise. One, which has already been addressed, regards the possibility of whether there is anything beyond cognitive schemes that is to be discovered. The evangelical answer has been that God has been revealed in Christ and the biblical revelation which bears witness to Him. Encompassing this response, though, are other interrelated questions. One is whether the Bible's message(s) can be discovered, or more specifically, interpreted accurately and thereby potentially understood. Another pertains to whether any criteria possibly can be established for substantiating the idea of fixed interpretations that directly reflect various elements of the biblical message, thereby providing support for the idea of Christian orthodoxy. In addition, whatever response is given to this dilemma, it must also be acknowledged that even while orthodoxy is necessarily oriented toward some kind of confessional hermeneutic, it is not excluded from developments or changes altogether.⁶⁸ Moreover, in observing the inherent complexities of these concerns as well the two distinct clusters of responses provided by Grenz and Vanhoozer, certain aims should be highlighted.

With regard to the first concern of biblical hermeneutics, initially it must be acknowledged that the Christian objectives in interpretation are multi-faceted. It is not

⁶⁸As Craig Blaising has observed, a "no-development" theory of doctrine, which sees all doctrinal developments as deviating forms of corruption and heresy, is a reductionistic assessment to say the least. See Craig A. Blaising, "Doctrinal Development in Orthodoxy," *BibSac* 145 (1988): 135-36.

the case that biblical interpretation is consumed simply with exegetical analysis only. Rather, it is an exercise wherein believers interact with the dynamic world that Scripture describes for the purposes of cognitive understanding as well as spiritual transformation. Postmodern thought is quick to point out, however, that all connections between readers and texts entail predispositions, subjective prejudices, and linguistic constructs, which reveal the limitations intrinsic to all acts of interpretation. All hermeneutical activity leads to ways of seeing, or “meaning,” that always entail ways of not seeing.⁶⁹ In response to this postmodern challenge, it must first be conceded that interpretation is a subjective enterprise that is prone to error. Yet proclivity to deviation does not necessarily mean complete impossibility of success. This is why evangelical hermeneutics must begin with God’s self-disclosure and then move to issues regarding interpretive shortcomings.

This being the case, accepting the Bible as divine revelation necessarily leads to a fundamental commitment regarding the nature of language.⁷⁰ Since God has chosen to use it as a legitimate means of communication, speech must include the possibility of being understood for potential acceptance or rejection. As already seen in Vanhoozer and Horton, the biblical record encompasses various forms of covenantal discourse whereby God not only performs communicative speech-acts via the biblical writers, but also expects to be understood because certain consequences or rewards are guaranteed results depending on a given reader’s response. Interpretation is then not only possible, it is also a functioning ethical addendum within a Christian framework of hermeneutics because

⁶⁹Frances Schüssler Fiorenza, “The Crisis of Hermeneutics and Christian Theology,” in *Theology at the End of Modernity: Essays in Honor of Gordon Kaufman*, ed. Sheila Greeve Davaney (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991), 125. Also see Stephen D. Moore, “The ‘Post-’ Age Stamp: Does It Stick? Biblical Studies and the Postmodern Debate,” *JAAR* 57 (1989): 543-59.

⁷⁰Again, this reflects the work of both James Smith and Kevin Vanhoozer.

obedience to a text can only be exercised if the understanding of text's communicative act has been attained.

In conjunction with this insight, the idea of covenantal discourse gives clarity to two further problems that normally arise in discussions of evangelical hermeneutics. One regards the tendency to often neutralize claims within various texts at the expense of their particular place in the outworking scheme of the canon. Avery Dulles characterizes this view as defining revelation within terms of the assertive content or core doctrinal affirmations which are embedded within Scripture itself.⁷¹ In some ways this characterization can be misleading because interpreting discourse does include giving careful attention to the illocutionary forces of various speech-acts, which to be fair, do contain propositional content, and in the Bible's case, divinely-revealed content. The key, though, is that illocutions, or actions that are being done with words, do not occur in forensic forms, but in multiple expressions for distinct communicative purposes. Also, the illocutions of the Bible occur in selective stages of redemptive history and even under different covenantal obligations, whether it be Israel under Mosaic stipulations or the early church experiencing New Covenant blessings.⁷² This means then that doctrinal summations of themes conveyed in Scripture cannot proceed without an awareness of the ways in which biblical statements are made nor can they ignore those formats once they are acknowledged. Rather, they must be formulated in a manner that is always sensitive to *how* Scripture communicates as well as *what* is being communicated.

⁷¹See Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983; reprint, 1992), 37-46; idem, *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 71-72. This is the same basic idea that Lindbeck calls the cognitive-propositional approach to theology, George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 21; and what Grenz labels as evangelical modernism, Stanley J. Grenz, "An Agenda for Evangelical Theology in the Postmodern Context," *Didaskalia* 9 (1998): 1-2.

⁷²Regarding the more intricate dynamics involved in this kind of covenantal hermeneutic, see Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, 171-219.

Alongside these concerns regarding the exact nature of propositionalism, the second major issue that a covenantal-discourse approach to hermeneutics addresses is the pertinent issue of authorial-intent. Evangelicals traditionally have shown a commitment to the idea that a major part of proper interpretive theory should include a genuine desire to ascertain the willed meaning that an author intended to convey through a given text.⁷³ Among the many reasons for adopting this approach, evangelicals normally highlight two. One is that the concept of authorial-intent provides a point of reference for stabilizing all textual engagements so that interpreters as well as texts are protected. On one hand, readers are held accountable in order to prevent spurious interpretations while on the other, authors are not misrepresented as saying things in texts that were not intended. Even more importantly, though, the idea of authorial-intent is crucial because it supports a prior commitment to divine revelation. Evangelicals desire to know what an author meant by what was said because that meaning is equivalent to what God meant.

Despite these emphases on authorial intent, nonetheless, two obstacles presently confront evangelicals regarding its hermeneutical legitimacy. One, which actually derives from within evangelical circles, concerns the idea of *sensus plenior*, or fuller meaning.⁷⁴ Herein, because of the dynamics involved in prophecy/fulfillment issues as well as the New Testament's use of the Old Testament, evangelicals disagree as

⁷³One of the most influential thinkers who provided much of the groundwork for this idea is E. D. Hirsch, Jr. The standard work evangelicals normally consult is E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967).

⁷⁴For traditional Catholic treatments of this idea, see Raymond Brown, *The 'Sensus Plenior' of Sacred Scripture* (Baltimore: St. Mary's University, 1955); idem, "The History and Development of the Theory of *Sensus Plenior*," *CBQ* 15 (1953): 141-62. For contrasting evangelical treatments, see Douglas Moo, "The Problem of *Sensus Plenior*," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 179-211; D. A. Oss, "Canon as Context: The Function of *Sensus Plenior* in Evangelical Hermeneutics," *GTJ* 9 (1988): 105-27; Walter Kaiser, "Legitimate Hermeneutics," in *Inerrancy*, 125-35.

to whether biblical texts can entail meanings that transcend what an original human authors intended.⁷⁵ In conjunction with this struggle, authorial-intent also has become an extremely problematic notion because of postmodern shifts to reader-response and poststructuralist (or deconstructionist) theories of hermeneutics. These numerous transitions are made because it is argued that once texts are given to readers, they become distanced from their authors and thereby made vulnerable to the hermeneutical mercies of readers.⁷⁶ Furthermore, just as all ways of knowing are theory-laden, postmodern thought perceives the act of reading not only to be an exercise in observing texts, but also in using them.⁷⁷ Authors and their literary intents are then necessarily eclipsed either by the sheer fact that texts develop lives of their own as they are interpreted over time or by the brutal reality that interpreters exploit them for personal pragmatic gain.

In both of these dilemmas regarding authorial intent, covenantal discourse provides potential direction. For example, with regards to the evangelical concern of *sensus plenior*, it must be emphasized that *divine speech*, as conveyed through divinely-

⁷⁵The literature on this issue is legion. However, four articles in *JETS* that help clarify the existing diversity between evangelicals regarding this issue include Phillip B. Payne, "The Fallacy of Equating Meaning with the Author's Intention," *JETS* 20 (1977): 243-52; W. Edward Glenny, "The Divine Meaning of Scripture: Explanations and Limitations," *JETS* 38 (1995): 481-500; Clark Pinnock, "Biblical Texts; Past and Future Meanings," *JETS* 43 (2000): 71-81; Robert Stein, "The Benefits of an Author-Oriented Approach to Hermeneutics," *JETS* 44 (2001): 451-66.

⁷⁶It must be noted that this dynamic is understood in a variety of ways by different thinkers. Some argue that texts take on an autonomous authority of their own, thereby being able to convey a surplus of meanings that are independent of original authorial intents. This idea is represented in Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976.) Others, such as Hans-Georg Gadamer see texts as existing in dialectical relationships with readers thereby creating a reciprocal dynamic that allows new meanings to develop. See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 369-79.

⁷⁷In the words of Stanley Fish, "It is the interpretive communities, rather than either the text or the reader, that produce meanings and are responsible for the emergence of formal features. See Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 14.

ordained speakers of the canon, is comprised of *speeches* that occurred within various segments of the historical drama of the redemption. Therefore, the communicative horizons of biblical speakers could only reach to the points that were established at the time of their speaking.⁷⁸ Yet the divine speaker, who is not confined to any hermeneutical horizons, guides the overall drama and orchestrates all the covenantal discourses in order to form layers of meaning that only come into focus at the canonical level.⁷⁹ So taken in this light, authorial-intent is deemed an essential key to biblical hermeneutics, but not in a uniform fashion that ignores the obvious canonical dynamics involved in the unfolding of divine-covenantal interrelations.

Notwithstanding further discussions of this issue, covenantal discourse also clarifies certain priorities in response to postmodern theories of hermeneutics. Herein, Vanhoozer's work again proves to be helpful because of his correlation between theism and interpretation. Beliefs about God do in fact dictate beliefs about communication to a certain degree. Thus, there is a certain undeniable factor of ethics involved in the postmodern hermeneutic of suspicion. Though it is imperative to be cautious against intentional as well as unintentional abuses of texts, to argue that authors cannot communicate ideas through texts, which can be potentially understood by readers again goes back to the initial rejection or acceptance of divine speech. If one rejects the idea that God has the capacity to communicate effectively through human language, then it appears that the only viable option is to adopt some form of postmodern ambivalence. However, if God has spoken through agents, it is assumed that understanding is a

⁷⁸Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, 179.

⁷⁹In recent years, one thinker who has offered significant insights into the concept of canonical hermeneutics is Francis Watson. See Francis Watson, *Text, Church, and World: Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994); idem, *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

potential result and therefore, belief in God and the reality of biblical revelation go against the general grain that postmodern thought emphasizes.

Recognizing then that accepting the idea of divine speech as revealed in Scripture also entails certain hermeneutical assumptions antithetical to postmodern thought, a corollary issue that also arises within the context of Christian theology is whether certain biblical interpretations can be viewed as fixed in nature, or for lack of a better word, confessional. Herein, this concern pertains to the nature of orthodoxy, or what belief or set of beliefs are to be considered in such continuity with the teachings of Scripture that to abandon them is considered equivalent to compromising the Christian faith itself. Likewise, these questions also involve further investigations into the functions that doctrinal constructions and theological traditions have in the hermeneutical process of interpreting the biblical texts.

Initially, it should be recognized that these concepts face significant objections and challenges from postmodern, postliberal, and even postconservative directions. Due to the epistemic limitations inherent within the interpretive process, postmodern thought generally characterizes religiously-linguistic frameworks as communally dependent by nature and thereby void of any ontological substance.⁸⁰ Similarly, postliberalism, as seen in the work of Lindbeck, constricts the validity of doctrinal formulations to their internal consistency and intrasystemic function within the overall scheme of a given religious

⁸⁰Stuart Kendall offers a helpful assessment of why this is the case. He observes that “the possibility of ontologically true claims presumes what genealogical and deconstructive postmodernism diagnoses as the ontology of presence common to western metaphysics since Plato’s cave. Postmodernism claims that foundationlessness lives only in the space opened and defined by an ontology of absence.” See Stuart Kendall, “Intra-textual Theology in a Postmodern World,” in *Postmodern Theologies: The Challenge of Religious Diversity*, ed. Terrence W. Tilley (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), 106. Also, for further analysis of this idea, see James B. Miller, “The Emerging Postmodern World,” in *Postmodern Theology: Christian Faith in a Pluralist World*, ed. Frederic B. Burnham (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), 1-19.

community.⁸¹ In between these two currents are also various postconservative thinkers who believe that doctrines do, in one way or another, refer to certain external realities, but show a growing tendency to emphasize the flexibility of doctrinal formulation in order to foster more theological tolerance for alleged advancements in the Christian tradition such as open theism and soteriological inclusivism.⁸² Moreover, a major part of the reason why many postconservatives herald this plea for theological tolerance is because in light of postmodern's suspicions toward epistemic certainty and objectivity, constant claims to doctrinal fidelity are perceived to foster an unhealthy and domineering triumphalism within evangelical ranks.

Several comments should be established in response to these challenges. First of all, in order for any evangelical conceptualization of orthodoxy or doctrinal language to have any legitimate point of reference, the functional role of divine speech as revealed in the covenantal discourse of the canon must be seen as first-order in nature. In other words, biblical language, which entails the voice of the Spirit, provides actual ontological claims about the external world. Granted, this does not necessarily mean that the *sensus literalis* of divine utterances must describe divine truths univocally. In other words, the literary patterns of Scripture are not required to postulate exhaustive, literalistic depictions of the divine essence in order to provide reliable epistemic correlations

⁸¹For further clarification, Lindbeck's system is somewhat complex regarding issues of ontology because he does attempt to embrace the correspondence theory of truth and metaphysical realism. See Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 68-69; Jeffrey Hinsley, "Are Postliberals Necessarily Antirealists? Reexamining the Metaphysics of Lindbeck's Postliberal Theology," in *The Nature of Confession*, 69-80. His system remains open-ended, however, regarding the exact ways in which religious language can reflect first-order truth claims as stated in Scripture. See the criticisms in Wayne Proudfoot, "Regulae Fidei and Regulative Idea: Two Contemporary Theological Strategies," in *Theology at the End of Modernity*, 111-13.

⁸²For example, see Roger Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Years of Unity and Diversity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 194-97.

between who God is and how we can understand Him.⁸³ Rather, the canon offers a range of referential analogies that form a spectrum of dependable constructs which linguistically incarnate what God has chosen to reveal concerning Himself.⁸⁴

This being the case, it likewise must be acknowledged, contra Grenz, that the spiritual dynamics inherent within Scripture precede and thereby contribute to the overall self-understanding of the Christian community rather than vice versa. Stated another way, the Christian encounter with God through Christ occurs as an outflow of the pre-established truths already revealed in divine speech. Scripture does not receive its authority because it gains acceptance by the Christian community that produced it, but because it entails the inspired discourse that has the capacity to produce the Christian community. Therefore, the church's subsequent endeavors to explicate the existential dynamics of the Christian faith entail a commitment not only to formulate various constructs that provide cognitive illumination, but also offer ways of rearticulating the teachings of Scripture so they can be personally applied in an effective manner.⁸⁵

It is attempting to meet these goals that the nature of doctrine, orthodoxy, and theological tradition begin to take their shape. Because of the authoritative and identity-creating features intrinsic to canonical revelation, doctrines function as potential second-order reflection on first-order truth claims. Herein, theological discourse attempts to

⁸³In speaking of the nature of divine discourse, Horton clarifies this point by asserting that "The relationship between our language about God . . . , and God's being is neither identical nor entirely equivocal. We do not know God as God is in the divine hiddenness, but we do know God in His condensation, in His willingness incompletely, yet truthfully to reveal Himself." Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, 191.

⁸⁴Another way to clarify this point is that "if God somehow . . . caused the production of the Bible as the medium of divine discourse, then the analogies are sufficient to each context and for each purpose." *Ibid.*, 190.

⁸⁵See Alister McGrath, *The Nature of Doctrine: A Study in the Foundation of Doctrinal Criticism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 78-79; Peter Toon, *The Development of Doctrine in the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 105-26.

define, summarize, and restate in fallible yet accurate terms what has been spoken within the covenantal discourse of Scripture. To clarify the complexities of this point, two particular thinkers are extremely helpful. One is David Yeago, who in an influential article on the development of theological exegesis, distinguishes between a judgment that is made and the conceptual terms in which a judgment is rendered.⁸⁶ Yeago contends that concepts are employed in discourse for the purpose of predicating certain ideas, which are to be the interpretive priority in doctrinal formulation. In his own words, “Unity in teaching must be sought at the level of judgments and not at the level of concepts, for discourse only teaches, makes claims that can be accepted or rejected, insofar as it passes and urges judgments.”⁸⁷ Therefore, whether one accepts biblical concepts themselves as inerrant and inspired, which evangelicals should do in light of the nature of divine discourse, to simply focus on the terminological and historical contexts of those concepts completely misses the point of the theological task. The purpose of Christian doctrine is to re-articulate the judgments that are made with divinely-inspired concepts in contemporary form. This insight, in turn, leads to another point made by Alister McGrath in his work on the development of Christian doctrine. Among his many insights, the most helpful point that compliments Yeago’s emphasis on theological exegesis is the fact that as doctrinal inquiries continue to interact with the narratives of Scripture, certain frameworks are formulated that not only hone in on given judgments embedded in the canon, but also on the themes that hold those specific judgments together.⁸⁸ Doctrines are then used to define given biblical perceptions as well as substantiate an overall belief-framework for the Christian community. In doing so, doctrines potentially can echo the

⁸⁶David S. Yeago, “The New Testament and Nicene Dogma: A Contribution to the Recovery of Theological Exegesis,” *Pro Ecclesia* 3 (1994): 159. Again, Yeago’s ideas also are utilized by Vanhoozer as well.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸See McGrath, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 61-63.

divinely-objective ideas residing in Scripture. There is a sense then in which doctrinal formulations can reflect the first-order claims of Scripture and hence, inherit a sense of ontological authority that has communal as well as universal implications.⁸⁹

As these investigations continue within the Christian community, eventually doctrines also highlight certain motifs that solidify the general structure of divine discourse and Christian experience. They are then determined to be specific ideas that are non-negotiable, or orthodox. They become core beliefs that become essential to the coherence of the Christian faith as well as the biblical message in general. These maxims are then reapplied within various contexts and ultimately, after proving their importance by withstanding the tests of time, become epistemic clusters that solidify into various theological traditions. Yet despite these dynamics in the development of Christian doctrine, however, the postconservative shift in evangelical thought currently shows hesitancy to delineate the ramifications of orthodoxy, which in turn, causes further confusion regarding the proper way to understand the manner in which orthodoxy can legitimately develop and lead to further theological advancements.

With regard to the nature of orthodoxy in general, it appears, at least in American evangelical circles, that the term is becoming more elastic and ambiguous due to the extremely sympathetic hearing that many postconservatives presently give to postmodern demands for pluralistic tolerance. The globalized culture of twentieth-century culture has revealed the sheer magnitude of worldviews that exist and the postmodern response has been to concede that no non-linguistic or objective criteria exists that can determine if one particular worldview is in fact a view for the world.⁹⁰ In similar fashion,

⁸⁹For further discussion of this point, see D. H. Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition and Renewing Evangelicalism: A Primer for Suspicious Protestants* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 71-99.

⁹⁰See the comments by Michael J. Scanlon, "The Postmodern Debate," in *The Twentieth Century: A Theological Overview*, ed. Gregory Baum (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 235-37.

the abundance of interpretations regarding biblical issues has convinced many post-conservatives that Christian orthodoxy, or more specifically the evangelical tradition, should be defined in the broadest terms possible. Again, a prime example of this can be seen in Roger Olson's plea that evangelicalism be defined in terms of a centered set model as opposed to a bounded set.⁹¹ The reason being that the bounded set model makes little distinction between the gospel and bounded beliefs, or orthodoxy, thereby fostering an ongoing need to sustain doctrinal maintenance and interrogate those who deviate from any one of many doctrinal statutes.⁹² Instead, Olson contends that beliefs should be allowed to wander in various doctrinal directions as long as they do not detract from a centered set of truths. Yet that set of truths is reduced by Olson to only include the deity of Christ (which entails Trinitarianism) and His free provision for salvation through His death, burial, and resurrection as well as a commitment to use the biblical witness as the touchstone guide in formulating all subsequent beliefs.⁹³ Beyond these axioms,

The centered set model views Christianity as a fluid and flexible force field held together by a strong, magnetic center. The boundaries are not as important as the center that identifies authentic Christianity, and all are recognized as truly Christian who are held in, as it were, by the center and are not moving away from it.⁹⁴

The problem with this theological editing is not the postconservative desire to foster theological freedom so possible improvements on doctrinal issues can still be discovered and implemented into evangelical theology. The difficulty is that segments of postconservative thought appear to substitute one potential power struggle for another. As seen in the development of postmodernity, on the one hand, it is always possible to abuse the belief in determinate meaning and prematurely equate a particular interpretation

⁹¹Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief*, 45-48.

⁹²Ibid., 48.

⁹³Ibid., 46-47.

⁹⁴Ibid., 47.

of a text with the text itself. Yet the postmodern choice to embrace the indeterminacy of meaning also is an expression of power because it eliminates hermeneutical accountability. In other words, to say that nothing can be known is just as much an act of hubris as saying that everything can be known. It appears that postconservative attempts to plea for a generous orthodoxy are flavored with this same attitude. Though it is true, as can be seen in fundamentalist ranks, that making every detail of theological inquiry an essential to doctrinal fidelity ultimately leads to Christian groups only being able to talk to themselves, to go in the completely opposite direction and allow evangelical theology to mean almost anything results in it meaning absolutely nothing.

At this juncture, however, it must be recognized that merely establishing a criteria for determining which beliefs are right and which are heretical is an insufficient strategy for solving this dilemma. This can be seen in the fact that much of the debates in evangelical circles regarding theological identity now pertain to method, not just content. Therefore, the apparent perplexity regarding the nature of orthodoxy does not derive merely from questions about what it is, or what allows it to maintain a certain kind of static continuity, but also how it can potentially change as the need arises. This means that understanding what orthodoxy is entails further comprehension of how it develops .

To begin, one cannot critically observe the dynamics of church history and forthrightly conclude that orthodoxy does not evolve in any way, shape, or form. Nevertheless, one can neither neglect the fact that certain beliefs remain constant and non-negotiable in the historical unfolding of doctrinal formulation. The question then is how both dynamics co-exist. Concerning this tension, Craig Blaising has attempted to provide several observations in an attempt to formulate an evangelical understanding of this dynamic. He writes,

Give (a) that any given generation in the history of the church could identify some locus of beliefs they would call orthodox, and given (b) that such generations would consider what they call orthodox as in some way expressive of the historical faith of the church, and assuming (c) that some central continuity can be demonstrated between these “orthodoxies” (i.e., what each generation is calling orthodox), and

given (d) that some differences can also be observed in the expression of these “orthodoxies,” then orthodox doctrinal development is a historical fact.⁹⁵

Note herein that orthodoxy entails certain beliefs that all generations of believers recognize, but at the same time notable differences may exist in how those beliefs, which are mutually recognized as orthodox, are articulated and expressed. The reason behind this apparent paradox is the fact that because doctrinal development occurs progressively throughout history and hence varying contexts, it interacts with several sources and thereby evolves in multiple ways. Moreover, these factors appear to divide the overall process of theological formulation into at least two levels, those being sources of use, which minimally include Scripture and tradition, and then subsequent methods of deductive reasoning and argumentation.⁹⁶

Beginning with the primary source for doctrinal formulation, much discussion has been provided regarding the nature of Scripture. However, two cursory points should be emphasized here regarding the Bible’s relationship to other sources which are used in theological method. First, following in the Reformed tradition, Scripture indeed is the *norma normans non normata*, or standard which is not to be corrected or revised. Second, though, despite one’s acclamation that the Bible is the supreme source for Christian reflection, one’s definition of its authority will dictate the way in which one uses it to develop subsequent beliefs. Consequently, it is not just one’s adherence to

⁹⁵Blaising, “Doctrinal Development in Orthodoxy,” 136.

⁹⁶Ibid., 137-38. Clark Pinnock also mentions that these subjects will continue to receive more attention because evangelicals are recognizing the crucial role that these factors have in the assessment of meaning, especially meaning in biblical texts. See Clark H. Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984), xii-x; idem, *Tracking the Maze: Finding Our Way through Modern Theology from an Evangelical Perspective* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990); idem, “New Dimensions in Theological Method,” in *New Dimensions in Evangelical Thought: Essays in Honor of Millard Erickson*, ed. David S. Dockery (Downers Grove: 1998), 204-06; idem, “Biblical Texts,” 71-72.

biblical authority, that is crucial, but how one defines the integrity and authenticity of the Bible itself.⁹⁷

A second source in doctrinal development, which is receiving enormous amounts of attention in contemporary theological discussions due to the postmodern focus on communally-oriented narratives, is the role of tradition. Traditions unfold within the history of the church as certain beliefs are deemed essential to the general tenure of Scripture. Even so, as this process develops, a distinction also must be acknowledged between the overall Christian *Tradition* and various forms of Christian *traditions*. As D. H. Williams claims, the former refers to the “. . . apostolic and patristic foundation which is the common history we have as Christians . . .,” while other existing traditions “. . . purport that they mirror in a substantial way the Tradition.”⁹⁸ Together, these theological traditions function as hermeneutical restraints that create a centrifugal dynamic that holds doctrinal formulations accountable to the Christian canon. Therefore, there is an undeniable interaction between tradition and Scripture because in one sense, the Christian tradition in general was conceived in light of the initial witness established by Christ, the prophets, and apostles. Yet as Peter Jensen has highlighted, though traditions safeguard Scripture and yes, Scripture does contain traditions, Scripture still stands over traditions because the church cannot claim any rule over the Bible, not even by claiming to be its sole licensed interpreter.⁹⁹ Furthermore, an interesting question to

⁹⁷Again, one who exemplifies this fact is Clark Pinnock. Pinnock holds to what he calls a simple biblicism wherein one does not study the Bible with predisposed “modernistic” commitments to certain views of truthfulness, such as inerrancy and infallibility. Those who do interpret the Bible in light of these latter ideas are characterized by Pinnock as philosophical biblicists. The interesting factor is that Pinnock’s version of simple biblicism has led him to adopt open theism, annihilationism, and inclusivism. See his comments in Pinnock, “New Dimensions,” 200-01.

⁹⁸Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition*, 36.

⁹⁹Peter Jensen, *The Revelation of God*, The Contours of Christian Theology Series (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 167.

note with regard to postmodern versions of postconservative thought is whether new traditions potentially can be created. Some, such as Grenz, are agreeable with regards to the role of tradition in theological method but at the same time, desire evangelicals to be more tolerant of theological diversity. The question is what should keep more theological traditions from developing if they can show continuity with the Christian faith and even highlight ideas that are extremely problematic.¹⁰⁰

Working in conjunction with Scripture and tradition is also the source of the cultural context in which a given Christian community exists. In one sense, this reality is one of the major reasons why orthodoxy is forced to develop over time because often it is the unique needs and issues that arise in various periods of the church's history that provide the need for new clarifications to be made for benefiting the future of Christianity as well as opportunities to revise possible errors of the past. These dynamics aside, nonetheless, some elements of the postconservative emphasis on the role of culture proves to be disconcerting. For instance, Pinnock asserts that "It is a temptation for theologians to stick with original meaning and not take risks discerning the mind of the Spirit for this moment."¹⁰¹ Here, Pinnock is echoing the Grenzian idea that culture and Scripture somehow are used by the Spirit simultaneously for divine speech. This emphasis on culture, though, is alarming and somewhat ironic because it commits the very sin that Pinnock and Grenz accuse conservatives of committing, namely ignoring the diverse features and literary richness of the canon. The original intents of the biblical authors and established meanings of the covenantal discourse embedded within biblical

¹⁰⁰It also would be interesting to know if postconservatives such as Olson, Grenz, and Pinnock would endorse any particular confessions of faith. It is true that each of these professors are members of the Evangelical Theological Society, which requires its members to believe in the Trinity and in the inerrancy of the original autographs. However, each of these thinkers would define inerrancy in terms that conservative evangelicals would interpret to be explicit denials of the idea.

¹⁰¹Pinnock, "New Dimensions," 206. Also see his comments in Pinnock, "Biblical Texts," 74-77.

revelation are so vast and all-encompassing that they transcend any cultural novelties or issues that may arise. The purpose of culture then is not to give the Spirit the chance to compensate on the shortcomings of the biblical authors, but to provide new situations for dialogue between Scripture and the world so that the original messages given by the Spirit can be re-incarnated in new and fresh concepts.¹⁰²

Consequently, the coordinating of these sources into a given format finally leads to the second plain of theological inquiry that contributes to the dynamics of orthodox development, namely the use of reason and various ways of argumentation. In one sense, the idea of *reason* in general is now an extremely complex subject due to the postmodern axiom that there is “. . . no universally valid or specifically privileged framework of rationality.”¹⁰³ Likewise, it is argued by many that the use of reason in theological development reveals a glaring contradiction in the Christian tradition altogether. David Clark perceives this objection when he observes;

If a theological source really is the ultimate authority, there cannot be some more ultimate rational argument lying behind it. If a reasoned argument must support a theological authority, then the argument, not the authority, is ultimate. In the context of evangelical theology, if someone gives a reasoned theological argument to defend Scripture, then reason, not Scripture, becomes the authority.¹⁰⁴

So two of the primary challenges that face evangelical theology with regards to the use of rationality entail a specific definition of reason as well as how it can function without undermining the supreme authority of Scripture. As seen in the work of Grenz and Vanhoozer, answering the first question must begin with the concession that reason is historically and culturally conditioned. The key, though, is that even while theological

¹⁰²For helpful assessments of this interaction between culture and theological development, see Lints, *The Fabric of Theology*, 101-16; and David Clark's recent discussion in Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 99-131.

¹⁰³McGrath, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 152. Also see Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).

¹⁰⁴Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 84.

understanding really entails preunderstanding, this does not mean that any set of given predispositions cannot enter into give-and-take dialogues with Scripture as well as theological traditions and the cultural context in order to reveal aberrant prejudices, epistemic fallacies, and even shortsighted judgments of given issues. Therefore, while it may be the case that reason functions in light of pre-established epistemic orientations, this does not mean that rational thought cannot change or make significant shifts in light of further evidence, trial-and-error, or convincing argumentation. This being the case then, the second concern regarding the relationship between Scripture and reason can best be solved by viewing the use of reason as an activity that occurs dialectically rather than at a linear level.¹⁰⁵ As David Clark argues, worldviews in general, or in this case accepting the Bible as supremely authoritative while using reason to affirm such a belief, function in a holistic sense even when certain commitments act as foundational axioms.¹⁰⁶ While one can argue that Scripture functions as an initial foundation for subsequent inquiries and beliefs, this does not necessitate evangelicals to view the priority of Scripture in simple terms of sequential supremacy.¹⁰⁷ Reason, then, or reasonable approaches, do not necessarily operate in a neat and outlined fashion, but actually function as a kind of epistemic lubricant that attempts to alleviate theological tensions and clarify doctrinal conclusions in as precise terms of possible.

It is in combining the use of all these sources and objectives that the reality of orthodox development begins to come into focus. Beginning with the consummation of divine discourse via the apostolic message, a given tradition as contained in the life and work of Jesus Christ was established. Then as time progressed, certain factors inherent within the biblical witness resonated as various questions and conflicts came into play

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 86.

¹⁰⁶In this sense, the idea of epistemological coherentism offers value to the development of evangelical theological method.

¹⁰⁷Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 87.

within the church's understanding of Scripture. In turn, these challenges led to the realization that these crucial ideas solidified the essential core of the faith in general. Yet even as these ideas eventually became patterns for later inquiries into theological issues, refinements, modifications, and even radical advancements could still occur due to the later contexts and the need for further clarifications. Consequently, orthodoxy has proven to be an entity that exists as a fixed form of beliefs that ironically exist in pliable epistemic molds.

In conclusion to this final discussion, all of these challenges show that further work is required in order to be as precise as possible in articulating what evangelical theology should look like in any culture, whether it be modern or postmodern, and what methodologies should be used to uphold such a tradition. This is why thinkers such as Grenz and Vanhoozer are now choosing to invest much of their time in addressing the multiple issues involved in theological method. They recognize that evangelicalism must re-evaluate the dynamics of theological reflection as well as its own fundamental identity in order to withstand the current cultural challenges of the day. The greatest struggle in engaging these challenges, though, seems to lie in the attempt to understand Christianity as a nonmodern (this means nonpostmodern as well) faith that can be contextualized for various cultures in nonharmful ways.¹⁰⁸ Grenz, Olson, and others see this challenge as self-defeating somewhat because they believe it is in the very ability of Christianity to adopt major segments of postmodern thought and jettison certain conservative commitments that the theological task can move forward. Fortunately, however, Vanhoozer's confessional version of postconservatism shows that evangelicalism does not have to be anti-conservative or extremely postmodern in nature in order to maintain a voice in the current intellectual setting. Nevertheless, postmodern postconservatives most

¹⁰⁸Millard Erickson also expressed this concern in relation to evangelical hermeneutics in general. See Millard Erickson, *Evangelical Interpretation: Perspectives on Hermeneutical Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 56.

likely will maintain their unwarranted denunciations of “modernistic” conservative theology and continue to propose ideas that appear to be eroding the very fabrics that initially held evangelicalism together. Time will only tell what kind of continuity postmodernized expressions of postconservative evangelicalism will be able to sustain with historic Christianity.

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ABSTRACT

REVISING EVANGELICAL THEOLOGICAL METHOD IN THE POSTMODERN CONTEXT: STANLEY J. GRENZ AND KEVIN J. VANHOOZER AS TEST CASES

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This dissertation examines the theological diversity that is currently developing within North American evangelicalism due to the growing influence of postmodernism and the resulting postconservative shift in evangelical thought. Chapter 1 begins with an initial assessment of the historical background and intellectual landscape behind the postmodern setting as well as the reasons why many evangelicals, such as Stanley J. Grenz and Kevin J. Vanhoozer, have chosen to adopt postconservative approaches to theological method.

Chapter 2 then moves to a critical analysis of these two theologians by first treating the work of Stanley Grenz. This segment evaluates his proposals regarding theological method by outlining the primary ideas and factors that lead to his version of a postmodern evangelical theology.

Chapter 3 subsequently offers a survey of the contrasting ideas of Kevin J. Vanhoozer. Here again, the tracing of Vanhoozer's distinct rendition of postconservatism is done by examining the major factors that are prominent within his work.

Chapter 4 then provides evaluations of the strengths and weaknesses of Grenz's and Vanhoozer's thought as well as points of comparison and contrast between them. In the end, it is argued that while both thinkers share several mutual criticisms of conservative evangelicalism, Grenz's expression of postconservatism is noticeably different from Vanhoozer's. Specifically, it is shown that Grenz clearly advocates a kind

of postmodern postconservatism, which entails modifications in theological method as well as certain doctrinal commitments intrinsic to historic evangelicalism. Juxtaposed to Grenz, it also is argued that Vanhoozer provides a more confessional model of postconservatism because his recommendations for a new methodology still remain loyal to certain theological commitments that Grenz would deem as non-essential to the evangelical theology.

Chapter 5 finally assesses the potential future effects that certain kinds of postconservative thought could have in evangelical circles. Likewise, several key elements regarding theological method that still require further attention in light of the development of postconservatism are also highlighted and discussed.

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