

**Stanley Grenz & John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism. Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001) pp.**

Stanley Grenz is a prolific writer on ethics, Baptist practice and theology. His latest offering is an ambitious project that takes seriously the cultural transition from modernity to postmodernity. Grenz works with co-author John Franke to critique the theological projects of modernity as an enculturated search for either, a foundation of experience (liberalism), or for a foundation of rational, propositional truth (evangelicalism).

Instead, for Grenz and Franke, theology must embrace one's specific historic context and serve the church by seeking to articulate the 'cognitive mosaic of the Christian faith' (p. 51). The book then seeks to outline a theology for a postmodern context. It introduces three sources; Scripture, tradition and culture, and three focal motifs; Trinity, Community and Eschatology. These are reworked in an attempt to ensure their centrality and capture their vitality, without falling into modernist foundational assumptions.

The theme of community is central in this task. It allows Scripture and tradition to function authoritatively, while held within the narrative of the life of the embodied, local community of God. Thus the tensions inherent in postmodern thought, those of universality and particularity, ethnicity and globalisation, are embraced.

Beyond the validity of such a communal approach, the book left me pondering a number of methodological questions. Firstly, the multiplicity of sources when postmodern culture becomes a theological dialogue partner. This is most apparent when Grenz engages with the work of Tom Beaudoin, who uses popular culture as his primary cultural resource. Beaudoin's dialogue partners include rock bands and grunge fashion. It is a far cry from Grenz and Franke's engagement with thinkers such as Lyotard and Toulmin. *Beyond Foundationalism* argues

(rightly, I believe) that theology is a mosaic. Equally, contemporary culture is a mosaic. We are faced with the enormous complexity of the contemporary theological task.

Secondly, the question of the location of the theologian in the practice of contextualisation. The book reads as that of an earnest language learner, the missionary who has studied hard, but will always speak with an accent. Perhaps a truly contextual postmodern theology can only come from those who have grown up immersed inside the world Grenz and Franke seek to describe.

*Beyond Foundationalism* is an ambitious project. It performs a valuable service in exploring community as central theological tool in a contemporary re-excavation of Christianity. It clears the space for a vital theological task, that of articulating Christian identity in this strange new world of the twenty-first century.

**Steve Taylor**