Three Evangelical Responses to Postmodernism:
Stanley J. Grenz, Douglas Groothuis, and Millard J. Erickson

Sang-Hwa, Han*

I. Introduction

Millard J. Erickson introduces the various responses of evangelical theologians to the challenges of postmodern thought in his book entitled, *Postmodernizing the Faith.* In this book, he divides the evangelical responses into two types: one is negative and the other positive. In the first group he includes David F. Wells, Thomas Oden, and Francis Schaeffer and in the second group, Stanley J. Grenz, Richard J. Middleton, Brian J. Walsh, and B. Keith Putt. The first group takes a strongly critical attitude against both modernism and postmodernism, whereas the second group shows more sympathy towards postmodernism. Erickson examines each of these evangelical theologians' responses and evaluates them both positively and negatively. In conclusion, he briefly presents his own response. More recently Erickson published a book entitled, *Truth or Consequences* in which he presents more in-depth studies on postmodernism with his insightful evaluations.

In this paper I shall examine three different evangelical responses to the postmodern challenge, namely, Millard Erickson, Stanley Grenz, and Douglas Groothuis. The rational for this choice is that Grenz seems to represent those trends that are sympathetic towards postmodern thought and Groothuis represents the other extreme.

* Ph.D., Associate Professor of Systematic Theology, ACTS.

Erickson seems to take a more balanced position and provides us with a viable direction that evangelical theology should take. Through examining these responses, I shall seek to glean some insights on a direction for evangelical theology in the postmodern era. Before dealing with the responses, it is logically necessary to explain the nature of the postmodern challenge.

**II. The Postmodern Challenge**  
**A. Definition of Postmodernism**

The term "postmodernism" has been used in so many different senses that it causes much confusion among the interlocutors. Therefore it must be defined before being used. Alex Callinicos provides a useful classification of the usage of the term.² First, the term, "postmodernism" refers to certain style in art, architecture and literature. Second, it refers to a philosophical trend that is sometimes used interchangeably with "post-structuralism." Finally, it takes a sociological significance, referring to a movement from a modern capitalistic society to a post-industrial society that is characterized by globalism, pluralism, and extreme consumerism. It seems that these three senses are not entirely separated, but related and consist of one broad cultural trend in the present era. I shall use the term in this comprehensive and loose sense that refers to the cultural and intellectual mood or ethos which dominates the present era since the late twentieth century. Particularly, I will use the term to refer to those intellectual orientations over against modernism. If so, what characteristics does postmodernism have?

**B. Characteristics**

Postmodernism is, in a word, an attempt to go beyond modernism. The former contains both continuity and discontinuity.

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