

Book Reviews

A.E. McGrath, *A Passion for Truth: the intellectual coherence of evangelicalism* (Leicester: Apollos, 1996) 287 pp.

Alister McGrath is already established as a scholar and a major contributor to theology and debate, especially among evangelicals. The list of his publications in the last decade is staggering and shows no sign of tailing off. In this, his most recent volume he enters a conversation begun in recent years by such as Stanley Grenz, David Wells and Mark Noll.

These and other writers have called for a reexamination of evangelical thought. In markedly different ways, each has been critical of trends or flaws in the theological and intellectual underpinnings of the movement. Whilst acknowledging the force of these critiques, in *A Passion for Truth* McGrath sets out to 'explore the coherence of evangelicalism by bringing out the inner consistency of the evangelical approach and demonstrating the internal contradictions and vulnerabilities of its contemporary rivals' (25).

The book thus falls naturally into two sections. The first contains chapters on evangelical views on Christ and scripture; the second interacts with three 'isms' described and critiqued by McGrath: 'postliberalism', 'postmodernism' and 'pluralism'.

Throughout the book McGrath displays his usual erudition and clarity of argument. Yet there remain clear echoes of the evangelical 'defensiveness' which the author claims to have left behind. McGrath acknowledges that one of the outcomes of this has been that evangelical theologians 'have been more concerned with defending the authority of Scripture than with engaging with its contents.' This is a trenchant point but it is open to question whether McGrath has stepped as far beyond the defensiveness he identifies

claims. He starts promisingly - the first major chapter (on 'the uniqueness of Jesus Christ') is a good statement of a conservative view. However whilst this chapter takes up some 26 pages, the second (on that evangelical favourite, scripture) demands 68.

The second section is mixed. McGrath is unconvincing on postliberalism and adds nothing new on pluralism. By far the strongest chapter is that which critiques postmodernism. Both the strengths and the limitations of this crucial part of the modern intellectual scene are fairly identified. Here the title of the book becomes important. McGrath argues well for a tighter sense of 'truth' than some postmodernists concede. Nevertheless, the ways in which postmodernism may act as a critical ally are accepted.

This acceptance of aspects of post-enlightenment thought is significant. *A Passion for Truth* may adopt the superstructure of standard evangelical apologetic method in its extensive treatment of scripture but McGrath is altering the foundations. He is clear, for instance, about the need to move beyond the Princeton theology of the Hodges and Warfield. McGrath is undoubtedly right to make this call. A high view of scripture does not - indeed, cannot - depend upon rationalism alone. For evangelicals the implications of such a shift are considerable. In this book McGrath dares to try new paths. For this alone *A Passion for Truth* is worth reading.

Martin Sutherland

S.J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 1996).

I bought Stanley Grenz's 'A Primer on Postmodernism' because, in a climate where 'paradigm shift' seems to be shouted from every street corner, I wanted a reasonably concise yet thorough introduction into the (supposedly) emerging parading of postmodernism.