THE ROLE OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY
IN THE THEOLOGY OF STANLEY J. GRENZ

Jason S. Sexton

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews

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University of St. Andrews
St. Mary’s College

The Role of the Doctrine of the Trinity in the Theology of Stanley J. Grenz

A thesis submitted by

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University of St. Andrews

To the Faculty of Divinity
In candidacy for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

St. Andrews, Scotland
March 2012
Thesis Declaration

I, Jason Scott Sexton, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 80,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

I was admitted as a research student in September, 2008 and as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Theology in May, 2009; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2008 and 2011.

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I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Theology in the University of St Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

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Abstract

This thesis provides an examination into the primary features in the theology of one of the turn of the century’s leading evangelical theologians, Stanley J. Grenz. It begins by establishing the controversial nature of Grenz’s project within evangelical theology, and how his aims were misread by a number of evangelical scholars. It then argues that the primary feature in his writings was the doctrine of the Trinity, giving shape to his methodology, theology, and ethical engagement. Accordingly, this thesis identifies the most significant features he adopted and adapted from Wolfhart Pannenberg, whose influence on Grenz is readily seen. These features include not only how Grenz derived particular methodological aspects from Pannenberg (chap. 2), but also those related to the shape of his trinitarian theology itself (chap. 3). Next, while realizing that Grenz’s newfound emphasis on a trinitarian project was not placed on a tabula rasa, a wider account of his trinitarian background is considered (chap. 4), as is the particular developmental shape of his doctrine of the Trinity itself (chap. 5). Following this, an examination is made into how Grenz accessed this doctrine of the Trinity, through the imago Dei concept, informed by a theological hermeneutic, theological exegesis, and weaved through the traditional systematic loci (chap. 6). Finally, the shape of his trinitarian ethical work is considered in light of the overall coherence of his body of writings, both in its early form as a Christian ethic as well as in the test-cases that were part of his engagement (chap. 7). This is followed by a summary of the reception of Grenz’s project, which is deemed consistent with his aims of being both a distinctly evangelical and trinitarian theologian.
For one who has brought so much joy through such horrendous circumstances,

bringing the reminder that the triune God of love gives the best of gifts

through the most challenging trials, in the face of death and disability;

having been used by God to cause me to wonder again at the Incarnation and Atonement,

by which the triune God of grace will one day bring about the hope of the gospel

to grant perfect communion with him and wipe away every tear;

who in her thirteen month old body challenged me to depend afresh

on the Author of life and the Perfecter of faith amidst tragedy

and spurred me on to the completion of this thesis

in a Parisian intensive care unit

For

Kara Elise
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Theology is done in community, which has been the story of this work from beginning to end. I am grateful to the believers of sovereign grace church, an Evangelical Free church plant, and especially David Garza who supported me by letting me get away (though not totally sure why) amidst great needs in the life of a young church with an even more embryonic vision of what we believed the gospel would accomplish in California.

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Professors Paul Fiddes and Alister McGrath graciously agreed to exam this thesis. And while any mistakes remaining are completely my own, the thesis would be nowhere near as good without their thorough and probing examination, which came from many different angles. I am immensely grateful for the careful attention they gave to my work, for their rigorous examination, and their ultimately gracious affirmation of my treatment of Grenz’s writings. I could not be more grateful to these men for their perceptive reading of my work, and for their insightful and penetrating comments and corrections.

I completed this thesis at the beginning of a busy postdoctoral year at Oak Hill College in London, which is a remarkable place of vibrant evangelical theology with a passion for serving the church. I am grateful for Charles Anderson’s creative thinking, and Mike and Heather Ovey have encouraged in many ways. The Strange’s have been remarkable: Dan, a reformed evangelical thinker spurred me on to complete this thesis, and served to challenge me in the early stage of my postdoctoral work; Elly did about everything imaginable to ensure that we had the warmest welcome possible. Both have made this time at Oak Hill the most incredible treat.

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I wish to also express my heartfelt gratitude to Paul and Wendy Dixon, who have journeyed with us through many ministry endeavors, have supported us endlessly with financial assistance, deep love and prayer, and have been a constant source of encouragement. And I am grateful especially to my parents, Gary and Lynn Sexton, have also provided financial help, consistent encouragement in the best ways they knew how, and for their endurance and through all of my life and decisions, many of which did not glorify the God I have come to love. My sister Rebekah has also encouraged, as has my beautiful Grandma, Barbara Sexton, who first helped me really learn how to write in possibly the most unconventional setting.

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### Abbreviations

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Chapter 1:
An Evangelical Trinitarian [Re]Visionary

1.1. Introduction

Stanley J. Grenz was one of the leading figures in evangelical theology at the turn of the century. He has been called “a preeminent evangelical theologian,” “one of the premier evangelical theologians in the world,” and “one of the most prolific evangelical theologians of our time.”¹ His work has received constant attention from stern critics highly skeptical of his work to firm backers deeply sympathetic, and everything in between. His most mature work has been referred to by leading scholars as of a “more thorough and of an altogether higher order” than his earlier work,² which was displayed in the increasing quality of scholarship that his creative, constructive, and ambitious writing agenda left at the point of his tragic death on 12 March 2005,³ indicating how significant a loss Stanley Grenz was for evangelical theology.

Grenz’s project has been one of the most controversial in the recent history of evangelical theology.⁴ His work has received many labels, including “postconservative,”⁵

³ See the list of at least fourteen books he was planning to write, eight of which had deadlines between 2005 and 2011. He planned at least one major volume a year, after which he intended a revision of his Theology text, and a “3-vol Systematic” (see Stanley J. Grenz, “Writing Projects” under the electronic file name, “WritingDeadlines,” last updated 22 Feb. 2005 [unpublished], 1).
⁴ There are different readings of Grenz’s agenda, even among his friends. Roger E. Olson recently stated: “Once when Thomas Oden spoke publicly of Stan’s ‘project,’ Stan said to me in private ‘I didn’t know I had a project!’ Of course, later, near the end of his life, he was working on a project with his Matrix series. But I’m not sure even he knew exactly where that was going” (personal email correspondence, 3 Feb. 2010). However, consistent with Oden’s understanding, Grenz himself spoke of his constructive work using the terms “proposal,” “program,” and “project,” as early as 1993 with his “constructive project” already in the works (see, e.g., Stanley J. Grenz, Revisioning Evangelical Theology [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993], 180 [hereafter, RET]).
⁵ This term appears to have come into pejorative usage with Millard J. Erickson, The Evangelical Left: Encountering Postconservative Evangelical Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), although it is reclaimed with positive reinforcement by Roger E. Olson, Reformed and Always Reforming: The Postconservative Approach to Evangelical Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 28, who sees this approach to evangelical theology as a “style,” displayed in the work
“meliorist,”
“postmodern in approach and worldview,”
and even post-evangelical, this lattermost designation being less of a label and more of a description of his work. All of these descriptions eventually came to be viewed in a negative light, casting much doubt on Grenz’s work as not only a conservative theologian, but also a distinctly evangelical one. And yet not only did Grenz see himself as “hopelessly conservative,”
but he also very shortly before his death declared, “I remain an evangelical through and through,” with the working desire “to spark a renewal in evangelical thought and piety for the sake of enhancing our gospel witness and our ministry to people in the contemporary context.”

Perhaps the most facetious assessment of the implications of his work were given in a paper titled, “How the Grenz Stole Christmas,” by R. Douglas Geivett. In this paper, Geivett affirmed that he was not suggesting that Grenz had
“crossed the line” by denying any key doctrine from the classic orthodox creeds, or that he had “deliberately sabotaged the faith,” but that he had rather paved the way, brick by brick, for others who come after him to upstage him, as it were, and carry the method to its natural, and I should think, unwelcome conclusion—that if Christianity is true, there is no way to know that it is true or even to be justified in believing that it is true, and indeed that Christianity is nothing more than a conceptual framework which as such bears no relation of correspondence to reality and so really is not true after all.”

Effectively, Grenz was consistently accused of the slippery-slope fallacy, which he explicitly and continually repudiated. Herein lies a significant problem for the present thesis. Who is the real Stanley J. Grenz? And what is the accurate description of his theology? Even some who once heartily endorsed his work have more recently had a shift in sympathies. But is this reading of Grenz’s work valid?

1.2. Background to the Present Study

Upon commencing doctoral studies with Stephen R. Holmes, I began a study seeking to identify how the particular projects of North American evangelical Baptist theologians Millard Erickson and Stanley J. Grenz differed from one another. The interest in Grenz and Erickson flowed from previous postgraduate work on evangelicals and the doctrine of the Trinity, a subject that has continued to interest me greatly. The initial approach for the doctoral research aimed to locate Grenz and Erickson’s particular doctrines of the “social Trinity,” and how these

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13 In a seemingly recent insight which was not previously disclosed, James Packer recently commented, “It is now clear to me that I never was in sufficient sympathy with Stan’s overall project” (personal correspondence via email, 7 June 2011). Packer’s enthusiastic endorsement of Grenz’s one-volume theology reads: “Clear, well informed, up to date, and firmly anchored in the mainstream of Christian wisdom. Oriented to the church, the Holy Spirit, and the future in a biblically proper way, this work transcends the rationalism and individualism that mar some of its predecessors…. An outstanding achievement” (Stanley J. Grenz, Theology for the Community of God [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994; 2d ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], back cover) (hereafter, TCG1 and TCG2, respectively). As of 20 Oct. 2011, however, Packer’s official endorsement has not been withdrawn.

14 See the forthcoming, Jason S. Sexton, Evangelicals and the Trinity: Tracing the Return to the Center of Christian Theology (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2013).
conceptions might have organically worked into the rest of their theologies and ethical engagement, as each had written ample material to commence the study. In culmination of the study, I hoped to have reached conclusions about the manner and reasons behind Grenz and Erickson’s different perspectives on theology’s engagement with postmodernism. However, as I commenced reading in Autumn 2008, it quickly became apparently that there were a great deal of conflicting readings of Stanley Grenz’s writings, limiting the ability to discern even an adequate accounting of his work. It also became apparent that some of the fundamental secondary work on Grenz’s own material had not yet been done, even in light of the fact that there had been over three years since his death and the unfortunate and untimely ending of his program. Today the situation has changed very little. With the encouragement of my doktorvater the project shifted its focus to the subject and writings of Stanley Grenz. And during Spring 2009, with permission from Edna Grenz, this project was enhanced by the acquisition of a significant number of Grenz’s unpublished materials, some being paper copies while most were electronic.\textsuperscript{15}

1.3. Difficulties Inherent to the Present Study

Stanley Grenz’s work has continued to garner increasing interest, but less so from the monolithic, hegemonic approach that held sway for roughly the last eight years of his life and academic career, which has already been identified. From the turn of the century until his untimely death in 2005, a large number of Masters theses critical of his work were produced from evangelical academic institutions. His project had also come under considerable scrutiny in a number of PhD dissertations that maintained a similar emphasis.\textsuperscript{16} But since his death, a

\textsuperscript{15} This was nearly two years before the Stanley Grenz collection became available at the John Richard Allison Library, Vancouver, BC, in Apr. 2011.

number of research projects have given much more serious, even-handed attention to his work.¹⁷ This does not mean that recent research has not been critical of his contributions, but it has increasingly critiqued his work in a manner much different from the earlier homogeneous reactionary approach. Each of these studies have their own agendas and reasons for engaging Grenz’s work and why it is a factor for their particular research aims. But fading and nearly gone is the mood that has treated his effort dismissively, under pejorative and misrepresentative labels such as postmodern, captive to culture, or something else.¹⁸ The academy is beginning to take his work seriously, and that, on the material’s own terms. These welcome contributions have paid attention to his work as a constructive theologian, and whereas this thesis will have particular issues with a number of the conclusions of these studies, they have nevertheless explored new avenues of research indicative of Grenz’s own particular research aims and the endeavors that his work sought to constructively contribute to.

What has been said so far has mainly been meant to highlight the difficult challenges that have surrounded Grenz’s controversial project. The contested nature of his work has created significant challenges that have made it difficult to both access and assess Grenz’s writings and agenda. This is not in any way to suggest that either Evangelicalism as a tradition, or evangelical theology as a subject, is not a “contested” phenomenon.¹⁹ In many ways the phenomenon


¹⁹ William J. Abraham, “Church and Churches: Ecumenism,” in The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology, ed. Gerald R. McDermott (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), 297. This is also displayed in the recent
identifiable as Evangelicalism and evangelical theology are most adequately understood as “an ongoing conversation” constantly returning to particular themes whilst holding out Jesus Christ as the hope of the world.\textsuperscript{20} The curious case of Stanley Grenz displays the contestedness of the evangelical tradition and its theology, and acknowledging the controversy surrounding his work provides both a catalyst and incentive for approaching his actual work directly in order to determine what he was saying amidst the unfortunately loose and somewhat careless descriptions of his work given by well-known evangelical figureheads who either sought to defend or dismiss his program, which treatments have been subsequently mimicked by later theologians.

But aside from the controversy swirling around his writings, prompting responses from numerous voices, his work is also difficult to assess due to its sheer volume. In twenty-three years, Grenz authored, co-authored, or edited twenty-eight books, and over one hundred articles, essays and reviews covering a wide-range of theological subjects. Beyond the sizeable body of material he left, his writings skillfully treaded the worlds of both the academic and the popular, which often made it difficult to see the coherence of his work, and whether or not he had an explicitly identifiable agenda. Grenz also had the keen ability to cover a large swath of material in his assessment of issues related to his constructs, especially concerning findings from other disciplines outside of theology and in the contemporary culture. While these features often were surveyed in order to establish the contexts in which he was working and the questions being asked therein, providing invaluable material for his construction and raising issues that facilitated important interdisciplinary conversations and contextually-appropriate articulations of the gospel, so many commentators on Grenz’s work mistakenly cite his descriptions of other positions (which he was a master at describing) as his own.

Additional difficulties arising from assessing Grenz’s work can be seen in the continual effort he set forth while isolating individual issues throughout the writing process that might have lacked clarity which were nevertheless intended to be further developed and illumined throughout the constructive and creative writing process, as many scholars do as a matter of practice. Writing was his creative process. He unfortunately left behind an uncompleted project at the time when his scholarly ambitions and academic capabilities were at their peak. He was an evangelical theologian who actually took the work of constructive theology very seriously, seeking to present ideas to be tested by the church and the academy with a view towards further revision of that theology in service to the church and world.

As a result of these difficulties, in order to provide a substantial assessment of Grenz’s programmatic corpus, the entire body of his work must be brought into consideration. His work must be assessed on its own terms, according to his explicit agenda, and on the grounds of his own explicit aims and relative accomplishment of those aims. The present thesis is therefore the first work seeking to provide an exhaustive treatment of Grenz’s writings, having set out to explore the entirety of his available written material, and thereby aiming to provide an accurate, thorough, and exhaustive account of the primary feature running conspicuously throughout his work. It grants primary consideration to the articulation of his own self-understood aims, along with his self-conscious methodology. Therefore this thesis begins where Grenz began, by sketching the explicit methodology he deemed adequate to carry his project through, which he identified as the sources and motifs inherent to distinctly evangelical theology.
1.4. Grenz’s Methodology

As his writing ministry began to blossom into its second decade (1990s), Grenz had already written a number of works devoted directly to serving the church.\(^{21}\) He had already established himself as a highly capable theologian, being one of the earliest interpreters of Pannenberg’s systematic program at its pinnacle.\(^{22}\) Engagement with contemporary theology was also on his radar, about which he made a number of formative conclusions concerning its shape and state nearing the end of the twentieth century.\(^{23}\) It was out of this trajectory that his single-volume *Theology for the Community of God* (1994) was birthed, and yet not without a preliminary, “more programmatic book” that he was encouraged to generate prior to the wake of the single-volume systematic theology.\(^{24}\) This methodological work became *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* (1993), marking Grenz’s call for “some new paradigms” within evangelical theology, and an agenda for its future.\(^{25}\)

The “revisioning” approach offered by Grenz’s initial programmatic work grew out of concern “for the future of the gospel witness in a rapidly changing world,” and was embarked upon with the goal of sparking interest and conversation amongst evangelical theologians concerning how “to live as God’s people and share the good news of the salvation available in Jesus Christ our Lord.” As such, he advocated a plan that sought “to articulate the biblical, evangelical vision in a manner that both upholds the heritage [evangelicals] embrace and speaks to the


\(^{24}\) See the account given in TCG1, x.

\(^{25}\) RET, 11.
setting” in which evangelicals are located. In therein he sought to establish the key “sources” from which to draw for his constructive theology.

1.4.1. Theology’s Sources: The Grenz Triadologue

The sources for Grenz’s theological program were scripture, church history, and the contemporary context. While not sharing equal authority, these three sources were viewed as the premium voices informing the second-order, very human enterprise of theological reflection.

1.4.1.1. Scripture

Deemed the “primary norm” or “norming norm” of theology, the Bible reserves “the primary voice in the theological conversation,” and it is from it that constructive theology draws first. Its status as “our supreme authority for theological reflection” maintains the legacy evangelicals inherited from the reformation. This emphasis can be seen in how Grenz looked to the Westminster Confession of Faith (1.10), joining Word and Spirit together, and thus designating that it is the Spirit who speaks in and through scripture.

As a “crucial presupposition” Grenz maintained that “[t]he reading of the biblical text must always take precedence over our theological constructions.” And yet this commitment was never intended to lapse into subjective individualism. Because it is the church’s book, the Bible is to be read theologically as “theological scripture,” itself being a theological text having

26 RET, 11 (italics added for emphasis).
27 While the sources are initially set forth in RET (1993), attention in the present section of this essay will also be given to subsequent methodological works which highlight and develop more fully (with no significant differences) these sources in Grenz’s overall proposal for theology.
28 RET, 81-84. See also John Webster, Holy Scripture (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 126.
29 RET, 93.
31 RET, 93. See also RTC1, 206-7; and RTC2, 214.
33 BF, 83.
34 BF, 68, 79, 89.
inherent, unique theological emphases. For Grenz, this meant approaching the text “conscious
that we are participants in the one faith community that spans the ages,” while also “recognizing
the theological heritage within which we stand as contemporary readers of the text.” Grenz
maintained the central role of the scriptures not just as the primary source for theology but also
for community life, the understanding of scripture being critical in community vitality. For this
reason the church constantly celebrates, while gathering together to hear the sermon during
worship, for instance, which is understood as “the divine provision of instruction in the present
as an outgrowth of the Spirit’s formulation of the Bible in the past.” This leads to theology’s
next source.

1.4.1.2. Tradition

According to Grenz, the church’s theological history or tradition is “the product of the
ongoing reflection of the Christian community on the biblical message.” In this way, it can be
spoken of as “an extension of scripture.” Nevertheless, while playing an important function in
theology, the role of tradition is a secondary one. It provides reasoning for pursuits like
confessions of faith or doctrinal statements as well as revealing historical examples that should
be learned from in order to be followed or avoided, and which “must be tested by the
Scriptures,” receiving primary correction from the inspired text. Grenz referred to all this as the
“hermeneutical trajectory of the theological conversation,” which ever remains an “open”
tradition, and yet simultaneously provides “an interpretive context” for evangelicals as well as a
context for living out the tradition. As the hermeneutical context is established, it then “allows

35 BF, 91.
36 TCG2, 493.
37 See the helpful discussion Grenz provided to explain what he meant and did not mean by the term
“tradition,” in RTC1, 208-9 and RTC2, 216-17.
38 BF, 119; and RET, 95.
39 RTC2, 216-17.
40 RET, 97.
41 This is opposed to groups that “run the risk of transforming their creeds, even if unofficially or
unintentionally, into de facto substitutes for Scripture” (BF, 124-25).
for creativity in addressing new situations while providing a basis for identifying interpretation that is not consonant with the historical position of the community.” So, while viewing scripture as theology’s primary source, with tradition understood as secondary, Grenz concluded further that “we as theologians would do well to admit that we do in fact look to culture as a tertiary source in our theological reflections and that throughout the church’s history its theologians have indeed viewed theology as a ‘trialogue’ involving the biblical message, the theological heritage and the contemporary culture.” This leads to Grenz’s final source for the theological endeavor.

1.4.1.3. Culture

The final voice in Grenz’s trialogue is the contemporary culture. He conceived this in two senses. First, it is the particular historical context wherein the church is situated, within which the Spirit speaks to the church. Second, it is the context into which the gospel must be proclaimed. This was perhaps the one area where Grenz received the most austere critique, especially while operating under the rubric where he saw the Spirit’s speaking in scripture and in culture as “ultimately one speaking.” And yet this understanding of Grenz’s position has not made room for the fact that whilst Grenz affirmed that the Spirit may speak however and wherever the Spirit chooses, “evangelical theology must always give primacy to the Spirit’s voice speaking through the biblical text.”

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42 BF, 127-28. This would keenly apply to cases like the Roman Catholic view of justification at the time of the sixteenth century Reformation, e.g.


Grenz was aware that culture can and does serve as a harmful, diabolical device, but also as a “playground of the Spirit.” As such, the “culture” source justifies Grenz’s dependence on contemporary theologians, as well as on “scientific findings” from other disciplines. He drew deeply from the “contemporary context,” situated in history, as a source where God speaks. This meant that he found “a host of traces of divine grace present in the midst of human brokenness.” In particular cultural contexts, Grenz asserted, the Spirit speaks not independent of scripture, but “through scripture… in the particularity of the historical-cultural context in which we live,” and “in which the theologian seeks to work.” Hence, the theologian enjoys the onus of the ongoing task of listening intently to culture in order to be able to construct theology that will serve the church “in formulating its message in a manner than can speak within the historical-social context.” And yet this commitment to take culture seriously was not without awareness of possible dangers that the biblical message may become accommodated to “the dictates of culture,” the same error made by classic liberal theology. But vigilance is needed, he held, so that the gospel message continues “to speak to culture,” without being swallowed up by it. In other words, Grenz did not grant culture the weight of “being the normative standard determining the nature of the gospel message itself but as a conversation partner that as theologians we must take seriously in our constructive articulations of the ‘faith once

47 For Grenz, contemporary theologians fall into two of the sources of his triadogenesis: the stream of church tradition and the contemporary context. These sources are not isolated from the first source (scripture), but are dynamically and intimately related to it.
48 RET, 97-101, 113.
50 BF, 161. This is not merely a speaking that can be discerned individually, lapsing into a necessary subjectivism, but is discerned within the context of the redeemed, gathered community which is imbedded in a social-historical context. See also BF, 68, 92, 160-66; and RTC2, 217-19.
delivered.’ Culture thereby becomes a servant, providing essential conceptual tools that “can assist the church in expressing its world view in current thought-forms and in addressing current problems and outlooks.”

Grenz’s usage of these three sources informed the shape of his constructive work, especially in the ways the sources related to one another in the order in which he arranged them, the primary source flowing into the secondary one, and then the tertiary one by the triune God’s governance and working both in the church and in the world. As he saw it, these sources provided the necessary resources to enable him to sketch a vision capable of reckoning with postmodern sensibilities in culture, and as he envisioned seeing the gospel develop further in the world, which in turn gave substance to the distinct shape of the three theological motifs working together in Grenz’s proposal.

1.4.2. The Motif Triad

The sources Grenz utilized for his revisioned evangelical theology suggest that each Christian community—with members having repented and believed in the biblical gospel, having been placed “in Christ” and therefore now existing as part of the “global village” known as the “evangelical family”—will nevertheless be “local,” having its own unique cultural expression of Christianity. In considering what makes each of these local theologies distinctly Christian, Grenz looked toward a “style” they all share. Specifically, he suggested that all local Christian theologies are “trinitarian in content, communitarian in focus, and eschatological in orientation.”

54 TCG2, 19-20.
55 For recent accounts of Grenz’s motifs, see the lengthy survey of Knowles, Beyond Evangelicalism, 128-54, and also a more simple survey by Harris, The Theological Method of Stanley J. Grenz, 258-66. I will not survey the motifs as these other works did, but aim to show how they relate to one another, and especially how the doctrine of the Trinity runs conceptually throughout them.
57 BF, 166. For an account detailing how these motifs evolved between the period from RET (1993) to RTC (2000), showing how the original motifs of “kingdom” and “community” very organically evolved into “Trinity,” “community,” and “future,” see §7.1.3. of this thesis.
Accordingly, Grenz’s renewed vision for evangelical theology was shaped thoroughly by the following motifs for theology: (1) the structural motif, the Trinity; (2) the integrative motif, community; and (3) the orienting motif, eschatology.\textsuperscript{58}

The second and third motifs are indelibly marked by their relationship to the first one, the Trinity, providing the shape and structure of Grenz’s theology.\textsuperscript{59} For example, the community which he referred to is not simply a sociologically-located enclave of people, a concept that might be easily borrowed from findings in contemporary social-science, from which Grenz was self-consciously drawing.\textsuperscript{60} Rather, being steadfastly committed to the theological task, his description was acutely ecclesiological, referring theologically to the redeemed community elected by the Father, called by the Spirit to be “in Christ,” and enjoying the riches of communion with the triune God. This community, for Christians, “is nothing less than a shared participation—a participation together—in the perichoretic community of Trinitarian persons.”\textsuperscript{61}

Grenz was well aware of the place of “community” as a contemporary buzzword, but nevertheless found its value as a conceptual tool offering assistance for understanding the church’s essential nature.\textsuperscript{62} Effectively, out of God’s triunity springs forth the church community with God as the divine community being the transcendent basis for all other semblances of community.\textsuperscript{63} Grenz therefore saw “community” as the foundation for ethical identity formation,  

\textsuperscript{58} RTC2, 220-25. An exposition of these three motifs takes place in chs. 6-8 of BF, as a result of what he disclosed later to be a strengthening desire to carry out a more robust program which, as he understood it and as much recent theology has shown, only the doctrine of the Trinity can uphold (see Stanley J. Grenz, Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004], ix-x [hereafter, RTG]).

\textsuperscript{59} See also Roger Olson who notes that, like Grenz, Pannenberg also made the Trinity the “structural principle of theology” (Olson, “Pannenberg’s Doctrine of the Trinity,” 177). For a rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity having a structuring role for theology, see Barth, CD 1/2: 878.

\textsuperscript{60} See TCG2, 19-20. While the nature of his sources may have caused the greatest divergences away from a proper understanding of Grenz’s usage of his sources, he stated explicitly, “I draw more heavily from the various theologians… than from philosophical thinkers” (Stanley J. Grenz, The Social God and the Relational Self [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001], 14 [hereafter, SGRS]). Contra the assessment he received by some, Grenz was a theologian through and through, not a philosopher.


\textsuperscript{62} RTC2, 321.

understood in two ways for believers: (1) as fellowship with God in Christ as a personal experience in daily life; and (2) as fellowship with God mediated through Christian community wherein the narrative of Jesus (itself derived from and defined by the divine community) is passed on to the present believing community as the biblical, historical community of which believers today become the contemporary expression, and wherein the narrative of Jesus is presently formed. In this way, every concept of either Christian community or community otherwise emanates conceptually from divine community.

In a manner similar to the community theme, the eschatology motif is also shaped significantly by the doctrine of the Trinity and the developments of much of the recent resurgence in trinitarian thought, especially concerning the large trinitarian well from which Grenz drank deeply in Pannenberg. In this understanding, while epistemologically prioritized and historically established, the Trinity was understood to be fully eschatologically disclosed when God’s rule becomes an irrefutable reality. The present mission of the Spirit and Son is then found in establishing the Father's deity in fully undisputable glory in the eschatological future. This is the anticipatory hope of the redeemed community and the crescendo toward which all history, and all present trinitarian activity, is moving. Therefore both the second and third motifs of Grenz’s theological approach were shaped directly by their relationship to the first motif, the Trinity.

Grenz’s carefully developed methodology provided both the guiding rails to keep his theology distinctly evangelical while enabling him to address significant problems in

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contemporary theology, ultimately building something helpful for proclaiming the gospel in the present context. But this same method also served to provide very distinct and sure guards that clearly sustained the shape of his theology as both distinctly evangelical whilst being robustly trinitarian as well.

1.5. Aim of the Present Study

This study aims to identify the primary emphasis in Grenz’s writings on his own terms and according to his own aims. It also sets out to determine whether or not he was consistent with his own targeted aims. Accordingly, this thesis will argue that the primary feature in Stanley Grenz’s writings was the doctrine of the Trinity. He identified the doctrine of the Trinity as not only central to Christian theology but also to Christian faith itself. He repeatedly stated that his work was trinitarian, fleshing out the doctrine of the Trinity into the remainder of systematic theology and ethics, something he learned from Pannenberg and displayed in many ways. This present thesis aims to show just how precisely trinitarian Grenz’s project was, and so test-cases will be performed examining features most important both throughout the trinitarian development in Grenz’s writings and also in the very shape of the writings themselves based on the self-conscious emphases that were part of his distinct evangelical commitment.

As much as possible, this thesis has made access of available unpublished material, including unfinished documents, and other personal files associated with Grenz’s theological development. Interviews have also been conducted with some of Grenz’s closest colleagues, friends, and family members. This data has proved genuinely supplemental to the material available in his published work, and is in no way suggestive that there were any major unfinished or unaccounted for shifts in his latest development, save those that will be highlighted in this

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66 Note, e.g., how he utilized the patristic concept of theosis from the “tradition” source to briefly suggest an answer to the problem of human participation in the divine life (see pp. 77-78n378 of this thesis).
67 TCG2, 53.
thesis, especially chs. four and five. The unpublished materials have simply served to fill in a few relatively minor gaps of understanding, and to confirm what may be already found in print form, although even the printed materials were not read as carefully as they might have been by many who have commented on Grenz’s project.
Chapter 2:

Pannenberg and Grenz (I):

The Origin of Stanley J. Grenz’s Trinitarian Methodology

2.1. Introduction

During his early theological training and later development, Stanley Grenz drew upon many sources for his theological proposal. While being trinitarian since his earliest memory, the time spent with Wolfhart Pannenberg greatly shaped his understanding of the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity, its central place in theology, and how “the triunity of God ought to inform all systematic theology.” Imprints left on Grenz’s theology by his doktorvater provided particular indelible marks on the constructive work of the younger theologian. While many have acknowledged this point, no thorough work has yet given systematic evidence for this. Whilst he found much of Pannenberg’s program commendable, Grenz did not travel with him on every point, nor did he accept him uncritically. He chose rather to employ Pannenberg in areas that served his own construction, adapting relevant contributions and thereby utilizing

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68 See Grenz’s self-awareness of the methodological shift in his own work related to the foundationalism borrowed earlier from his former seminary professor, Gordon Lewis, along with other proponents noted in Stanley J. Grenz, “Why Do Theologians Need to Be Scientists?” Zygon 35 (2000): 337-38. Grenz nevertheless dedicated Beyond Foundationalism to Lewis for imparting “the importance of a sound theological method” (“Dedicatory page,” BF). More of the narrative of Grenz’s earliest doctrine of the Trinity, including the shape of what he borrowed from his earliest mentors will be narrated in chap. 4 of this thesis.

69 RTG, x.

70 See Grenz’s account of Pannenberg’s stature as a theologian in RFH1, 4 and RFH2, 2-3. Grenz also testified to the prominence of Pannenberg’s trinitarian theology in his own thought: “[I]t was not until I encountered the work of Wolfhart Pannenberg—first as his graduate student [1976-78] and later during a sabbatical year in Munich [1987-88]—that I began to see the deeper importance of this Christian confession [i.e., “belief in the doctrine of the Trinity”] for the theological enterprise” (RTG, ix). He stated elsewhere that “Pannenberg’s proposal offers perhaps the most rigorous and highly developed statement of the doctrine [of the Trinity] and its interrelatedness to the whole of theology” (BF, 191; see also TCG2, 65).


Pannenberg’s work as a “source” for theology. Pannenberg was not the only source for Grenz’s program, however, as will be shown elsewhere in this thesis. He consciously depended on and drew from the work of numerous theological predecessors and contemporaries for concepts able to assist his course.

The present chapter’s aim is to set forth crucial components of Grenz’s methodology that have drawn deeply from Pannenberg, whose work provided the major catalyst for Grenz’s development and thought. It seeks to show precisely where and how certain methodological elements were incorporated into and adapted for his proposal, providing the initial and major trinitarian aegis for Grenz’s entire theological and ethical engagement. The research begins by considering matters of theological method and other preliminary features that accompany the task and appropriation of Christian theology. These include considerations of, first of all, the provisionality of theology for Pannenberg and Grenz. Next, the public approach to theology comes into view, along with its relevant import to the empirical enterprise, and its pious requisite. Finally, the postfoundational character of Grenz and Pannenberg’s work will be explored, showing how Grenz adapted and carried forth trajectories implicit in Pannenberg’s writings. While it is impossible for both Grenz and Pannenberg to separate theological method from theology itself (one necessarily informing the other), the sections and sub-sections in this chapter and are laid out in an orderly manner in hopes of assisting the exploration, but also in preparation for the next chapter of this thesis, on features of each one’s trinitarian theology itself.

Pannenberg and Grenz’s theologies both arise from methodological structures. As initial aspects of Grenz’s trinitarian methodological development are examined, this chapter

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73 See §1.4.1.2-1.4.1.3. of this thesis.
74 Grenz noted that “Pannenberg devoted himself primarily to questions of theological method and only secondarily to an explication of his own theological system,” with his early work, *Jesus—God and Man*, being no exception, as Grenz argued convincingly in *RFH2*, 3-4. For Pannenberg’s own account of this in his work, see his “An Intellectual Pilgrimage,” *Dialog* 45 (2006): 190. For Grenz’s appropriation of this for his program, see *RET*, 11.
seeks to illumine precise contours he harnessed from his mentor for employment in his own work in trinitarian theological methodology, and, in the next chapter, for his constructive work in trinitarian theology. As this chapter’s exploration into Pannenberg’s trinitarian methodology ensues, it acknowledges that his dogmatics resulted from a steadily worked-out methodology. This coincides with Pannenberg’s careful engagement with aspects and implications of Karl Rahner’s well-known axiom (i.e., “the economic trinity is the immanent trinity and vice versa”), as has been argued elsewhere. And insofar as Grenz reflects and adapts Pannenberg’s work might his theology also be designated as primarily trinitarian.

2.2. Adapting Pannenberg’s Methodology: The Quest for Ultimate Truth

Methodology plays a critical self-conscious role in the theologies of both Pannenberg and Grenz, providing contextual factors for how each one’s theology developed and the basis upon

and the “Preface,” in SGRS, ix-xi, where he asserted that “the theological construction” in The Matrix of Christian Theology series emerges from a methodological “trialogue” between scripture, tradition and the contemporary context. Incidentally, Iain Taylor critiques Pannenberg on this point, calling for his methodology to be much more explicitly trinitarian (Pannenberg on the Triune God [London: T&T Clark, 2007], 190) which Grenz may have only slightly improved on with his “structural motif” for theology—i.e, the Trinity. Grenz, however, bore a lighter onus than Pannenberg, having never claimed to write a systematic theology “more trinitarian than any I know of” (Wolfhart Pannenberg, “God’s Presence in History,” The Christian Century [11 Mar. 1981]: 263).

75 See the interesting discussion of whether Pannenberg’s theology was always trinitarian by Iain Taylor, who concludes (contra Grenz’s assessment that Pannenberg gained a “newer understanding” in the early 1980s [RFH2, 57]) that “the Trinity is present at each stage of Pannenberg’s theological development,” and “operative in a way that presages its later importance in [Systematic Theology]” (Taylor, Pannenberg on the Triune God, 3-5). Grenz concurred with this notion in his conclusion that Barth’s catalytic contribution had already “determined that any truly helpful Christian theology would need to be trinitarian in both method and content” (RTG, 217). A significant argument running as a thread in the present thesis is that Grenz’s theology was also trinitarian since its inception. See SGRS, x, where Grenz explained precisely how the doctrine of the Trinity gave birth to his program and engagement with theology. Christiaan Mostert, whom Pannenberg declared to have “pointed out brilliantly” the conclusive insight for this methodological discussion (Pannenberg, “An Intellectual Pilgrimage,” 189), captures the idea of Pannenberg’s basic ontological principle: “that the essence of something is only determined by its end, but—on the principle of retroactive permanence—is then constituted as its essence throughout.” Mostert concludes that this is also true for Pannenberg’s theology, especially as it relates to the doctrine of the Trinity’s role throughout his entire work: “the centrality of the doctrine of the Trinity in his theological system is fully clear only from his later writings but turns out to have been the real centre of the system all along” (Christiaan Mostert, God and the Future: Wolfhart Pannenberg’s Eschatological Doctrine of God [Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 2002], 185).

76 Grenz acknowledged this in RFH2, 11-53.

which their theologies are articulated. Themes presented in this chapter and the next set forth Pannenberg’s conceptions first, followed by Grenz’s interpretation, appropriation, or adaptation thereof. Several reasons make this approach sensible. First, Pannenberg’s theology is well-established, and has received innumerable reviews, both laudatory and critical. Despite Grenz’s “fluent pen” and having been designated “a prolific scholar,” Pannenberg was much more so, and his thought more mature. Second, Pannenberg successfully managed “to develop a doctrine of God and to treat the subjects of Christian dogmatics… in the form of a Christian systematic theology,” while Grenz unfortunately did not. The German theologian also enjoys chronological precedence, and finally, as a practical matter, Grenz is an established interpreter of his former teacher. It is therefore a very natural practice for him to interpret Pannenberg and

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Grenz’s methodological works include these: RET (1993); Grenz, “Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic,” 107-36; and Stanley J. Grenz, “Conversing in Christian Style: Toward a Baptist Theological Method for the Postmodern Context,” Baptist History and Heritage 35 (2000): 82-103, the last two chs. of which became chap. 6 of RTC, later expanded further in the book-length treatment on methodology, BF (2000) (see an account of this in RTC, 8). For Grenz, these works dealt intensely with “methodological concerns” that gave “careful examination of philosophical presuppositions” and “theological hermeneutics” (BF, 13).


A comprehensive systematic theology was something Grenz was unable to do because of his untimely death, although he had plans for a more mature revision of his single-volume Theology for the Community of God, as well as a three-volume systematic theology once his explorative work in The Matrix series was complete (this insight was first disclosed in a personal interview with John R. Franke, 28 Jan. 2009, and verified by Grenz’s personal electronic files in a document entitled “Writing Projects” under the file name “WritingDeadlines,” last updated 22 Feb. 2005 [unpublished], 1).

82 At the time, Grenz’s interpretation of his supervisor’s theology was extolled as “clearly the best effort of its kind… convincing even to Pannenberg himself” (Michael Bauman, “Review of Reason for Hope,” Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 40 [1991]: 563-64). In the foreword, Pannenberg offered gratitude for Grenz’s work, especially since it would be another decade until the three volumes would be in English, calling it “a correct picture” of the synthesis of his overall theology (“Foreword,” in RFH1, ix). In chs. 1 and 2 of RFH Grenz highlighted Pannenberg’s key themes from the German ed. of ST (chs. 1-6), giving an interpretation which, though sound, was somewhat underdeveloped, perhaps a consequence of it being the first English interpretation of Pannenberg’s ST. While Elizabeth A. Johnson lauds Grenz’s “descriptive” introduction to Pannenberg’s “systematics in print and yet
then follow by adapting relevant features determined to be fitting for his own proposal. Accordingly, this chapter and the next seek to lay out key trinitarian themes shared between Pannenberg and Grenz, which ultimately approaches theology’s grand subject in due sequence, but not before addressing significant methodological matters.

2.2.1. Provisionality

Pannenberg reckons every theological statement about ontological reality as an epistemological “hypothesis” needing to be “tested.” Such historical statements are set forth as propositions, meaningfully asking whether or not they are true while leaving truth temporarily “at stake” and genuinely contestable in the present state of affairs. While theological assertions take shape as hypotheses to be tested, however, with claims being partial and debatable, they are nevertheless affirmed through “experiential verification” that relates to the eschaton. He summarizes:

> When we say that the truth is at stake in the systematic presentation of Christian doctrine, this cannot mean that dogmaticians themselves decide what is true. Attempts to find in the coherence of Christian doctrine and the unity of the world, its history, and its future consummation an expression of the unity of God simply repeat and anticipate the coherence of divine truth itself. They rest on anticipations which repeat the prolepsis of the eschaton in the history of Jesus Christ. Decision regarding their truth rests with God himself. It will be finally made with the fulfillment of the kingdom of God in God’s creation. It is to come” (“Review of Reason for Hope,” Theological Studies 51 [1990]: 765), Pannenberg’s work continued to develop beyond ST, which he called an inevitable “fact” (Pannenberg, “God’s Presence in History,” 260). It developed, as his own tenets call for (see the concepts of provisionality and “anticipation” that Pannenberg refers to in his comments in the “Foreword” to RFH1, ix), and the exegesis and exposition of his program has also matured. Others have probed Pannenberg’s theology, elucidating contours that Grenz earlier may not have seen clearly enough to delineate overtly; these contours were nevertheless present at varying degrees and have been noticed by researchers on Pannenberg who came after Grenz’s early work. E.g., see Iain Taylor’s explicit treatment of Pannenberg’s trinitarianism in Pannenberg on the Triune God, 1-21, a trinitarianism earlier noted by Grenz in RFH2, 57-59 and also in RTG, ix-x. See also F. LeRon Shults’s exposition of Pannenberg’s postfoundationalism in The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), something alluded to earlier in Grenz, RFH2, 5, 16-18. See also Christiaan Mostert’s exposition of the ontological priority of the future over other modes of time in God and the Future, though Grenz seems to develop this in his third theological motif, “eschatological orientation,” and the early motifs of “kingdom” and “community” (see RET, 137-62).

84 ST, 1:56-60. See also Shults, The Postfoundationalist Task, 123.
85 RFH2, 18, 40. See also Ed L. Miller and Stanley J. Grenz, Fortress Introduction to Contemporary Theologies (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 130.
provisionally made in human hearts by the convicting ministry of the Spirit of God.\textsuperscript{86}

In this manner, provisional truth is obtainable in the fragmentary and broken present while humans quest for "the ultimate truth," which is Pannenberg's solution to the present provisionality of all human (including theological) knowledge.\textsuperscript{87} Along with being provisional, however, for Pannenberg theological statements are often ambiguous, which accords perfectly with the "partiality" of present revelation. For example, he views "infinity" as the basis for "the incomprehensibility of the unity of God" (in one sense implying God's simplicity) as it relates to "the mystery" of the Trinity.\textsuperscript{88} The intentional vagueness inherent in Pannenberg's methodological commitment to theology's trinitarian provisionality is seen in the usage of various connective terms that yield degrees of ambiguity especially while attempting to sort out matters related to the doctrine of the Trinity.\textsuperscript{89} For example, although taking Karl Rahner's Rule and its implications with "complete seriousness,"\textsuperscript{90} and while avoiding problems with Moltmann\textsuperscript{91} and those earlier in Hegel, for Pannenberg, "God and history are… linked but not fused."\textsuperscript{92}

Grenz echoed Pannenberg on theology's provisionality. In contrast to his mentor, Grenz found that the transcendent, mysterious, previously unknown, holy Other is ultimately knowable

\textsuperscript{86} ST, 1:56.
\textsuperscript{87} RFH2, 4, 19, 43, 55; and RTG, 91.
\textsuperscript{88} ST, 1:343.
\textsuperscript{90} See the discussion of Pannenberg's rigorous application of this axiom in Sanders, The Image of the Immanent Trinity, 97-107.
\textsuperscript{91} E.g., Moltmann's view is said to lack a "real reciprocal relationship" between immanent and economic Trinity (Roger Olson, "Trinity and Eschatology: The Historical Being of God in Jürgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg," Scottish Journal of Theology 36 [1983]: 222-23). See also RFH2, 97-98 and the more thoroughgoing critique of Moltmann in Molnar, Divine Freedom, 197-233.
\textsuperscript{92} RFH2, 94. Any reading of Pannenberg cannot fail to speak of how he links concepts and uses the idea of "link" throughout his writings, nearly as much as the frequently employed and immensely significant usage of the "future" concept and term. Mostert also observes Pannenberg's usage of the "concept of 'anticipation' to link, yet differentiate, the present and the future" (Mostert, God and the Future, 113).
through “the speaking of revelation,” which is not provisional or forthcoming, but genuinely given—a divine revelation whose truth content “has been objectively disclosed.” As theology’s “norming norm,” the Bible is the “supreme authority for theological reflection,” thus resourcing the temporary “second-order” theological formulations that humans generate in the present. Although not denying the ontological nature of theological declarations, Grenz understood that the theologian’s task is to provide “a model of reality,” or an “analogue model” in the engagement of “the quest for truth,” while conversely being unable “to describe reality directly.” Like Pannenberg, Grenz also maintained affinity for ambiguity in theological statements, yet not as something to be deliberately pursued, which he was sometimes accused of. Evidence of this is in his employment of terms like “connection” when referring to present-


94 RET, 72. See also the study between Pannenberg and Grenz’s views of revelation in §3.1.2. of the next chapter. Cp. also Knowles, “Postmodernism and Evangelical Theological Methodology,” 174, who misunderstands Grenz’s view of revealed truth, assuming that Grenz applied the ontological priority of the future to what God has revealed. On Grenz’s adaptation and application of this principle borrowed from Pannenberg, see §3.1.3. of this thesis.

95 RET, 93.

96 This is slightly different from Pannenberg’s “propositions” which are set forth publicly within the realm of the hard sciences in order to be tested. While occasionally using the term “proposition,” Grenz sought to avoid what he called “modern evangelical propositionalism” (RET, 61-72, 78), opting for what Brian Harris labels the “post-propositional approach” (“Revisioning Evangelical Theology,” 120). Note that this is somewhat nuanced from Grenz’s earlier call for a devotion “to the first order task of constructing a theology which can serve as a solid foundation for this future ministry” (Stanley J. Grenz, “A Theology for the Future,” *American Baptist Quarterly* 4 [1985]: 267). Herein appears a significant clue about how Grenz’s ontology began to separate from his epistemology later in his career.

97 RET, 64, 78-79, 82-83. See also how this relates to the “dynamic character” of the divine name-giving act in Grenz’s program (*NGQB*, 370-71).

98 In a personal letter from Millard Erickson to Grenz (6 Dec. 1995), Erickson requested of Grenz “that in your writing you try to be a bit more unambiguous,” followed by reasons for the request, and yet conceding that he also had been criticized “for not being sufficiently unequivocal as well.” Under a similar accusation from Spencer, “Culture, Community and Commitments,” 338-60, Grenz asserted, “I have in fact been far less ambiguous in my writings than he claims.” On the other hand, Grenz upheld that “by its very nature, theology will always be beset by a kind of ambiguity. Indeed, a proper ambiguity can be one of the theologian’s greatest virtues,” if it “reflects a humility about what we as mere mortals can say about God and the mystery of salvation,” and also “if it spurs both writer and reader to seek greater clarity as they engage together in the grand conversation that lies at the heart of the ongoing discipline we call ‘theology’” (Stanley J. Grenz, “The Virtue of Ambiguity: A Response to Archie Spencer,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 57 [2004]: 361-65). Incidentally, in seemingly bizarre contrast, one of Grenz’s more well-known critics, D. A. Carson confesses that Grenz’s writings are still, despite everything else said, “reasonably lucid” (Carson, “Domesticating the Gospel,” *SBJT*, 82).
future reality, and also between the immanent/economic Trinity. Grenz affirmed that God disclosed the open-ended and mysterious divine name to Moses along with later descriptive information about himself, which is always partial whilst anticipating the yet-to-be revealed content of the ongoing further self-naming of the divine name, and which further anticipates being unfolded through a history of personal relationships, the action of which takes place in the form of a grand narrative. What follows after this is the task of theological engagement, the process of moving toward and being allowed to see “more clearly.”

Consonant with the relevant, contextual theological constructs Grenz aimed for, he also worked toward a Christian proclamation that avoids “the opaqueness” of theological categories often employed, preferring instead to leave the proclaimed offense belonging to “the absurdity of the cross” rather than to theological vagueness. In light of the “already—not yet character” of the relationship between the new humanity and the image of God, and its correspondence being both “an eschatological goal and a present reality,” Grenz was unable to hold to Pannenberg’s “provisionality of the present,” with the future giving meaning to the present. Perhaps even more than Pannenberg, Grenz saw the present itself as deeply meaningful, and yet believed that it could not be divorced from the eschatological orientation inherent to and indicated by the

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100 NGQB, 281-3. For more on how Grenz understood scripture as a narrative, how scripture relates to history, and how he understood his work relating to Lindbeck and narrative theology, see p. 44n204 of this thesis.

101 NGQB, 9, 12, 287.

102 RET, 102.

103 SGRS, 224.

104 RFH2, 43.

105 Implying at least that “life is meaningful: our decisions and actions are eternally significant” and that “the proclamation of the gospel is urgent” (Stanley J. Grenz, “Introduction to Christian Theology: Christian Doctrine for Today’s World,” course notes from THEO 7345, Baylor University, Waco, TX, lecture on “Eschatology” given 7 Apr. 2003 [unpublished], 11). This, of course, does not mean that Pannenberg did not see the present as meaningful. Yet he only saw its meaning determined and defined by the future, since meaning not only increases but emerges with the coming of the future and the composition of the whole of the created continuum. See also p. 51n254 of this thesis for Pannenberg’s understanding of the future’s bearing on the present.
basic human quest, which cultivates anticipation of “a future, deeper disclosure of meaning.” For Grenz, then, revelation (including the incripturated kind) is fixed in the present and real while the future reality is even more real, even as it is equally epistemically and experientially both provisional and proleptic. Even further still, the theological constructs generated by humans remain entirely provisional, no matter how much they accord with present or future reality. At the very least this provides a more responsible approach to the nurturing of theology on the way to the shape it might take in its public form.

2.2.2. Public Theology

Pannenberg is widely known for his commitment to theology as a “public discipline.” By this he differs from some contemporary expressions of “public theology,” and yet similarly begins with a strong opposition to theology’s privatization. As such, he sees theology demonstrated both in religious experience and the history of religions. Acknowledging its subjective nature, he asserts that faith exists prior to theological reflection, but then becomes “[p]ersonal assurance” when confirmed by experience and reflection on the truth believed. Since no truth can be “purely subjective,” it is thus “open to confirmation in the sphere of argument relating to the universal validity of the truth which is believed.” As a public matter, then, theology “deals with the universality of the truth of revelation and therefore with the truth of

106 NGQB, 9-10.
revelation and of God himself.”[109] Herein, Pannenberg advocates an inclusivist rather than exclusivist or pluralist approach for his theology of religions,[110] suggesting that “[t]he task of theological reflection, rather than assuming truth, is to advance the quest for truth,”[111] not assuming starting points but working deliberately to establish them.[112] Herein Pannenberg’s commitment to the superiority of the Christian conception of God positions him as a legitimate dialogue partner with alternate views.

For Pannenberg, the historical canvas in the midst of world religions is where “the universality and universal validity of truth” are established, ultimately displaying Christianity’s concept of God as superior to all others, both proleptically and eschatologically.[113] Summarizing Pannenberg’s position of how the human quest for truth works itself out within the history of religions, Grenz says that

it moves from the thesis that the religions all function to provide a unified understanding of experienced reality. On this basis Pannenberg looks to the history of religions, seen as the struggle of rival religious truth-claims, for the determination as to which conception of the ultimate can best illumine experience, understood in the broad sense, and thereby prove itself true.


112 ST, 1:117, 388-89. See also RFH2, 18.

113 Pannenberg, “Religious Pluralism,” 104. For his account of how public engagement contributes to human morality and benefits humanity’s good, evincing Christianity’s superiority among the religions, see Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Morality, Ethics, and God,” in The Doctrine of God and Theological Ethics, ed. Alan J. Torrance and Michael Banner (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 47-54.
This truth and unity will not emerge as some “this-worldly product of human efforts,” even major ecumenical efforts, but only as a “final consensus,” and as “an eschatological reality because of the reality of truth.”

Like Pannenberg, Grenz affirmed that theology is a public discipline, although pragmatically, he placed greater emphasis on ethical performance—the “living out” and “modeling [of] the divine intention of establishing community,” which he grounded in “the universal intention of God’s activity in human history.” Accordingly, he placed slightly less emphasis on eschatological judgment and determinedness than Pannenberg has, with its sweeping retroactive features. Instead, he replaced it with a more robust picture of the present community, which is nevertheless the eschatological(ly-oriented) one, called to exude implications of faith “in, for and to a specific historical and cultural context.” This is a major point inasmuch as Grenz’s “public theology” emphasized the present “community” more than Pannenberg’s. Grenz also affirmed an eschatological realism and the ontological priority of the future in a manner similar to Pannenberg, although Grenz was relatively more interested in gospel proclamation in light of the coming-kingdom than in interdisciplinary academic dialogue. His interdisciplinarity was only as interested in this as it might serve the gospel. By order of emphasis, then, Grenz was much more concerned with the present than the future.

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117 RET, 83; cp. ST, 1:50-52. This is not to assert that Grenz abandoned the concept of “eschatological judgment” as an essential component of the future (see SGRS, 359), for Grenz’s view of judgment in the form of eternal conscious torment is much more traditionally evangelical than Pannenberg’s. See TCG2, 640-44 and Grenz, “Review of Brian D. McLaren, The Last Word and the Word After That,” 663-65.
118 This may be attributed to Grenz’s baptistic pietism which had a much more “local” renewal emphasis than Pannenberg’s Lutheranism. See Stanley J. Grenz, “Concerns of a Pietist with a Ph.D.,” *Wesley Theological Journal* 37 (2002): 58-76, which made no reference to the future as motivator for present piety and renewal, although elsewhere he did express the future’s relevance for the church’s present action (Stanley J. Grenz, *The Millennial Maze* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992], 197-215), in both cases emphasizing the present, with a “dimension of
is therefore “the faith community’s reflecting on the faith experience of those who have encountered God through the divine activity in history and therefore now seek to live as the people of God in the contemporary world.”

All religions play some role here, as they embody the universal human quest to “seek after God” in order to draw from him and thereby “be the imago Dei,” mirroring God’s reality amidst all creation. Grenz affirmed that this bodes well with evangelicals’ openness (contra their fundamentalist forbears) to engagement with the world and other viewpoints, yet ultimately finding them theologically deficient in light of the universal superiority of the Jesus-story.

2.2.3. Scientific Theology

Science and its interface with theology have played key roles in Pannenberg’s work at least since Theology and the Philosophy of Science (1973), although with little contribution beyond that until the late 1980s. He understood the doctrine of God to be pervading everything in the sciences, even claiming that it is “necessary to explore every field of knowledge in order to speak of God reasonably.” Pannenberg thus purported a pursuit of science and theology with similar intensity, and theology as science, believing they inform one another and ultimately yield contingency in present world events,” which leaves the future “to some degree open” (Grenz, The Millennial Maze, 208).

119 RET, 75-76.
120 NGQB, 353-64. This quest for and realization of the imago Dei displayed how “the Christian vision stands as the fulfilment of the human religious impulse…” (Stanley J. Grenz, “The Universality of the ‘Jesus-Story’ and the ‘Incredulity Toward Metanarratives’,” in No Other Gods before Me? ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001], 110). It exists as part of the working out of the history of religions, the importance of public theology and “public-living” (i.e., witnessing). In turn it has become part of the church’s mission (Grenz, “Ecclesiology,” 267; and SGRS, xi). The imago Dei concept is how Grenz tried to work trinitarian doctrine into theology and ethics. This development throughout traditional systematic categories is addressed in Jason S. Sexton, “The Imago Dei Once Again: Stanley Grenz’s Journey Toward a Theological Interpretation of Gen 1:26-27,” Journal of Theological Interpretation 4 (2010): 187-206, and in chap. 6 of this thesis. For a discussion of how this relates to present discipleship see Stanley J. Grenz, “But We Are Baptized: Baptism as the Motivation for Holy Living,” Preaching 16 (2001): 19-24.


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universal truth that illumines all knowledge.\textsuperscript{125} Since publishing \textit{Systematic Theology}, as part of his insistence that theology’s task is to give a “rational account of the truth of faith,”\textsuperscript{126} Pannenberg has engaged significantly in the conversation of theology and science.\textsuperscript{127} Precisely because theology is a public discipline, he sees it as “subject to the same critical canons as are the other sciences.”\textsuperscript{128} But the science Pannenberg advocates is not the kind directly-descending from the Enlightenment, which he explicitly faults for its marginalization of theology, as well as robbing it of historicity.\textsuperscript{129} Instead, aware of little consensus among scientists over the ability to account for the essence of their own method,\textsuperscript{130} Pannenberg opts for something new in the form of a coherence approach where “all truth must cohere in God.”\textsuperscript{131} As Shults has shown, Pannenberg’s view advocates “coherence with other beliefs as a necessary condition for justifying the truth of an assertion.”\textsuperscript{132} However, this does not finalize an assertion’s truth, which itself ultimately remains forthcoming. Therefore, as Mostert has noted, Pannenberg’s metaphysics “is best seen as an ontology of ‘final coherence.’”\textsuperscript{133} This allows him to observe the sustainability and viability


\textsuperscript{126} Pannenberg, \textit{Basic Questions}, 2:53. See also RFH2, 39-40. Grenz also noted that “[n]othing could be more abhorrent to Pannenberg” than the “attempt to shield the truth content of the Christian tradition from rational inquiry” (RFH2, 16).

\textsuperscript{127} See Wolfhart Pannenberg, \textit{Toward a Theology of Nature}, ed. Ted Peters (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993); and Wolfhart Pannenberg, \textit{The Historicity of Nature: Essays on Science and Theology}, ed. Niels Henrik Gregersen (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2008). Also of relevance is the dialogue with John Polkinghorne over his “bottom-up theory” about which Pannenberg states: “There could be no genuine dialogue between scientists and theologians if only the theologians were expected to listen to the scientists, while these would have no reason to be concerned for what theology might have to say on the requirements of an interpretation of nature as God’s creation” (Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Response to John Polkinghorne,” \textit{Zygon} 36 [2001]: 800).


\textsuperscript{130} E.g., see John Polkinghorne, \textit{Belief in God in an Age of Science} (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 105-6.


\textsuperscript{132} Shults, \textit{The Postfoundationalist Task}, 115-16.

\textsuperscript{133} Mostert, \textit{God and the Future}, 78.
of particular concepts, whether in the scientific disciplines or theology, all informing cognition about God and God’s world.\textsuperscript{134}

Grenz acutely observed Pannenberg’s engagement with science,\textsuperscript{135} himself reflecting some of Pannenberg’s concerns about the scientific method.\textsuperscript{136} Grenz also remained unconvinced by some of Pannenberg’s specific proposals, including the “field” and Spirit connection for providing the link between theology and science.\textsuperscript{137} Like Pannenberg, Grenz was eager to draw from findings of disciplines such as contemporary developmental psychology\textsuperscript{138} and other academic fields that might provide assistance in listening to relevant questions that could facilitate “important biblical affirmations about God.”\textsuperscript{139} This development within Grenz’s work moves beyond Pannenberg, however, showing greater interest in the significance of theology itself as a social science, albeit taking less interest in fields such as sociology per se (or any other soft or hard science) since he understood theology as occupying the preeminent place among the disciplines—i.e., it being the queen of the sciences.\textsuperscript{140} Methodologically he goes one step ahead of Pannenberg, highlighting not just the scientific nature of theology, but also the theological nature of science, describing it as one wherein scientists essentially don the very theological task and effectively become theologians who are themselves actively building worlds,

\textsuperscript{134} E.g., see Pannenberg’s attempt at developing the noncorporal field theory of modern physics as related to God as spiritual mind in ST, 1:382-83 and then farther in 2:79-108. See also Grenz, RFH\textsubscript{2}, 79. Examples of Pannenberg’s recent engagement along the same lines are his “Eternity, Time and the Trinitarian God,” Dialog 39 (2000): 9-14; “Response to John Polkinghorne,” 799-800; and “Eternity, Time, and Space,” Zygon 40 (2005): 97-106.

\textsuperscript{135} Grenz, “Scientific’ Theology/’Theological’ Science,” 159-66; and RFH\textsubscript{2}, 18, 39-40, 79.


\textsuperscript{137} Grenz, “The Irrelevancy of Theology,” 310.

\textsuperscript{138} Cp. Grenz’s observations in RFH\textsubscript{2}, 24 with SGR\textsubscript{5}, 306-12. See a similar approach advocated for apologetics in Alister E. McGrath, Mere Apologetics: How to Help Seekers and Skeptics Find Faith (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 133.

\textsuperscript{139} Cp. Grenz’s observations in RFH\textsubscript{2}, 81 with Grenz’s explorative engagement with postmodernism’s questions in The Matrix series which both set the agenda (SGR\textsubscript{5}, x) and carry it out (SGR\textsubscript{5}, 133-36, 336).

\textsuperscript{140} Grenz, “Ecclesiology,” 258. See also RTC\textsubscript{2}, 237-40 (esp. p. 240) where he stated that in the view of several prominent theologians, “theology serves as the queen of the sciences, insofar as it explores how all human knowledge is unified and illumined through the Christian conception of God and the universe as the creation of God.”
constructions, and belief systems in the present context.\textsuperscript{141} While completely unwilling to subject theology to the ultimate judgment of other disciplines, contra Pannenberg, Grenz found theology able to and necessarily having to draw from all other fields of knowledge, thereby enabling it to maintain a steady pulse on particular findings and issues in order to be aware of the present context and questions being raised in the contemporary setting.

\textbf{2.2.4. Personal Piety}

The next methodological element shared somewhat between Pannenberg and Grenz is the personal spiritual commitment observable in each one’s work, which each theologian saw as essential to the theological task. While Grenz’s first personal encounter with Pannenberg saw the German theologian denouncing pietism, it was not a pietism Grenz was familiar with.\textsuperscript{142} Rather, it was that which Pannenberg deemed a harmful invasion to theology, and a product of the subjective theology he linked with Barth, Bultmann, and modernism.\textsuperscript{143} Yet Pannenberg still maintained the full importance of personal piety for the theological enterprise,\textsuperscript{144} which he believed to be drawing not from the Enlightenment halls of Pietism and the Awakening, but from the very heart of the Reformation, as he understood it. He advocated not the penitential pietism that has often been associated with the Reformation doctrine of justification, but the “freedom of the believer through participation in Christ”—against self-aggression and towards the formation of genuine self-identity.\textsuperscript{145} And thus a Christian understanding of the self, from which basis one may identify a particular behavior as sinful, will produce the “transformative

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{141} Grenz, “Why Do Theologians Need to be Scientists?” 345-53; and Grenz, “Conversing in Christian Style,” 92.
\bibitem{142} Miller and Grenz, \textit{Fortress Introduction}, 127-29.
\bibitem{143} \textit{ST}, 1:50, 56.
\end{thebibliography}
affirmation of the human person by God’s love.” Pannenberg claimed this to be the heart of the Lutheran doctrine of justification.146

A further component of Pannenberg’s personal spiritual commitment was expressed by concern over the ecumenical unity of the entire Christian church, a personal burden since his ordination as a Lutheran pastor in 1966.147 Not disconnected from his inclusivist approach to world religions, this concern for unity prompted both Pannenberg’s ecumenical activity and inter-faith dialogue as an important practical aspect of his commitment to the truth of the Christian faith.148 Accordingly, he saw himself as a theologian both for the public arena, as seen earlier, and for the church.149

Like Pannenberg, Grenz was also a churchman, intentionally Spirit-oriented and ecclesially-centered.150 He viewed himself as a pietist because he saw himself “as one whom God has encountered in Christ, whose heart the Holy Spirit has regenerated, and therefore whose highest desire is to be a faithful disciple of Christ within the community of Christ’s disciples and the world.”151 Like Pannenberg, Grenz’s personal piety led him to maintain an ecumenical

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147 Pannenberg, “An Intellectual Pilgrimage,” 191. See also Pannenberg’s accounting of a discussion with Grenz that reflects his commitment to unity, and the edification of other Christian traditions: One day, when we discussed the doctrine of baptism and I defended the Lutheran reasoning in favor of children’s baptism as an expression of the unconditioned grace of God, [Grenz] asked me whether I wanted him to become a Lutheran. My answer then was that no, I would prefer that he in the context of his own tradition should find [a way] to incorporate the elements of truth from all other Christian traditions towards the formulation of a truly contemporary Christian theology. This was precisely what Stanley went to do in his later development, in the series of his later publications (personal letter from Wolfhart Pannenberg, cited in Erik C. Leafblad, “Prolegomena: In Dedication to Professor Stanley Grenz,” *Princeton Theological Review* 12 [2006]: 1).
149 Miller and Grenz, *Fortress Introduction*, 139.
interest, though his view of personal piety was less focused on Pannenberg’s rather negative theological concerns (i.e., particular understandings of justification, truth, and unity) and more positively oriented toward what he thought spirituality should look like, with greater emphasis on experience. Simultaneously, Grenz refused to negate or minimize theology in any way, firmly resolved that “Orthodoxy is crucial to orthopraxy, right-headedness is important to warm-heartedness, and doctrinal rigor plays a crucial role in the truly transformed life.” He thus devoted equal time seeking to integrate the two into an ideal middle position, asserting that the hallmark of Evangelicalism is “an experiential piety cradled in a theology.” Grenz, therefore, maintained a theology and spiritual devotion committed to building up the body of Christ (locally and broadly) for its task in the present situation of life in the world, since “the spiritual believer balances piety with activity.” This leads to the final feature to be explored in the similar yet different trinitarian methodologies of Pannenberg and Grenz.

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152 RTC2, 358-59.
153 RET, 27-35. See also the markers Grenz gave for historic Evangelicalism with its concern for both convective piety and right doctrine, arguing that evangelicals today are “caught in the middle” of both of these emphases (Grenz, “Concerns of a Pietist with a Ph.D.,” 60-76). Incidentally, according to Roger Olson, at the 2002 meeting of the American Academy Religion, after Grenz’s presentation, “Concerns of a Pietist with a Ph.D.,” Richard Mouw critiqued Grenz’s position emphasizing the faith experience, among other things stating: “Isn’t anyone else here worried about Schleiermacher?” (Roger Olson, “Some thoughts on theological biases,” 4 Jan. 2011, http://bit.ly/llhs2C [accessed 5 June 2011]). But see also Grenz’s consistent distancing himself from Schleiermacher in, e.g., RET, 149; Bf, 33-37, 185-86; RTC2, 211; TCG2, 257, 634-35; and RTG, 17-24. Carson also falls into this error, thinking Grenz preferred the direction of Schleiermacher (Carson, The Gagging of God, 481) whilst elsewhere even Millard Erickson acknowledged that “Grenz is quite critical of any approach that seeks to utilize experience as a theological source” (Erickson, The Evangelical Left, 48). Grenz also differs from Schleiermacher by emphasizing the community’s role both in shaping and articulating the experience of faith (Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Evangelicalism and the Church: The Company of the Gospel,” in The Futures of Evangelicalism [Leicester, UK: InterVarsity, 2003], 51).
154 Grenz, “Concerns of a Pietist with a Ph.D.,” 74.
155 RET, 35, 62. Despite the various criticisms, this is why Grenz’s description of Evangelicalism is said to have “landed his horseshoe closest to the pin” (David K. Clark, To Know and Love God: Method for Theology [Wheaton: Crossway, 2003], xxviii-xxix).
157 RET, 45.
2.2.5. Postfoundationalism

As already noted, for Pannenberg all theology must cohere, and it must do so in God. Implications of this were not easily observable for many of his early interpreters, especially as it related to epistemological foundationalism. His view of science, its historical groundedness, and the quest for ultimate universally verifiable truth led many to label him as a modernist or epistemological foundationalist. Yet this understanding has been forcefully challenged.¹⁵⁸ Whereas Pannenberg has not directly entered the conversation as such, having argued a case neither for nor against foundationalism, non- or postfoundationalism, his thought seems most consistent with the lattermost epistemological commitment.¹⁵⁹ This is not least because he believes the very task of theology is to bring the Christian concept of God into relation with the broader interdisciplinary dialogue about rationality. His vision therefore consists of a search for the integration of all truth whatever, bringing together the particular and the universal into a coherent whole, leaving theology open to the contributions of other disciplines.¹⁶⁰

Grenz recognized Pannenberg’s coherence theory of truth and its quest for the coherence of all knowledge in the realm of reality, himself adopting similar language.¹⁶¹ This catalyst moved Grenz explicitly beyond the foundationalist epistemology he observed in North American Evangelicalism and into somewhat of a “chastened foundationalism.”¹⁶² Here Grenz’s

¹⁵⁸ Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task*, argues throughout that Pannenberg’s coherence model is consistent with a postfoundationalist approach. See also Mostert, *God and the Future*, 59-60.

¹⁵⁹ Shults believes that neither the foundationalist nor the nonfoundationalist framing of the rationality debate is able to capture Pannenberg’s methodology. Rather, “[t]he postfoundationalist goal is to find a ‘middle way’ between the dogmatism of foundationalism and the relativism of many forms of nonfoundationalism” (Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task*, 18).


¹⁶² Brian Harris comes to this conclusion primarily because of the “tidiness” of Grenz’s methodology, for which reason he referred to it as a “soft” or “chastened foundationalism” (Harris, “Revisioning Evangelical Theology,” 147-48). See also the discussion about the confusion over what classifies as classical foundationalism in Michael C. Rea, “Introduction,” in *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Michael C. Rea (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009), 12n17, and Knowles, “Postmodernism and Evangelical Theological Methodology,” 83n85, although Knowles also (see pp. 170-78) does not escape Rea’s
work reflects Pannenberg, while also implementing solutions to specific criticisms that were made against Pannenberg by F. LeRon Shults. For example, what could be seen as a response to Shults is that Grenz took the postmodern challenge more seriously as seen not only in his embrace of some of its tenets but also in his engagement with the very phenomenon. Second, he integrated new anthropological discoveries into the interdisciplinary task of theology, and managed to also avoid much of Pannenberg’s modernistic language. Beyond providing a response to these criticisms against Pannenberg, another significant epistemological matter and the primary issue of focus for Grenz’s soft-foundational approach is how the doctrine of the Trinity drives (and answers) the necessary questions for a relevant construction of Christian theology. For Grenz, the matter of constructing theology was not accomplished by merely granting primacy to the questions arising from a non- or soft-foundationalist approach to theology. While not wishing to minimize them since they are an essential part of the “context” source of theology, he wanted more importantly and explicitly to bring the doctrine of the

critique. Note also what seems to be Grenz establishing distance from the term “postfoundationalist” is J. Wentzel van Huyssteen’s preferred term (Grenz, “Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic,” 109n7).

Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task*, 247-50. Interestingly, one will be disappointed if searching Shults’s work to find much relationship between Pannenberg’s epistemology and the doctrine of the Trinity (with the exception of his acknowledgment that Pannenberg treats all things *sub ratione Dei*, or “in relation to God” [pp. 92-110]). This may also be why Grenz, in his treatment of the same questions Shults poses to Pannenberg’s method, pays little attention to Shults’s work and its possible usefulness for the constructive enterprise. Grenz also never stated explicitly that he was responding to Shults’s critique of Pannenberg, perhaps making the connection only incidental.


However accurate his understanding may be of the issues involved with postmodernism, Grenz was well-known for his awareness of postmodern thinkers. See Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) and the assessments made by Erickson, *Postmodernizing the Faith*, 83-102, and Knowles, *Beyond Evangelicalism*. Although see my trenchant critique of Knowles’s major assumptions and erroneous conclusions about the level of Grenz’s postmodern commitments in Sexton, “Review of Steven Knowles, *Beyond Evangelicalism*,” 84-88.

E.g., see *SGRS* for this anthropological emphasis.

Grenz finds grounds for this as a result of his understanding of the “postmodern condition,” with its shift in speech, language, etc. (*RTC2*, 358-59).

Iain Taylor highlights this deficiency in Pannenberg’s work (*Pannenberg on the Triune God*, 190), which is something Grenz seems to correct by beginning with the Trinity as theology’s structural motif, later working this out via the *imago Dei* theme which Pannenberg only did minimally (*Pannenberg on the Triune God*, 96-97, 101-5), with nothing nearly as thoroughgoing as what Grenz accomplished (e.g., *SGRS* and “Jesus as the Imago Dei,” 617-28).
Trinity, epistemologically prioritized and historically established, to bear on them. This is where, in light of the supposed demise of foundationalism in the postmodern situation, Grenz’s Trinity was found able to serve as theology’s entire structure. Accordingly, a significant catalyst for Grenz’s work on postmodern epistemological issues can be traced to neither contemporary philosophers nor epistemological theorists but in the most influential way to Pannenberg and the methodological approach of his trinitarian systematic theology.

2.3. Summary

The material presented in this chapter has considered particular methodological pre-commitments to the study of theology, providing significant components observable in Pannenberg’s work which were then appreciably adapted, although sometimes straightaway adopted and directly appropriated by Grenz for his methodological engagement. These included his own nuanced reception of theology’s provisional, public, scientific, pious and postfoundational shape, as found in Pannenberg in various ways. The next chapter follows with an exploration beyond the developing trinitarian methodology and directly into intimate features intricately tied to the doctrine of the Trinity itself. This includes investigations into principles inherent in Pannenberg’s doctrine of the Trinity and his distinctly trinitarian theology. As each of these principles is highlighted in the next chapter, it will be followed with subsequent explorations of the manner in which Grenz drew from, adopted, and adapted these features for his own doctrine of the Trinity and trinitarian theology.


170 While Grenz may have found it first in Pannenberg, the idea of soft-foundationalism does not find its twentieth century origin in him. A notion of soft-foundationalism called “rational apprehension” or “rational objectivity” is echoed from Barth via Thomas Torrance as early as 1952 (see “A Skirmish in the Early Reception of Karl Barth in Scotland: The Exchange Between Thomas F. Torrance and Brand Blanshard,” ed. Iain and Morag Torrance, *Theology in Scotland* 16 [2011]: 8). Additionally, Timothy Stanley recently argued that Karl Barth saw Luther as the progenitor of a non-foundationalist affirmation of the being of God (*Protestant Metaphysics after Karl Barth and Martin Heidegger* [Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2010], 4). Incidentally, some lack of precision and clarity on Grenz’s position had to do with some of his own methodological ambiguity and the inchoate nature of his theology, which was actively seeking to read cultural developments.
Chapter 3:

Pannenberg and Grenz (2):

The Origin of Stanley J. Grenz’s Trinitarian Theology

3.1. Approaching Theology’s Ultimate Subject: Discovering the Triune God

The ultimate subject matter in Pannenberg’s theology is God, unifying all reality.171 Grenz likewise maintained the triune God as the topic of the entire systematic construction of theology, with all other theological loci viewed as “in some sense participants” in this grand, central topic of theology—the doctrine of the Trinity.172 Pannenberg came to understand God through the lens of at least five features that this chapter will highlight, each intimately related to and observed in his doctrine of God, which simultaneously orients and informs this doctrine’s shape. These include emphases on history, revelation, Pannenberg’s future hypothesis, the so-called “Pannenberg Principle,” and his development of a relational ontology.173 In what follows, Pannenberg’s understanding of these facets is briefly explored, along with the manner in which they inform his doctrine of the Trinity, yielding evidence of being a comprehensive theology “more trinitarian” than any he knows of.174 Upon presentation of the traits of Pannenberg’s theology proper, consideration will be given to how Grenz relates to, adopts, and adapts these significant themes for his own program, thereby elucidating both the major catalytic features in Grenz’s trinitarian development as well as the primary features that led to the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity in his work, and also gave rise to its predominant shape and drive.

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171 ST, 1:59-61. See this observed in Grenz, “The Irrelevancy of Theology,” 308; and RTG, 88, 91.
172 BF, 190. The doctrine of the Trinity is, of course, distinguished though not separate from the Trinity itself.
173 Dissecting these traits is a somewhat unnatural, utilitarian task, since each informs the other in Pannenberg’s explication of the trinitarian doctrine of God. Yet the dismemberment is made in order to compare Grenz’s development, reception, appropriation, and adaptation of these characteristics for his own theology.
174 This claim was made in Pannenberg, “God’s Presence in History,” 263. See the affirmative conclusion by Taylor after his exhaustive study of the Trinity in Pannenberg’s ST (Pannenberg on the Triune God, 187).
3.1.1. The Role of History

Quite notable for his early work on God’s relation to history, Pannenberg designated the triune Being as the God of history, identifying the nature of God’s truth as historical.\(^{175}\) Early on he stated that this is not limited to one or even a few events, but that all historical facts themselves amidst history’s development comprise “the totality of revelation.”\(^{176}\) Over a decade later he proffered,

> there is no event, either holy or unholy, in which God is not acting, and the question of the meaning of historical occurrences should be judged initially on that basis... The question concerning the truth of history can only find its answer through God himself. If history is essentially the history of divine activity, then it follows that the truth of God’s deeds and their identity with him can only be grounded in him.\(^{177}\)

According to Philip Clayton, the theme of Pannenberg’s essay quoted above, indicating a major shift in his thinking, is that “both history and God can be conceptualized only in a reciprocal relationship with each other.”\(^{178}\) Clayton then notes that “a (the?) Grundmotiv of Pannenberg’s entire corpus” is that in Christian theology “the biblical understanding of God in the Old and New Testaments and the historicity of reality are necessarily tied together.”\(^{179}\) Clayton summarizes that for Pannenberg “theology works at the level of contexts of meaning that account for history as a whole.”\(^{180}\)


\(^{180}\) This references Pannenberg, Theology and the Philosophy of Science, 220-24, 309-10 (Clayton, “The God of History and the Presence of the Future,” 103). Note the significant changes in Pannenberg’s thought seen in the essays in Grundfragen systematischer Theologie, Band 2, especially with “Der Gott der Geschichte,” showing how Pannenberg’s earlier “from below” view of history changes, as noted in Clayton, “The God of History and the Presence of the Future,” 99. See also the statement in Pannenberg, “Problems of a Trinitarian Doctrine of God,” 255, where he states: “God, through the creation of the world, made himself radically dependent on this creation and on its history.”
Grenz, on the other hand, avoided linking God and history in the same way Pannenberg did. Specifically, he more easily avoided the accusation of being Hegelian, although he still found God working in history, which work in itself gives history its significance of meaning. Hegel is not all Grenz wanted to avoid, however, since he also had difficulty with traditional evangelical conceptions of history that sought to construct a history behind the text as a primary goal and thus treated the Bible “as a problem rather than a solution.” Over against the positive way Pannenberg viewed historical-criticism when he placed his ontology upon historical research, Grenz adopted a much more theological interpretation of history. His view of history situated itself distinctly upon a narrative, enabling him to define it as “the narrative of God’s activity in bringing humankind to God’s intended goal,” which is the accomplishment of the divine plan for humanity. He saw this as entirely consonant with the Israelite view of history inherited by the West, which presented history as much more than a man-centered sequence of world events. According to Grenz, the biblical view “places history on a theocentric foundation.” Seen in scripture, this narrative yielded Grenz’s corporate eschatology, which followed a trajectory also observed in scripture. This trajectory began with the prophetic vision of justice and continued with the apocalyptic vision disclosing world history as the stage where the divine drama of cosmic warfare rages while still en route towards the establishment of God’s goal for his creation. This narrative is marked by “one crucial innovation” from the NT narrative

(italics in original). See also the acknowledgment from Molnar, now in accusatory tone (Molnar, Divine Freedom, 139-55), which Archie Spencer hurls at Grenz (“Culture, Community, and Commitments,” 351n52), which simply does not stick since Grenz explicitly avoided these notions in Pannenberg, as the present thesis displays throughout.

181 This idea is owed to an attendee of a presentation of an early portion of this chapter at the Society for the Study of Theology meeting, 31 Mar. 2009, Amersfoort, The Netherlands, who suggested, “Perhaps Grenz is Pannenberg without the Hegel?” See also the discussion in Taylor, Pannenberg on the Triune God, 15-21, which persuasively rejects the notion that Pannenberg is Hegelian, while not being unwilling to acknowledge Hegelian aspects of his thought. Note also that while Grenz himself conscientiously avoids Hegel, he welcomes the notions Barth picked up from him, that “all theology is the explication of the being and action of God in Christ” and that, following Hegel, a “truly trinitarian” theology is one where the explication of the Trinity informs and is informed by every theological category (BF, 190).

182 BF, 60-63.

183 TCG2, 599, 608.

184 TCG2, 607-8.
that would ultimately “mark the climax of human history,” namely, “the return of the crucified and risen Jesus.”

3.1.2. The Nature of Revelation

As noted in the previous section, Pannenberg’s early description of revelation consisted of history’s entirety. In part, this emerged from his emphasis on history in light of Schleiermachtian subjectivism and the dialectical theologians of the early twentieth century. On the other hand, Pannenberg faulted the Protestant position for seeking to establish scripture’s inspiration as the presupposition of revelation rather than its goal. His 1963 essay, “The Crisis of the Scripture Principle,” highlighted the problem arising from focusing on scripture while neglecting theology’s task to concern itself with “all truth whatever.” He saw what he called the “double crisis of the Protestant Scripture principle” ensuing from historical-criticism and the growing hermeneutical problems amplified by the increasing horizon gap between text and reader locations. This led him to see the need for a universal understanding of history to provide a view toward “the totality of all events,” which can also be explained as “an all-embracing theology of history.” As such, Pannenberg understood the focal point of God’s self-revelation as being the historical process, but only understood in light of the whole. His epistemic starting point is the triune God in history, without any sought after preconceived notions of the triune God in se, or in the eternal trinitarian relationships, as though revelation came about by some “supplementary inspiration” outwith history, or as though the primary revelation of God in Christ took place “in some strange Word arriving from some alien place

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185 TCG2, 603-6. Note also how crucial this is in Pannenberg’s trinitarian theology, especially in the Son’s relation to the Father and the Father’s own deity (ST, 2:364-67).
186 ST, 1:40-47.
187 ST, 1:31, 35-36.
188 Pannenberg, Basic Questions, 1:1.
190 Pannenberg, Basic Questions, 1:12-13.
192 ST, 1:250.
and cutting across the fabric of history.”¹⁹³ For Pannenberg, the doctrine of the Trinity is grounded in the divine economy which yields a genuine ontic description of God as the Creator and future Redeemer of the world. God’s self-revelation is proleptic and observable proleptically in light of the future’s view of history’s entirety. Thus, Pannenberg understands revelation via the anticipation of the totality of history in light of its end.¹⁹⁴

Grenz expressed caution over Pannenberg’s doctrine of revelation, finding at least four faults: (1) the lack of a doctrine of scripture viewing the Bible as divine revelation; (2) an over-dependence on historical research; (3) a minimized view of special revelation; and (4) a pneumatology unable to accept divine working beyond historical events in the epistemological process coinciding with reception of divine truth.¹⁹⁵ On the first point especially, that of viewing scripture as divine revelation, Grenz wanted to “move beyond” Pannenberg in holding to a “full-orbed doctrine of Scripture,” which included verbal inspiration. And yet he also adopted numerous aspects of Pannenberg’s doctrine of revelation. Grenz stated that he understood revelation as

an event that has occurred in the community within which the believing individual stands. “The revelation of God” is the divine act of self-disclosure, which reveals nothing less than the essence of God. This divine self-disclosure, while standing ultimately at the eschaton—at the end of history—is nevertheless a present reality, for it has appeared proleptically in history.¹⁹⁶

Unlike Pannenberg, Grenz did not equate revelation with history, making theology dependent on historical research,¹⁹⁷ nor did he conclude that revelation and God’s truth are subject to the scrutiny of other scientific disciplines. Rather than revelation being the historical events themselves, he understood revelation as resting on a foundation of historical events, and therein

¹⁹⁴ ST, 1:228-29.
¹⁹⁶ RET, 76.
¹⁹⁷ Grenz, “Pannenberg and Evangelical Theology,” 278.
disclosing the very “essence of God.” This feature is complex in Grenz’s writings, and seems to be the lynchpin for understanding the progressive nuanced distinction between his epistemology and ontology, which both stay primarily tied together throughout his work, but remain critical for understanding his view of revelation. Specifically, his view of revelation is Spirit-driven, corresponding to his understanding of the Spirit working in culture. His view of revelation does not equate the Spirit with culture, nor does it subject the Spirit to culture, or remove the Spirit from culture. Rather, the Spirit reveals God within culture.

It would be naïve to suggest that Grenz’s doctrine of revelation was not jolted and thereby shaped somewhat during his time with Pannenberg. The experience with his mentor was crucial for his situating of revelation under a pneumatological heading. This allowed Grenz to draw deeply from the “contemporary context” situated in history as a source where God is both working and speaking. Grenz asserted that in this “context” (i.e., real history) the Spirit is not speaking independent of scripture but “through scripture… in the particularity of the historical-cultural context in which we live,” and “in which the theologian seeks to work.” Emphasis on the historical context is consistent with the notion that God spoke prior to scripture’s actual inscripturation (a speaking that happened in historical-cultural contexts), speaks in and through

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198 Grenz’s understanding of God’s “essence” is explored in §5.1.4.3 of this thesis.
199 The importance of revelation in present history is not minimized in light of Grenz’s future-realistic ontology, which is explored in this chapter’s next section (§3.1.3).
200 TCG2, 379-404. Grenz also treated soteriology (particularly the nature of conversion and salvation) under the rubric of pneumatology (TCG2, 405-60). He would have also presumably done this in The Matrix series, which had no volumes distinctly devoted to the traditional categories of bibliology and soteriology, but relegated these categories under pneumatology. No other North American evangelical theologian placed scripture directly within a doctrine of the Holy Spirit, including Donald Bloesch in his seven-volume Christian Foundations series and Clark H. Pinnock (who also never proposed a systematic theology) either with The Scripture Principle (New York: Harper and Row, 1984) or Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996). In a personal conversation, Scottish theologian A. T. B. McGowan told me that Grenz’s work was the first he had ever read that located scripture under a pneumatological rubric with the traditional systematic categories (24 Feb. 2010).
201 RET, 97-101, 113. The Spirit’s speaking cannot be discerned individually, lapsing into a necessary subjectivism, but is discerned within the context of the redeemed, gathered community imbedded in a social-historical context (BF, 68, 92, 160-66).
202 BF, 161; and Grenz, “The Irrelevancy of Theology,” 310. For Grenz, theology’s primary norm is the biblical message or “kerygma as inscripturated in the Bible.” Accordingly, Grenz understood scripture’s nature and status as divine vis-à-vis revelation (RET, 93-94; see also TCG2, 398; and §1.4.1.1. of this thesis).
203 BF, 160-61.
the texts of scripture (both in the historical context where it was written and the subsequent
text of the church’s interpretation of it), and also speaks today (in the present historical-
cultural context). Here is where Grenz found justification for his dependence on other
theologians from church history, and those working in the present context. Indeed,
contemporary theologians categorically fall into two of the sources in Grenz’s theological
dialogue—the stream of church tradition and the contemporary context. These sources are not
isolated from theology’s primary source (scripture), but are dynamically and intimately related to
it. There is an organic unity flowing from Grenz’s principal source to the other sources as a
result of the pneumatological governance and organic “extension of the authority of scripture”
into church tradition and then into the contemporary context, all three of which are sources for
the second-order construction of theology.

The purpose of the speaking of the Spirit taking place through theology’s sources is not
just for the intellectual satisfaction of hearing or knowing what was said, which could just as well
terminate with the individual hearer. The present hearing of what the Spirit has said (and says),
however, is for the continual instruction “in the midst of our life together as we face the

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204 BF, 64-68. Here is also where Grenz’s affinity for “narrative theology” of such as George Lindbeck
is evinced (see RET, 77-78; Grenz, “The Universality of the ‘Jesus-Story,’” 107-11; SGRS, pt. 2-3 passim, NGQB, 282,
332-33), although Grenz is not uncritical of Lindbeck (see RTC2, 206-11 and Stanley J. Grenz, “Toward an
Undomesticated Gospel: A Response to D. A. Carson,” Perspectives in Religious Studies 30 [2003]: 459). This is another
significant difference between Pannenberg and Grenz. Pannenberg is dissatisfied with the “narrative approach to the
Bible” because he believes it “evades the truth claims of the biblical narratives” which he deems largely historical
and basic to faith and doctrine (RFH2, 49). See also Pannenberg’s interaction with proposals of James Barr et al in
ST, 1:230-57.

205 See Grenz’s declaration of an eclecticism that led him to “draw from a variety of voices—Pannenberg,
Lindbeck, and I should add Karl Barth as well....” (Grenz, “The Virtue of Ambiguity,” 364). It should be noted that
Grenz is not Barthian insofar as he does not fully adopt Barth’s doctrine of scripture, resisting Barth’s “inordinate
emphasis on the event character of revelation” (TCG2, 392), and yet his pneumatological view of scripture, where
the Spirit appropriates the written Word (the biblical text) to create a world centered on Jesus Christ, the Word
disclosed, Grenz shares something of Barth’s approach (BF, 78). In his most mature theology Grenz did, however,
adopt something like a Barthian Christ-centeredness insofar as he conceived Jesus as the Imago Dei, both revealing
and redeeming. In saying as much, Grenz sought to show that Heb 1:1-3 did not reveal two distinct movements in
the life of the Son but rather displayed that Jesus Christ is the Son because “precisely through the cross he revealed
the eternal nature and glory of God and thereby showed himself to be the wisdom of God through whom God
made the worlds” (SGRS, 222).

206 See the discussion of Grenz’s sources in §1.4.1. of this thesis.

207 BF, 119, 124-29, 161-64; and RET, 95.

208 BF, 68.
challenges of living in the contemporary world." It also serves present developments in scripture’s proper interpretation and application. And it nurtures the theological description of the faith experience and faith’s act(ion) in specific historical-cultural settings within the contemporary world, which are themselves part of God’s working in salvation history. Accordingly, Grenz highlighted the importance of “context” in a variety of spheres. It is not just where the Spirit speaks, but also where (extending from the biblical text through church history, and into the present context) the Spirit is working. And if the trinitarian God is speaking and acting, this must be worked-(thus, acted-)out in “performance” by those who have encountered this God. These performers are ones “destined to be the new humanity” and thus are in the process of presently being transformed into the *imago Dei*. According to Grenz, those being transformed by the Spirit into the divine image “carry the ethical responsibility to live out that reality in the present.” This is consistent with Grenz’s “working’ definition” of the nature, task, and purpose of theology:

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.

Here, one might start to observe underlying motivating factors for Grenz’s reliance on “cultural context” as a source of theology. Rather than assessing Grenz on the nature of this practice, making judgment about the degree to which factors in the contemporary context might have

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209 BF, 67.
210 RET, 75-76, 83; and SGRS, 222.
211 SGRS, 251-52; and BF, 65, 126-28.
212 BF, 16.
213 While likely that, in part, Grenz borrowed such a notion from Pannenberg and Lindbeck (Spencer, “Culture, Community, and Commitments,” 344), the impetus for much of Grenz’s proposal is found in his need to find a theology able to adequately address some of the most serious problems in the world and facing the church. See Roderick T. Leupp, *The Renewal of Trinitarian Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 12, 26, 106-9 for another example of looking for certain trinitarian models (and analogies) to fit needs of particular circumstances or issues.
driven his program, it must be granted that there is always a situated location in which theology is done.\textsuperscript{214} Specifically, theology is and must be done in \textit{every} situated location, which is where the church’s “missiological calling” is advanced and her theological engagement is mandated, believing that “Christian faith addresses the problems, longings, and ethos of contemporary people, knowing that the social context in which we live presses on us certain specific issues that at their core are theological.”\textsuperscript{215} For theology that claims to be distinctly Christian, trinitarian, and communitarian, it must serve the church in her present mission and witness of attesting to the Bible’s message, “which is directed toward the ‘future,’ toward the goal or \textit{telos}, of the divine activity in history.”\textsuperscript{216} This emphasis leads to the next major Pannenbergian theme reflected in Grenz’s work—the future’s ontological priority.

3.1.3. The Ontological Priority of the Future\textsuperscript{217}

Once described as one of the principal “theologians of hope,”\textsuperscript{218} maintaining that God’s revelation and activity are found in history, Pannenberg is also markedly known for his eschatology. His appeal to the future became “the focal point of ultimate truth,” while admitting the brokenness of the ascertainment of revelation “in the era before the consummation.”\textsuperscript{219} His retrieval of eschatology for the center of theology has been called “unmatched in contemporary theology,” and “nothing if not comprehensive.”\textsuperscript{220} Pannenberg’s emphasis on the future’s ontological priority over the present (and past) provided him the key to unlocking the meaning of the present (and past) since in his view the “essence” of something can only be known at its end and completion. And yet, through “anticipation” a thing possesses its essence since “[t]he

\textsuperscript{214} See Grenz’s understanding of theology’s “culture” motif in §1.4.1.3. of this thesis.
\textsuperscript{215} \textit{BF}, 159.
\textsuperscript{216} \textit{RET}, 115; and \textit{NGQB}, 218.
\textsuperscript{217} Roger Olson calls this “[t]he most difficult problem with Pannenberg’s doctrine of the Trinity” (“Wolfhart Pannenberg’s Doctrine of the Trinity,” 203).
\textsuperscript{218} Grenz and Olson, \textit{Twentieth Century Theology}, 170-72.
\textsuperscript{219} \textit{RFH2}, 19, 55. Grenz acknowledged this “wholesome and helpful development” in Pannenberg’s thought,” which did not exist in the 1961 essay later translated as “Kerygma and History,” in \textit{Basic Questions}, 1:81-95 (Grenz, “Pannenberg and Evangelical Theology,” 280).
\textsuperscript{220} Mostert, \textit{God and the Future}, 20.
decision concerning the being that stands at the end of the process has retroactive power.”\textsuperscript{221}

Clayton notices how Pannenberg avoids “skeptical” epistemological conjectures by making an ontological move,\textsuperscript{222} and in doing so employed what to him was a “new systematic category” known as “prolepsis.”\textsuperscript{223}

Prolepsis (“anticipation”) has a long history in philosophy and theology, but became significant to Pannenberg’s work in a manner unparalleled by any theologian.\textsuperscript{224} On this point there is development within Pannenberg’s thinking in that early in his career he saw the future engendering eternity whilst later he saw God engendering eternity.\textsuperscript{225} This move landed Pannenberg closer to Aquinas’s expression of the divine being’s actuality, \textit{Deus est suum esse} (“God is nothing but the actuality of being”). Thus Pannenberg is able to affirm that “God is his own future in the sense that he has no future beyond himself.”\textsuperscript{226} In this way, the future does not occur to his present, but rather “God’s future constitutes his present.”\textsuperscript{227}

This is unlike the creatures, whose experience of the future is contingent upon the “present reality” of their lives.\textsuperscript{228} Therefore by prioritizing God’s future, Pannenberg safeguards human freedom and the contingency of all human events.\textsuperscript{229} And yet the eternal Son became a human creature, dependent upon the triune God’s work to bring about the reconciliation of all

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{222} Clayton, “The God of History and the Presence of the Future,” 99.
\item \textsuperscript{223} Pannenberg, “God’s Presence in History,” 262.
\item \textsuperscript{225} Mostert, \textit{God and the Future}, 141-44.
\item \textsuperscript{226} Pannenberg, “Eternity, Time and the Trinitarian God,” 13. This affirmation seems to be a self-conscious avoidance of at least two problematic ideas: (1) a Hegelian view of reality; and (2) process theology’s continual development of all things, making God dependent on something (a process) external to himself.
\item \textsuperscript{227} Pannenberg, “Eternity, Time and the Trinitarian God,” 13. Although this seems to contradict Pannenberg’s earlier often misinterpreted statement that “God does not now exist” (Wolfhart Pannenberg, \textit{Theology and the Kingdom of God}, ed. Richard John Neuhaus [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969], 56), which according to Mostert is a matter of God’s existence and power being known when God’s essence is made explicit and his deity established “in relation to precisely this world” (Mostert, \textit{God and the Future}, 154-55).
\item \textsuperscript{228} Pannenberg, “Eternity, Time and the Trinitarian God,” 13.
\item \textsuperscript{229} Mostert, \textit{God and the Future}, 136.
\end{itemize}
things with himself. According to Pannenberg, Jesus’ resurrection proleptically displays “the reality of the new, eschatological life of salvation in Jesus himself,” making sense of his incarnation as “the inbreaking of the future of God, the entry of eternity into time.” He argues further:

the reality of the resurrection of Jesus is definitively and irrefutably decided only in connection with the eschatological resurrection of the dead, with all the implications for the person of Jesus Christ that the church already confesses on the basis of its conviction that the Easter message is true.

Pannenberg, then, is not advocating any kind of realized eschatology since for him the eschaton remains future while having come proleptically in such a way that God’s futurity (and eternity) is already present.

Grenz’s emphasis on the future knew little of the philosophical gymnastics occupying Pannenberg’s work. Instead, journeying from a premillennial dispensational heritage which dominated a significant portion of US Evangelicalism during the second half of the twentieth century, he showed a deep awareness of historical and socio-theological developments in contemporary evangelical eschatology. He identified threads he deemed helpful, generated from these other developments, and integrated them into his own eschatological construction. Grenz’s version of the future’s priority, however, looked to revelation as such and to the structure of the scriptural canon. In the introduction to one of his final works, posthumously published, Grenz asserted that the character of God’s revelation of his own name actually has a “largely nonphilosophical character” to it. He observed that God’s revelation of his name is “initially indeterminate, for it anticipates a future, deeper disclosure of meaning,” moving “from ambiguity to clarity.” Additionally, he stated that the very “pronouncement of the I AM is an

231 ST, 3:627.
232 ST, 1:331.
233 Mostert, God and the Future, 113-14, 143-45.
234 This is the agenda of Grenz, The Millennial Maze.
Divine revelation therefore leaves creation facing an eschatological direction, longing for “eschatological participation in the divine life,” which is “the ultimate expression of *imago dei* and therefore marks the *telos* for which humans were created in the beginning.”

Much milder than Pannenberg, Grenz adapted the future principle into what he designated as “eschatological orientation,” one of the three theological motifs he saw as inherent to distinctly Christian theology. Eschatological orientation then gives way to his “eschatological realism,” being discovered and experienced through the believer’s anticipation of the vision of salvation which God is effecting. “In the end,” he argued, this “participation in the perichoretic dance of the triune God as those who by the Spirit are in Christ is what constitutes community in the highest sense.” According to Grenz, this ultimate “community in the highest sense” is nothing short of “an outworking of God’s own eternal reality.” While Grenz’s language here might suggest that the only difference between the present community of gathered believers and the eternal fellowship of believers with the triune community might be one of degree, he did in fact more carefully distinguish the two. While the issue will be explored

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235 NGQB, 9-10.
236 GRV, 327.
237 While evinced at the rudimentary stage in the “kingdom” motif (RET, 137-47 and TCG1, 28-29), this motif became more defined in RTC, 216-17 and BF, 239-73 (whilst RTC was published earlier, BF was conceived earlier and developed Grenz’s methodology more thoroughly), although the idea of future-orientation existed in Grenz’s thought as early as his 1985 essay, “A Theology for the Future,” 266.
238 BF, 166. See also §1.4.2. and p. 28 of this present thesis.
239 Contra Knowles who misreads both Pannenberg and Grenz, suggesting the latter draws on the former for his eschatological realism. Unfortunately this fails to account for Grenz’s divergence from Pannenberg to establish an eschatological realism. Knowles further conjectures an interesting but speculative hypothesis of Grenz’s adaptation of John Hick’s “eschatological verificationism” (“Postmodernism and Evangelical Theological Methodology,” 94, esp. n144) without explicitly factoring Grenz’s own dismissals of Hick (e.g., TCG2, 637n11; and RTC2, 272-74).
242 Grenz, “Universality of the Jesus-Story,” 110.
briefly in the next chapter,\textsuperscript{243} the distinction he saw can be most readily observed in his refusal to make the ontological connection between the future kingdom and present linear history.\textsuperscript{244} And yet Grenz found God’s future kingdom as present in a concealed way, as a “hidden power currently at work in bringing the end to pass,” which then carries “ethical importance for the present.”\textsuperscript{245} With this understanding in view, God’s image bearers are privileged and mandated to participate with God in constructing a world in the present by speaking about (i.e., proclaiming) “the actual world,” which is the future coming kingdom, “for the sake of the mission of the church in the present, anticipatory era.”\textsuperscript{246}

Grenz’s eschatological realism accorded not with Pannenberg’s “provisionality of the present,”\textsuperscript{247} but instead referred to the “present reality” focused on Christ as the new humanity that corresponds to God’s “eschatological goal” for his creation.\textsuperscript{248} Grenz displayed a tension in his work by not seeing the future taking ontological “precedence,” but rather constituting the present orientation which in turn portends the future.\textsuperscript{249} The kingdom, then, was understood as “both an event and a sphere of existence,” and its coming creates “a new way of life in the present.”\textsuperscript{250} As such, the church “is determined by what the church is to become.”\textsuperscript{251} He explained further that while “not chronologically first in the historical flow, the final goal of history is logically first in the order of being. Only the end process determines ultimately "what

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{243}See p. 77-78n378 of this thesis.
\item \textsuperscript{244}As early as 1992, Grenz argued, “the kingdom of God is a transcendent reality that can be confused with no earthly kingdom prior to the final transformation of creation. No earthly city can ever hope to become the New Jerusalem, except through a radical transformation both of human nature itself and of the universe that through the Fall unwillingly participates in the human predicament” (Grenz, The Millennial Maze, 214; and see similar language in TCG2, 619).
\item \textsuperscript{245}TCG2, 605. See also the exposition of Grenz’s trinitarian ethic/s given in chap. 7 of this thesis.
\item \textsuperscript{246}BF, 273.
\item \textsuperscript{247}RFH2, 43, 176.
\item \textsuperscript{248}SGRS, 224.
\item \textsuperscript{249}However, Grenz did see God standing in the future (TCG2, 657). See also his Freudian slip where he said that the end of the historical process ultimately determines “what is” and that the final goal of history is logically first in the order of being (TCG2, 452-53)—leaning towards Pannenberg’s ontological priority of the future, seeming ever to affirm ontological priority of the future (TCG2, 475, 479), although it is critical to keep in mind that in each of these places Grenz was speaking of soteriological (election, predestination) or ecclesiological realities, not everything in history, and especially not God’s very being.
\item \textsuperscript{250}TCG2, 475.
\item \textsuperscript{251}TCG2, 479.
\end{itemize}
is.’ We are, therefore, what we will be.”

All of this must be balanced with how Grenz saw the future kingdom of God arriving as God’s action breaks into the present, not having any retroactive effects for the present and past, but bringing “a contradiction to, rather than merely a continuation of the present.”

Instead of finding the future determining the present as in Pannenberg’s ontology of the whole, Grenz’s narrative approach is much closer to seeing the future defining now, particularly for those who have faith in Christ, and in this manner determining the end of history when the kingdom is established.

According to Grenz, God constructs his “eschatological will” in the present world, which is the “real world that he is bringing to pass.” Indeed, Grenz understood the present world as currently passing away (1 Cor 7:31) while God is also presently making the eschatological new creation world, a realm that “lies before rather than beneath or around us.” It is this new creation world where all creation finds its connectedness in Christ, where the Spirit actively speaks through the scriptures by creating this eschatological world, “in, among, and through us.”

Grenz described his eschatological realism succinctly in this way:

Eschatological realism arises out of the biblical teaching that the new creation comes only as God’s gift to the world and will come only through the in-breaking of the kingdom of God that will be here when Jesus Christ returns from heaven.

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252 TCG2, 453.

253 TCG2, 619, 605.

254 Puzzled over whether Pannenberg’s usage of the term bestimmen in his lectures and in Systematische Theologie (1:64, 152, 214, 364) referred to the future as either “defining” or “determining” the present, Roger Olson once posed the question to him directly. Pannenberg responded, “Both, of course!” (personal interview with Roger Olson, 23 Apr. 2009, Waco, TX). See also Stanley J. Grenz, “Wolfhart Pannenberg: Reason, Hope and Transcendence,” The Ashbury Theological Journal 46 (1991): 86.

255 Grenz, “Why Do Theologians Need to Be Scientists?” 351-53; and RTC2, 253-56. See also TCG2, 600. Carson accuses Grenz of a categorical mistake of confusing the eternal with reality, and thereby eliminating the “real” existence of present linear temporality (Carson, “Domesticating the Gospel,” SBJT, 92). Grenz refuted this charge persuasively by arguing for “the centrality of theology and… [the] rejection of the autonomy of the human sciences”:

My perspective does not banish the universe to the realm of the unreal or make it less than real. On the contrary, insofar as God’s program for the ages is the transformation of this universe in the coming to be of the new heaven and the new earth, this universe is truly “real”—real, insofar as it is precisely this universe that God is moving toward its telos and hence toward the fullness of its reality. However, such judgments arise from the perspective of divine revelation and hence from Christian faith. Although they find echo in the natural sciences as well, they are not readily discernable from some supposedly neutral stance that a human knower might hope to be able to assume (Grenz, “Toward an Undomesticated Gospel,” 460-61).
in great glory. My point in advocating “eschatological realism” is that the future kingdom of God—the new creation—that will come as God transforms this creation into new creation—is what is ultimately real. Indeed, God’s new creation is in this sense “more real” than the present world. The New Testament declares that this is [sic] world is passing away. Moreover, as the author of Hebrews says, God will once again “shake the foundations” (of this world) so that what is truly real (the new creation/God’s kingdom) can appear.  

As such, the future kingdom, drawing believers ever forward and bringing them to fix their gaze upon that day when God is fully known, will one day “emerge” into the present by God’s own doing. This leads to the next theme shared somewhat between Pannenberg and Grenz.

3.1.4. The “Pannenberg Principle”

The string of coherence seen thus far through Pannenberg’s program starts with the provisionality of the present, which lends to the contestedness of all truth claims including God’s self-revelation. This revelation is subsumed under an ontology of the whole that prioritizes the future, which is where God irrefutably and incontestably establishes his kingdom and hence his deity. This fundamental thesis formed early and maintained throughout his work has been coined “Pannenberg’s Principle.” This deity is proleptically (though not really) present while ultimately displayed in the future, at which point its reality produces retroactive effects for all previous history.

Pannenberg derives these consequences from Rahner’s Rule, says Ted Peters who concludes that, for Pannenberg, “the eternal self-identity of God cannot be conceived independently of the work of the Son and Spirit within salvation history.” Pannenberg’s resolve, then, affirms that apart from this kingdom being realized in the world, “God could not be God.”

257 This maxim, “God’s deity is his rule,” was first coined by Roger Olson in “Pannenberg’s Doctrine of the Trinity,” 199.
At stake, then, in the creative work of the Father, as well as in the reconciliation imparted through the Son and in the work of the Spirit glorifying them both, is the existence of God in the world, without which no existence of God before the foundation of the world could be affirmed either. Now, once a world is given, the Godhood of God as its creator is no longer conceivable without his ruling in this world, no longer conceivable without the creatures giving praise to him, thanking him for their existence, and thereby, honoring him as their creator. Therefore it is not until the eschatological consummation of the world—but then with retroactive power—that the existence of God will be conclusively decided.

Pannenberg then offers an important implication for this, namely that “God, through the creation of the world, made himself radically dependent on this creation and on its history.” Thus in the relationship of God’s own history with the world, mediated by the actions of the trinitarian persons, and with God’s deity presently up for grabs, the fulfilment of God’s coming kingdom will demonstrate (“gewiesen”) God’s deity. It is precisely this commitment to the completion of the kingdom that is part of each trinitarian member’s divinity. Alternatively, “[a]part from the coming of His kingdom, God would not be God. Therefore, the future of His kingdom, as a history of His activity, is the place of God’s reality and the truth of history.”

Pannenberg understands the deity and identity of each member of the Trinity as dependent on the distinction from other members, including their deity and actions. While the Father’s monarchy is ultimately established in history, the Father does not “have his kingdom or monarchy without the Son and Spirit, but only through them.” Pannenberg explains further that “[o]n the basis of the historical relation of Jesus to the Father we may say this of the inner life of the triune God as well.” Beyond this, “the Father and Son have their divinity only as mediated through the Spirit… [who] is the reality of God’s kingdom in the world and, in that way, the

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259 Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Problems of a Trinitarian Doctrine of God,” Dialog 26 (1987): 255. This is a major difference between Pannenberg and Grenz, the latter maintaining God’s complete independence from the world and also the world’s utter dependence on him, not simply with God’s freedom ontologically relocated unto the eschaton but also as the reality free from and in no way dependent on this world, its creaturely features, and events.


263 ST, 1:324.
Commenting on the significant essay, “Der Gott der Geschichte,” in Pannenberg’s Grundfragen, Band 2, Philip Clayton offers the following synopsis:

For each of the persons of the Trinity, the other two represent “the one God,” and each has his full divinity only through the other two persons. Hence, in the resurrection of the Son through the Spirit, the Father’s Godhood is confirmed; in his self-differentiation from the Father, the Son’s full Godhood appears through the Spirit; in his glorification (Verherrlichung) of the Father and Son, the Spirit’s equal Godhood is established. Such a Trinitarian formulation ties God indissolubly with creation and history.

Following the above citation, Clayton declares that Pannenberg’s formula “is emphatically not meant to be a panentheistic doctrine of God, since the condition for humanity’s fellowship with God is its self-differentiation from God (on the model of the Son’s relationship to the Father).” While some might even conclude that this formula of indissolubly linking God, the world, and history harbors a latent pantheism, Pannenberg’s major difficulty is instead with “Hegel’s ghost,” panentheism. While Pannenberg’s most generous interpreters have acknowledged this “becoming” component in Pannenberg’s doctrine of God, one interpreter insists that “the ontological principle of ‘retroactive permanence’ overrules the principle of development or becoming.” And yet there is a critical qualification Pannenberg gives in his refutation of God’s becoming in history, namely, that “the eschatological consummation is only the locus of the decision that the trinitarian God is always the true God from eternity to eternity.”

Echoes of “Pannenberg’s Principle” are evident numerous places in Grenz’s writings. While sketching his agenda for a revisioned evangelical theology, he saw “the eschatological

266 See Grenz’s criticism of LaCugna (RTG, 190), which could be equally made of Pannenberg. See also Olson, “Trinity and Eschatology,” PhD thesis, 378.
267 Grenz and Olson, Twentieth Century Theology, 254. For additional critique of Pannenberg’s panentheism by those aware that Pannenberg denies the charge, see Olson, “Trinity and Eschatology,” PhD thesis, 373-84, and John W. Cooper, Panentheism—The Other God of the Philosophers: From Plato to the Present (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 278-81.
268 RFH2, 87.
270 ST, 1:331. Taylor notes this as an “important” qualification (Pannenberg on the Triune God, 41).
kingdom as the future of the world and its presence in the here and now” standing as “an important theological motif, an illuminative and integrative theme for theological reflection.” For Grenz, the “divine reign” concept served to be “a promising focal point for understanding the great Christian doctrines of God, humankind, Christ, the Spirit, the church and the last things.”

Viewing Pannenberg’s effort as “the latest and greatest attempt to construct a theology that is oriented to the theme of ‘kingdom,’” Grenz’s early kingdom theme was more or less an adaptation of the German theologian’s major principle. However, Grenz viewed the kingdom as partially present “in principle,” while finding that there still remains “a future eschatological aspect of the kingdom.” In the future, “God’s kingdom will be fully actualized in the new human society that God will inaugurate.” This will be when God becomes “king over all the universe de facto. What is God’s by right (de jure) will be actualized in the world. The entire universe will be the realm of God’s rule.” More than just proleptically, however, because the power of the kingdom is at work breaking into the present “from the future… we can experience the kingdom in a partial yet real sense prior to the great eschatological day.”

While endorsing what he called “amillennial realism,” Grenz saw the need for God’s people to expect great things to happen in the present, engaging in “realistic activity in the world.” At the same time, they also know that “the kingdom will never arrive in its fullness in history,” unless it comes by “the divine action breaking into the world.” Grenz asserted that this view “lifts our sights above the merely historical future to the realm of the eternal God…. [reminding] us that the kingdom of God is a transcendent reality which can be confused with no earthly kingdom prior to the final transformation of creation.” Meanwhile God is working in history, “effecting the consummation of the divine reign by establishing community” in a world

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271 RET, 147.
272 Grenz, “The Irrelevancy of Theology,” 311.
273 RET, 146-47.
274 Grenz defined “realistic” as activity that is “both effective and penultimate” (TCG2, 657).
275 TCG2, 619.
where ultimate sovereignty remains a “theological question.” Accordingly, the story of Jesus is incomplete at its current stage, which nevertheless highlights the narrative of God’s saving action in the world. When reaching its conclusion in the future, “God will establish community in its fullness,” bringing “his universal plan for creation to completion” and thereby publicly disclosing that Jesus is all of creation’s center and focus.\(^\text{276}\) Therefore, while experiencing fellowship with God through Christ, since believers have not yet entered the fullness of God’s intention of “future community,” where God now stands,\(^\text{277}\) implications for present living remain.\(^\text{278}\) Russell Moore observed a marked shift in Grenz’s thinking on this point where the eschatological goal began to be seen as “not merely a Kingdom but a Kingdom community.”\(^\text{279}\) This highlights no minor shift in Grenz’s program, for while the kingdom concept reserved early prominence, Grenz began speaking of “the coming of God’s community as the goal of history.”\(^\text{280}\)

Despite Grenz’s initial unwillingness to adopt prolepsis as Pannenberg does, the concept began to appear around the turn of the millennium as he spoke of the “validity” of a coherent presentation of the Christian vision. He asserted that its validity “does not look to a universally acceptable present reality for confirmation but anticipates the eschatological completion of the universally directed program of the God of the Bible.”\(^\text{281}\) In rearticulating his eschatological realism, he further stated that “the new creation toward which our world is developing is experienced through anticipation.”\(^\text{282}\) Grenz’s later work increasingly adapted components of his doctorvater’s principle. He saw Heb 1:1-3 declaring that “Jesus Christ, who as the Son is the visible manifestation of divine reality, ultimately fulfills this role and therefore comes to possess this

\(^\text{276}\) TCG2, 651.
\(^\text{277}\) TCG2, 657.
\(^\text{278}\) TCG2, 652-59.
\(^\text{279}\) Russell D. Moore, “Leftward To Scofield: The Eclipse of the Kingdom in Post-Conservative Evangelical Theology,” Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 47 (2004): 429-31. See §7.1.3.3. of the present thesis for an explanation of the relocation of the “kingdom” motif in Grenz’s writing, although the motif does not completely vanish, as seen in his 2005 revision of Prayer: Cry for the Kingdom.
\(^\text{280}\) TCG2, 658 (italics added for emphasis).
\(^\text{281}\) BF, 54.
\(^\text{282}\) BF, 272.
accolade only through the historical work in salvation history.” In this way, Grenz understood God’s revealed deity on display in salvation history, stating explicitly that “Jesus Christ fully reveals God—and thereby is the *imago dei*—as he fully redeems humankind.”283 Incidentally, Grenz offered a highly sympathetic description of Hegel’s construction, even designating it as trinitarian.284 Yet he seemed to intentionally avoid Hegel’s trappings of self-actualizing God in the world, which would have necessarily bound God to the created order, by instead adopting a more healthy dose of Eastern trinitarian theology in the ingenious use of the *perichoresis* concept.285

Grenz elsewhere came quite close to the concept of “retroactive” universal Lordship (and presence) when he found that Jesus’ promise of sharing his own name (the glorious I AM) entails “the promise of a new, eternal ‘being present’ of the sovereign God.” This promise is for those who bear the divine name, a promise to be with them “at every moment of time and even into eternity.” This promise is said to emerge in the Apocalypse as “the central significance of the divine eternality disclosed in the *ego eimi*.”286 Grenz also found another principle at work, where the Father bestows the divine name (i.e., his character, essential nature, and deity) on the Son, who in turn then returns to the Father what he receives from him.287 Indeed, Jesus’ own life, ministry, and death in salvation history become a “composite act of returning to the Father what the Son receives from the Father, namely, the Father’s very nature as deity—that is, the Spirit, who thereby becomes the Spirit shared by the Father and Son.”288 It is this dynamic, yielding a relational ontology, which is to be taken up as this chapter’s final matter for exploration.

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284 *SGRS*, 99.
285 *SGRS*, 316-17. This is explored in §5.1.2.-3. and §5.1.4.2.-3. of this thesis. However, see also p. 110n520 of this thesis for the vanishing of *perichoresis* in Grenz’s work.
286 *NGQB*, 246.
287 *NGQB*, 288.
288 *NGQB*, 290.
3.1.5. Relational Ontology

Attempts to nuance Pannenberg's doctrine of the Trinity, itself resulting from his rigorous application of the concept denoted in Rahner's Rule, have yielded many different labels. A range of descriptions have referred to his doctrine of the Trinity as advocating “trinitarian self-actualization,”\(^{289}\) a “reciprocal relational unity,”\(^{290}\) and a “relational model” of “dependent divinity” where “self-distinction constitutes… unity in God.”\(^{291}\) Others have described it as the “unity-in-distinction” of immanent and economic Trinity.\(^{292}\) Still others have portrayed this designation as a mutually independent ontological perichoretic self-distinction being the means of distinguishing trinitarian persons, over against any description of origin for members of the Trinity.\(^{293}\) While also spoken of as “reciprocal self-differentiation,”\(^{294}\) Pannenberg himself refers to this concept as a mutual, “reciprocal self-distinction,”\(^{295}\) which allows him to avoid the hard distinction of pitting persons as either concrete substances or concrete relations.\(^{296}\) As Clayton notes, this precise point is where Pannenberg’s view of history and epistemology take an ontological turn.\(^{297}\) These descriptive features of Pannenberg’s work indicate what is now

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\(^{290}\) Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology*, 203-11, 238.


\(^{292}\) See Kent D. Eilers, “Pannenberg on God’s Reconciling Action” (PhD thesis, University of Aberdeen, 2009), 43n126, who acknowledges that the phrase “unity-in-distinction” came from Christiaan Mostert. Mostert uses this phrase (*God and the Future*, 224), although it is actually used earlier by Roger Olson (“Wolfhart Pannenberg’s Doctrine of the Trinity,” 185).


\(^{295}\) See this exposition in *ST*, 1:308-19; and Pannenberg, “The God of History,” 36-38, where the term employed is “Selbstunterscheidung” (Pannenberg, “Der Gott der Geschichte,” 124, 126-27).

\(^{296}\) For an explanation of the issues involved here, including his “classical concerns,” see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 139-77. For two leading examples of those having developed thoroughly relational trinitarian ontologies, see David S. Cunningham, *These Three are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998) and Paul S. Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2000).

commonly referred to as the “relational turn” in theistic conceptualizations. The best way to understand Pannenberg’s doctrine of the Trinity, then, and its inherent components from which Grenz later drew and ultimately adapted for his own construction, is to highlight the concepts of trinitarian self-reciprocating identity and love, along with the role played by the social analogy.

For Pannenberg, the self-reciprocating identity inherent in the divine life is where his doctrine of the Trinity begins. It is also here where the phrase “God is love” (Jn 4:16) is unpacked, being understood as both “the comprehensive expression of the trinitarian fellowship of Father, Son, and Spirit,” and as indistinguishable from the divine essence. In this way, love is not simply one among God’s other many attributes, but instead represents the concreteness of the concept of the infinite. The entire economy of salvation, then, is the divine love manifested, serving as the eternal basis of the immanent Trinity coming forth as the economic Trinity, incorporating creatures thereby into the triune life. In the final sentence of his Systematic Theology, Pannenberg concludes: “The distinction and unity of the immanent and economic Trinity constitute the heartbeat of the divine love, and with a single such heartbeat this love encompasses the whole world of creatures.”

Beyond the trinitarian expositions of love given by Augustine or the medieval theologian Richard of St. Victor, Pannenberg’s understanding of the divine love is grounded in the displayed reciprocity of relations between persons of the Trinity. After all, “person” is a correlative idea. Pannenberg asserts that trinitarian dogma which affirms the divine Subject’s self-deployment negates the equality of divinity for divine persons, reducing their plurality to subordinate modes of being. Alternatively, he suggests that each member receives constitution, glory, lordship, and deity in the self-distinction from the God whom each glorifies in community.

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298 See Vanhoozer, Remythologizing Theology, 112-24.  
299 Miller and Grenz, Fortress Introduction, 133.  
301 ST, 3:646.  
302 ST, 1:286-88.
And while these “self-distinctions of God are constitutive for the divinity of the Trinitarian persons,” it must not be underemphasized that the persons themselves are constituted by their relationship to the other two members. Herein lies the reason for Pannenberg’s prioritization of God’s three-ness over God’s one-ness, yet whose unity becomes a “perichoresis” of the three persons in their reciprocal relations. And yet while beginning here, priority of attention looks to the Father-Son relation worked out in history (yet belonging to God’s eternity) as the foundation for the other relations in the triune life. God’s essence is seen as a relational concept, one existing as much in the immanent as in the economic Trinity, the former dependent on the inseparable action of the latter’s work in history. It is unclear whether this self-reciprocal identity necessitates the Hegelian self-actualization that some have found so unhelpful. And yet none of this can be divorced from Pannenberg’s Christological anthropology, where humans have fellowship with God by “participation in the fellowship of the Son with the Father by the Spirit in the life of the Trinity.”

While Pannenberg’s status as a social trinitarian has been recently contested, in a very important sense he cannot avoid seeing imago Dei as similitudo trinitatis, especially with his commitment to Jesus Christ as the true imago Dei, and with how determinative the historic economy is for the triune life, lordship, and deity. Having tied God indissolubly with creation and history, then, the way Pannenberg sees the trinitarian dynamic as a blueprint for establishing

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303 Pannenberg, “The God of History,” 36. See also Mostert, God and the Future, 206-10; and RFH2, 64, 73-81, 88.
304 Olson, “Pannenberg’s Doctrine of the Trinity,” 192.
305 Olson, “Pannenberg’s Doctrine of the Trinity,” 185-88.
306 Olson, “Trinity and Eschatology,” 226-27. See also the earlier treatment in the present chapter of this thesis, “The Role of History” (§3.1.1.).
308 ST, 3:583-84; see also Mostert, God and the Future, 206.
309 Taylor, Pannenberg on the Triune God, 92-97. See also RFH2, 98, which more mildly asserted that Pannenberg rejected traditional analogical approaches.
310 See Pannenberg’s understanding of imago Dei as anthropological, Christological and including a prescribed destiny (ST, 1:409). See also his description of believers needing to be renewed after Christ, having been made according to (2) God’s image from Gn 1:26 (ST, 2:215).
the human societal pattern is found in humanity’s destiny, which is “to share in the self-distinction of the Son from the Father,” and also to grow up in this relationship (i.e., self-distinction) with God the Father. According to Pannenberg, the Logos finds expression in humans to a higher degree than other creatures “because we are able and destined to distinguish God from ourselves and ourselves from God, so that the self-distinction of the Son from the Father can take shape in us.”

While there are a number of major problems in Pannenberg’s contribution to a relational ontology of divine (and human) persons, these are compounded by his application of the principles to at least three things he sees as also having reciprocal relations. First, there are the identity-constituting and deity-granting reciprocal relations of the triune persons which through Christ also constitute human identity. Next for Pannenberg there is the reciprocal relationship between the immanent and economic Trinity, as well as that which exists between the present and future. And social analogies seem to be employed in multiple places. And yet while treating Rahner’s Rule earnestly, Pannenberg’s reconceptualization of the Trinity remains fraught with “serious ambiguity.” As Sanders suggests, this may result from his desire to apply Rahner’s axiom as rigorously as he does, or it may highlight the vast gap that will always exist with logical propositions humans set forth in attempts to understand God’s nature and ways. In attempts to nuance the trinitarian members’ self-differentiation, some have even said that it is “not an eternal, heavenly event,” but one that is otherwise historical, which then yields supplemental confusion for the precise manner in which the future affects God, unless each is

311 Taylor, Pannenberg on the Triune God, 105.
312 ST, 2:385.
313 This is contra the more conservative reading of Pannenberg taken in Taylor, Pannenberg and the Triune God, 96-97, suggesting that the imago Dei in Pannenberg is not similitudo trinitatis but creatura operis trinitatis. See also the confusion that Grenz highlighted when suggesting that Pannenberg is an “articulate ally” of those wanting to maintain a classical understanding of the eternal God, even while he is said to reject traditional analogical approaches in order to assert doxological language about God’s eternal essence (RFH2, 98).
somehow supposed to be grounded in the other. The entire time Pannenberg also seems to assert that God is “simple” even while constructing a massive edifice upon the idea of reciprocal self-distinction or self-dedication in order to be more overtly trinitarian. But do all these things work together? Or is the end result simply incoherence?

Whatever assessment might be made of Pannenberg’s relational ontology and its variegated dimensions, Grenz was sympathetic to it and his work was deeply affected by it. At the very minimum, perhaps displaying the most significant theme bequeathed to the younger theologian, Grenz acknowledged Pannenberg’s “elevation of the social Trinity to the center of theology,” which included strident implications for a relational ontology that warranted even further development. As a general summary of something he elsewhere called “the triumph of relationality,” Grenz cited Jüngel, Moltmann, Jenson, and Pannenberg as theologians who (building upon Hegel, Barth, and Rahner) have been committed to a relational understanding of the Trinity. While this statement may be highly contestable and also somewhat irresponsible, Grenz nevertheless understood their work as having launched “a relatively new emphasis that bases the doctrine of the Trinity on relationality and as such represents… an extension and development of ancient trinitarian thought.” Observed in the influential writings of theologians like Boff, Zizioulas, and LaCugna, “the concept of relationality had indeed moved to the center stage,” along with its incipient relational ontology. Grenz himself found the impetus for a “thoroughgoing relational ontology” in the concept of perichoresis, which preserved the ideas

316 This seems hard to maintain in light of how radically dependent God is on his creation and its history in Pannenberg’s scheme. See Pannenberg, “Problems of a Trinitarian Doctrine of God,” 254-55.
319 RTG, 117-62.
320 BF, 191.
321 RTG, 117-19.
of the one and the many within interrelational dynamics. By the early twenty-first century, he saw this idea holding major promise for his own work.

This relational ontology Grenz began working with was referred to as something also said to be building on Zizioulas's communion ontology. The ensuing social or relational ontology for Grenz also had import for God, who is spoken of as essentially other-oriented. Here, however, is where Grenz took Pannenberg to the next step, moving from what he saw as a more underdeveloped relational ontology to a communion ontology. And while chiding Pannenberg for ignoring the theme that would have major import for Grenz's own work, which he found central to scripture and systematic theology, namely the “community” theme, he nevertheless commended his mentor for providing the foundation for the move to “community,” having elevated the social Trinity to theology's center. With these moves observed while exploring Pannenberg’s relational ontology, the same can be seen in Grenz’s work by considering the trinitarian persons’ self-reciprocating identity and love, along with the function of the social analogy. These features are captured together in one paragraph toward the end of his first Matrix volume. According to the trinitarian shape of the newfound communion ontology, “the three members of the Trinity are ‘person’ precisely because they are persons-in-relationship; that is, their personal identities emerge out of their reciprocal relations.” Grenz explained further that “[t]he attendant ontology of personhood suggests that the Creator's intent that humans be the

322 SGRS, 317.
323 Interestingly, in a personal letter seeking a written reference for a number of large scholarship funding agencies in preparation for the work resulting in the volume published as The Social God and the Relational Self (2001), Grenz wrote to leading proponent of a relational model of the Trinity, Paul Fiddes, then Principal of Regent's Park College, University of Oxford, noting “the crucial importance of my proposed work in advancing the scholarly enterprise as it relates to your own field of study” (2 Nov. 1998).
324 Roger E. Olson, “Deification in Contemporary Theology,” Theology Today 64 (2007): 197. See also SGRS, 16, 50-57, 317, 332, which shows dependence on both Zizioulas and Catherine LaCugna for this newfound ontology. Unfortunately, however, this does not reflect or acknowledge the incompleteness with which Grenz rendered these other proposals, which is further unpacked in §5.1.2. of this thesis.
325 Olson, Reformed and Always Reforming, 231. See this notion in Grenz, where the affirmation of God as “person” comes from creaturely experiences of God’s incomprehensibility as well as that of his will and freedom (TCG2, 84-85).
326 Grenz, “The Irrelevancy of Theology,” 310-11. There may, however, be good reason for Grenz’s criticism to be put more mildly—see the description of community in relation to kingdom and imago Dei in Pannenberg, Anthropology in Theological Perspective, 531-32.
representation of the divine reality means that the goal of human existence is to be persons-in-
relation after the pattern of the perichoretic life disclosed in Jesus Christ.”

For Grenz, the self-reciprocal identity constitutive of persons was understood as a given in
the newfound ontology of communion. In his theology’s most mature shape, Grenz
understood that personal relations, and not causal ones as in earlier theological history, affirm
that the presenting and substantiating of love is complete between persons in the eternal
dynamic of the divine life. It is this dynamic of the divine life—the dynamic of reciprocal-
glorification and love—into which creatures are drawn. These ideas showed up earlier in
Grenz’s 1993 methodological work where he explained that the truth of God creates our
experience within a community. Earlier in 1990 he also declared that “God is the divine
community,” the basis for the sameness and difference reflected in human community and
sexuality. This was worked out later when the telic component of human existence was
explained as it relates to the divine life:

Ultimately, then, we enjoy the fullness of community as, and only as, God
graciously brings us to participate together in the fountainhead of community, namely,
the life of the triune God. For this reason, the communal fellowship Christians
share goes beyond what is generated by a common experience or even by a
common narrative. The community that is ours is nothing less than a shared
participation—a participation together—in the perichoretic community of Trinitarian
persons.

Within these ideas, Grenz adapted Pannenberg’s self-reciprocating identity concept. To the
confusion of some evangelicals, he was shattering categories in the subordination debate (within
the divine life and with male-female relations) by affirming the mutuality of both the Son
submitting to the Father as well as the Father submitting to the Son, and that, on biblical

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327 SGRS, 332.
328 NGQB, 339-40, 366.
329 RET, 73.
330 Grenz, Sexual Ethics, 47-48. See also §1.4.2. of this thesis where the “community” motif is discussed in
light of its relationship to the other motifs in Grenz’s theological construction.
But of additional consideration in Grenz’s thought is how this idea of reciprocal-relationality, personhood and community relate to the concept of love.

Grenz designated love as central among God’s attributes, and as his only true attribute. For him, to affirm that “God is love” was the most basic and fundamental thing that could be declared about the divine essence. Love is a relational term requiring subject and object and is tantamount to the very “reciprocal self-dedication of the trinitarian members,” constituting or comprising God’s unity. This mutual self-giving and coinherence of trinitarian persons, accompanied by the use of *perichoresis* as the manner in which to describe their constitution “opened the way for the development of a dynamic ontology of persons-in-relationship or persons-in-communion.” In some ways, Grenz’s usage of love to describe the trinitarian life served to perpetuate the ambiguity he saw in Pannenberg about whether the Spirit is the love relation between Father and Son or else the third person sharing love with the Father and Son. At various points, God’s primary attribute, God’s essence, and God himself are each described as love; meanwhile Grenz said that the Spirit does not just forge the connecting link between one trinitarian member to another, but “is the love shared within the divine life and as such is the personal concretization of the very essence and character of the one God.” As such, and as the “divine love” given by Father to Son and then back to Father from Son, the Spirit is “shared

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334 *TCG2*, 71-72. Note that here Grenz actually said that love “builds” the unity of the one God. I could not find this language used elsewhere in Grenz’s work when dealing with this issue of love and personhood within the divine life. He instead opted for the terms “constitutes,” “comprises,” or “gives rise to” (*SGRS*, 313-31; *NGQB*, 287-90, 331-41), language employed with seemingly a bit more caution.

335 *SGRS*, 314-17.

336 See his critique of Pannenberg on this point in Grenz, “The Irrelevancy of Theology,” 310.

337 *NGQB*, 340. See also *SGRS*, 327 and *TCG2*, 71.
Gift,” which becomes ontologically significant as it encapsulates God’s graciousness. While much more of the features included in this dynamic will be explored in the next two chapters on Grenz’s doctrine of the Trinity, including the nature of perichoretic unity (§5.1.2.-5.1.4.), participation in God’s life, along with developments in Grenz’s conception of the doctrine and further import from the community theme, the final feature relevant to the present study of Grenz’s relational ontology is the role that the social analogy played.

Ultimately, Grenz held that “nothing in creation is totally analogous to the one God who is three-in-one.” And yet, it is the reciprocal dynamic within the triune life that is involved in the glorification of the other which is part of the reciprocal sharing of love. Grenz explained that the Father eternally lavishes unbounded divine love on (thus glorifying) the Son, who then reciprocates this love received from the Father, glorifying the Father eternally just as he did on his earthly mission. It is then by being drawn into this dynamic of the trinitarian life that “the new humanity participates in this eternal reciprocal glorification.” This happens both as humans glorify the Father and the Son by the Spirit, but also as they are glorified in the Son by the Spirit with all of creation, displaying the “ultimate expression of the imago dei” and thus denoting the purpose for God making human beings originally. What is made visible in the existence of the church, then, according to Grenz, is “the divine quality of love that Jesus reveals, the love that characterizes God.” In other words, the indwelling Spirit transforms the ecclesial community “after the pattern of the perichoretic life of the triune God.” And therefore by incorporating believers “into Christ,” the Spirit thus “places participants in one another,” which in turn brings

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338 NGQB, 340-41. The Spirit is also said to be both the name and essence of God which the Father bestows on the Son who is other than the Father and thus finds his name (i.e., “Spirit”) in the Son. Additionally, the Father is named as Father by the Son, in all of which both are dependent on the Spirit who is the very name they share (NGQB, 334). See this notion further unpacked in “Beyond the ‘Social Trinity’” in §5.1.4.2. of this thesis. Incidentally, this may come directly from his reading of Pannenberg, who, on Grenz’s account held that the Spirit is both the divine essence as such and the third person of the Trinity (RFH2, 79-80).

339 TCG2, 71.

340 SGRS, 327.
about the “ecclesial solidarity” that entails living out the unity of the triune God.\textsuperscript{341} The analogy, however, does not stop here since ultimately it is a God-centered and thus Christ-centered view of the perichoretic relations, a theme exhibiting substantial development in Grenz’s reading of the issues.\textsuperscript{342}

3.2. Summary

This and the preceding chapters’ research findings yield the conclusion that Grenz’s method and theology were deeply affected by Pannenberg, which could be expected based on an account Pannenberg gave of one supervisory meeting.\textsuperscript{343} Pannenberg’s work provided an indelible imprint on much of Grenz’s work, and the primary aegis for the development of the most significantly catalytic feature in his academic/ecclesial theological thought. He read Pannenberg carefully and appropriated his thought in ways deemed helpful within his own context. In this manner, Grenz provided somewhat of an extension and organic development of Pannenberg’s thinking. It was much more than simply an evangelical rendition of Pannenberg in a different context, which, while somewhat being this, was actually much more of a working out of Grenz’s understanding of the next steps Pannenberg’s thought needed to take in order to be consistent with its own outworking in the historical framework of the Christian gospel’s articulation in the world (or, of religions). At least, this was how Grenz saw it.\textsuperscript{344} And while easily the most influential thinker for Grenz’s most radical early development as a young academic theologian, Pannenberg was not the only thinker he utilized for the development of his own

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{341} SGRS, 335. For a more detailed explanation of how this works in Grenz’s ecclesiology, see Sexton, “Stanley Grenz’s Ecclesiology,” 31-33, 40-44.
\item \textsuperscript{342} For more on this, see Sexton, “The \textit{Imago Dei} Once Again,” 187-206, esp. pp. 192-96 for how various analogies worked in his anthropology and theology proper.
\item \textsuperscript{343} See Wolfhart Pannenberg’s comments cited in Leafblad, “Prolegomena: In Dedication to Professor Stanley Grenz,” 1.
\item \textsuperscript{344} Grenz, “The Irrelevancy of Theology,” 310-11.
\end{itemize}
trinitarian project. He took account of and borrowed from a huge arsenal of thinkers to provide the fuel for his own work, the array of which will be observed in the next two chapters.345

So far, then, it can be summarized that while Grenz did not borrow from Pannenberg on every single point in his methodological presuppositions, his work nevertheless reflects him on each major point in ways that set forth Pannenberg’s work as the major catalytic feature contributing much to his erstwhile student’s theological method. Grenz’s pursuit of his own doctrine of the Trinity, as well as a comprehensively trinitarian theology and a trinitarian ethic, can also really only be properly understood when beginning with this understanding, mindful of features he resembled, both borrowed and adapted from Pannenberg. While not in everything, Grenz was a true disciple of Pannenberg, and there is nobody else upon whose theological shoulders he was more directly situated in his development.

Inasmuch, then, as Pannenberg’s method and shape of theology’s main subject can be called properly “trinitarian,” or even “more trinitarian than any he knows of,”346 Grenz followed suit. With a few significant exceptions, nothing offset his program from traveling with Pannenberg down many parallel paths. The features Grenz did not adopt from Pannenberg are clear and seem to do with things that were simply deemed inappropriate in Grenz’s contextual location. For example, the assumed “postmodern turn” was a difference for Grenz and probably factored significantly into his adoption of a more narrative approach to theology. His view of scripture’s authority (and inspiration) was also different from Pannenberg’s, as was his reading of the filioque clause in the Western Creed, each of which displays key features within Grenz’s methodology. It seems also that Grenz deemed each of his commitments on these issues to be “trinitarian” in one way or another, perhaps even more trinitarian than Pannenberg as Grenz would have seen it, especially as he deemed the triune God’s activity occurring in particular

345 Among these can be observed the theologians Grenz engaged with in RTG and others cited in Grenz, “The Virtue of Ambiguity,” 364.
localized social settings. Having established Pannenberg, then, as the major catalyst of Grenz’s most significant trinitarian development, Grenz nevertheless still borrowed key components for his doctrine of the Trinity from others, which will be explored in the next two chapters, each helping him to arrive at the place he needed to be to move forward with his own unique trinitarian construction.\(^{347}\)

Based both on his following of and particular divergences from Pannenberg, Grenz’s work should also be provisionally described as “trinitarian.” And while Pannenberg’s influence contributed to some degree the most defined contours of the trinitarian thrust and emphases in Grenz’s theology, the younger theologian nevertheless remained his own thinker with his own unique agenda. To establish this, it is necessary to explore both the range of his trinitarian exposure and development, as well as his own unique trinitarian thought and construction(s).

\(^{347}\) Apparently, the treatment of trinitarian theology in *SGRs* was insufficient for the journey he planned to travel on in his construction of *The Matrix*. To engage the context of postmodernism Grenz knew that he would have to draw from the robust theology that had emerged out of the twentieth century, which was ebbing and readily available for the church’s usage. A survey of Grenz’s resourcement of this reservoir is found in chap. 5 of this thesis.
Chapter 4:

Discovering the Divine Community:

The Early Developing Shape of Stanley J. Grenz’s Doctrine of the Trinity

4.1. Introduction

The previous two chapters explored the major catalyst for the development that led Grenz to see the relevance of a thoroughly trinitarian approach to theology which in turn charted his course of exploration. If his project were to be truly trinitarian, as he had observed in some of Pannenberg’s most important contributions to recent Protestant theology, the Trinity would necessarily need to be understood as ontologically primal. In order to conceive this, however, Grenz needed an appropriate doctrine of the Trinity to work with. And while indicating nothing of the full-blown trinitarian project that the depth of engagement with Pannenberg’s work convinced him to seek, since there was never a time when Grenz could recall that he had not been a trinitarian it follows that he was always a trinitarian of some kind. Emphases he adopted and adapted from Pannenberg’s project were not placed upon any tabula rasa, nor did they end up completely taking over Grenz’s own agenda. Because earlier and contemporary theologians comprised an essential part of both the “tradition” and “culture” sources for Grenz’s theology, their significance for his program cannot be overlooked.

Advancing the argument of this thesis beyond the strides taken in the previous two chapters, and while Pannenberg still features significant at various junctures, this chapter and the next one aim to conduct a much broader survey of Grenz’s trinitarian understanding. It will identify precisely what trinitarian models were immediately available for Grenz, and is concerned with how he read, borrowed, and adapted key ideas from his theological predecessors, as well as

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348 RTG, ix.
349 See §1.4.1.2.-1.4.1.3. of this thesis.
how he differed from them. Grenz’s trinitarian development throughout his career will be traced, exploring precisely what kind of doctrine of the Trinity he was utilizing at different points on his theological journey. Amidst the far-reaching scope of the twentieth century rebirth of trinitarian theology, there were a variety of options to choose from. And thus, this chapter and the next explore the developmental observations Grenz surveyed in his own engagement with the leading trinitarian thinkers around him.

Providing this broader survey of his exposure to the world of trinitarian ideas, along with his own advances, this chapter will first consider the early trinitarianism Grenz inherited largely from his own theological tradition and seminary mentors. Next, his well-known interest in the new social trinitarianism is explored, followed by an assessment of both his reception of social trinitarianism, along with the abiding role of vital features from the more traditional, perennial “Western” model that resolutely remained in his conception of the doctrine of the Trinity. After this, the next chapter will detail his account of the twentieth century trinitarian resurgence, examining this account as it was conducted in a concentrated manner in the 2004 book-length treatment of trinitarian theology, *Rediscovering the Triune God*. This book was of critical importance for his work in *The Matrix* series and preserves many inklings into the doctrine of the Trinity as Grenz conceived it in what turned out to be practically his most mature conception. Following this survey, an exposition of important features of Grenz’s doctrine of the Trinity will be provided.

Note the somewhat unfortunate “standard” characterizations of trinitarian models (Eastern or social trinitarianism versus Western or Latin trinitarianism) which were largely bequeathed to modern theology and contemporary scholarship by analytic philosophical theologians. E.g., see Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O’Collins (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1999), and other essays in that volume. See also the assessment offered by Richard Cross, “Two Models of the Social Trinity?” *Heythrop Journal* 43 (2002): 275-94, and Stephen T. Davis’s attempt to move toward reconciling the two models in his *Christian Philosophical Theology* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006), 60-78. These characterizations of Eastern and Western trinitarian thought were commonly accepted devices Grenz simply could not avoid.
4.2. Early Trinitarianism

Inherited from his North American evangelical background, Grenz’s initial view of the doctrine of the Trinity was what he understood as “the classical Western approach that presents the one God before moving to the divine triunity.”\footnote{RTG, ix-x.} He regretfully identified this early approach as relegating the doctrine of the Trinity to a small corner in the vast room of theology, effectively expressing no interest in how God’s triunity might inform the rest of systematic theology and ethics.\footnote{Grenz saw this approach coming largely from “the rationalist approach to theology” that he learned during his seminary studies (TCG2, xxxii), which nevertheless gave him “a degree of deftness in defending belief in the doctrine of the Trinity” (RTG, ix).} The present chapter takes no issue with the matter of the doctrine of the Trinity informing theology and ethics for Grenz, which is considered in chapters six and seven of this thesis, setting forth how his writings were thorough in seeking to show how the doctrine of the Trinity informed everything.\footnote{See SGR1, 252. Although never having the opportunity to complete the project upon which his ethics would later be built, based on the remarkable coherence of his body of work, Grenz’s ethical writings serve as a reliable test-case for the comprehensiveness of the trinitarian thoroughness of his project (see the development of this argument in chap. 7 of this thesis).} This chapter and the next are primarily concerned with the first issue, the one from which Pannenberg dislodged Grenz, and which stimulated the evolution of his work’s major feature. This chapter and the ensuing one therefore highlight the question of what kind of doctrine of the Trinity Grenz would represent and articulate. But the first matter of exploration concerns not where he ended up or even where he happened to journey, but where he came from.

4.2.1. Inheriting Lewis and Demarest

It is no surprise that Grenz had some difficulty with the manner in which his former professors Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest articulated the doctrine of the Trinity.\footnote{It is well-known that Grenz made somewhat of an epistemological shift away from the earlier dominant epistemology advocated by his former teachers and other evangelical leaders, which is articulated clearly in the argument of RTC. But the argument given there, however, relates more to Grenz’s reading of Evangelicalism and its defining features rather than the doctrine of the Trinity per se and/or its shape within the North American body of evangelical doctrinal literature (this historical theological issue will be accounted for in Jason S. Sexton, Evangelicals...} Their
jointly-authored theological work itself indicates a significant dilemma. After dealing with some epistemological matters and the nature of revelation in the first four chapters, the work’s second major section addressed “the Living God,” leading-off with chapters entitled, “God: An Active, Personal Spirit,” and “God’s Many Splendored Character,” which only then followed with the chapter, “God’s Unity Includes Three Persons.” The doctrine of the Trinity is hardly touched outside of this latter chapter, even though it is said to have major relevance for apologetics and significant areas of life and ministry. While meagerly attempted in the chapter on the Trinity, other chapters make no attempt to integrate God’s triunity either with his oneness, or with the rest of theology proper. The chapter following the trinitarian one, “God’s Grand Design for Human History,” also avoids any relevant import from the doctrine of God as Trinity.

In spite of the unfortunate ordering of their theology and inherent segregation of the doctrine of the Trinity, when coupled with their articulation of God’s triunity, Lewis and Demarest’s articulation of God’s oneness (divine simplicity) was fraught with tension and impulses moving in another direction. Perhaps this was due to awareness of the relational turn underway within the broader Christian tradition and even prefiguring a shift in North American evangelical trinitarian theology, where Grenz would eventually be a leading innovator. Regardless, their effort displays a number of strains. They were not entirely consistent in their presentation of the so-called “Western form” of the Trinity received by evangelical theology. In their description of the tradition, they present a sweeping historical sketch citing not one

and the Trinity: Tracing the Return to the Center of Christian Theology [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2013]). And yet, the argument throughout RTC runs an implicitly (if not explicitly) trinitarian course while even there aiming for a distinctly evangelical identity while Grenz was pushing matters in a distinctly trinitarian direction. See RTC2, 220-22; and also §8.2. of this thesis, where this point about RTC is made more explicitly and conclusively.

355 Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, Integrative Theology, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987-94), 1:280-88. Areas of practical import for life and ministry are said to be meditation, prayer, loving relationships, ministry simplicity, doctrinal orientation, and missionary theology (pp. 285-88).

historical work on the development of trinitarian dogma. Yet in less than two and a half pages, they attempt to span the second century *Epistle of Barnabas* down to contemporary evangelical Millard Erickson.\(^{357}\)

Evincing some level of discomfort with their understanding of Augustine’s “Neo-Platonic doctrine of God’s simplicity (where the One lacks all distinction),”\(^{358}\) Lewis and Demarest opted for a two-fold approach for their doctrine of the Trinity which might more adequately maintain divine simplicity. To do this, they first established that whatever the Trinity is it must not lapse into polytheism since this hypothesis “does not fit the facts of general and special revelation... as coherently as the hypothesis of God’s oneness in essence.”\(^{359}\) Second, they declared that the doctrine of the Trinity must fit with their understanding of the biblical description of God, including “multiplicity within the divine unity.”\(^{360}\) On this second point, based on a dependence on biblical data and rationality they found patristic confessions affirming “trinitarianism against a mere divine singularity.” They also found communication to be “inherent in the Triune God eternally,” where “[t]ranscending the limits of space and time in the Godhead are personal relationships involving contentful communication.”\(^{361}\)

Expanding their initial descriptions, they affirmed that “[t]he biblical oneness does not rule out distinguishable attributes and persons,” and that trinitarian members’ “equality of essence” is not affected by any ordering of relationships in the triune economy.\(^{362}\) Stretching their view of simplicity to its furthest extent, they took one more step in allowing three distinct, personal

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\(^{357}\) Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 1:255-57.

\(^{358}\) Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 1:257. See also the recent critique of Oliver Du Roy’s thesis in Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 13-41, challenging notions of “Platonism” evident in Augustine’s thought, finding in Augustine much more than something holding to a doctrine of God where the one lacks all distinction. See also Ayres’s discussion of Augustine’s notion and usage of simplicity, which Augustine is said to develop from his later readings of earlier Christian authors (*Augustine and the Trinity*, 208-29).

\(^{359}\) Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 1:280. See also p. 271.

\(^{360}\) Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 1:258, 271.


\(^{362}\) Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 1:271 (italics added for emphasis), 279.
centers of consciousness in the divine Being. And while about to dust off their trinitarian treads and leave behind the orphan chapter on God’s triunity, they gave one consolation: “Until a view is proposed that more coherently fits the biblical passages on both the unity and the diversity of the Godhead, we do well not only to believe and to sing about the Trinity, but also to defend trinitarianism.” Without seeking to nuance or correct difficulties within Lewis and Demarest’s trinitarian conception which might be labeled in somewhat caricatural style, “simplicity incoherently adopting sociality,” and while it might be easily bypassed by those interested in Grenz’s mature theology, the trinitarian context in which he was trained and by which he was initially deeply influenced was not insignificant for his development. Grenz’s early exposure to this kind of trinitarianism in which he was “schooled” was highly indicative of his earlier trinitarian thinking, from which he would evolve after gaining a “new perspective” from which to conceive this doctrine.

4.2.2. Early Explorations

As Grenz began his writing career after the PhD, he continued initially with many of the same features evinced in his former teachers. His doctoral research explored the work of Isaac Backus (1724–1806), the New England Calvinistic Baptist. Although the work on Backus was not necessarily descriptive of Grenz’s personal positions, his self-identification as a Baptist within the historical line of Evangelicalism descending from the Puritans, along with his erstwhile affinity for Backus’s positions display Backus as an influential character whose work

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363 Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 1:258, 272-75.
365 See the comment by Grenz’s former professor Ed L. Miller: “Probably the most important influence in seminary was that of Dr. Vernon Grounds, Dr. Gordon Lewis, and Dr. Bruce Demarest” (Ed L. Miller, “How I Took Barth’s Chair, and How Grenz almost Took It from Me,” *Princeton Theological Review* 12 [2006]: 4). Grenz also dedicated his 2001 co-authored methodological work to Gordon Lewis, who “instilled in [him] the importance of a sound theological method” (*BF*, v). For an account of Grenz’s other differences with Lewis and Demarest, see accounts of their “rationalist,” and “empirical-scientific” approach (*RTC2*, 58, 85, 126, 233-34) followed by Grenz’s argument throughout that book.
366 See Grenz’s explicit statements about this in *RTG*, ix-x.
was worthy of being utilized and even emulated by Grenz. Backus held a distinct form of divine simplicity, stressing God’s transcendence and incompressibility as “the absolutely sovereign governor of the universe,” the existence of which is “the first self-evident truth of reason.” Backus saw the eighteenth century Arminian challenge to divine predestination as a denial of God’s absolute sovereignty, inviting “a dangerous rejection of the lofty place given to God, for the sake of a falsely elevated place for man.” Grenz acknowledged that Backus says little about the Trinity primarily because it was not a controversial issue for him. On theology proper, Backus was mainly concerned with preserving God’s freedom and divine grace, denying that God is influenced in his work from agents and motives out with himself.

By the 1985 work, The Baptist Congregation, Grenz identified the church as drawing its nature from the very nature of the eternal God, who is “not solitary singleness”; rather, “the Divine One revealed to us is ‘trinity’ and therefore ‘community.’” This “divine community is characterized by love, for this is the relationship shared by the three persons of the Godhead.” People are invited to share in this “life-in-community,” with this invitation ultimately giving birth to the church. Grenz provided no further elaboration on God’s nature in this 126-page book on Baptist polity, and yet herein the nascent themes “community” and “future” began to emerge in his writings. This eschatological note was set to a tune in a more developed 1985 essay sketching a theology for a complex world in transition. Summarizing the essay’s main argument, Grenz deemed that “a theology for the future must be oriented to the future.” The following year, reviewing six books related to the issue of Christian proclamation in the public

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367 E.g., see RET, 39-40; RTC2 53-54; and Grenz, “Concerns of a Pietist with a Ph.D.” 62-63, 75-76. See also the point recently made that Grenz’s work on Backus was largely oriented toward determining its relevancy to contemporary Baptist theology and life (Brian Harris, “Beyond Individualism: Stanley Grenz’s Contribution to Baptist Theology,” Pacific Journal of Baptist Research 6 [2010]: 9).
368 Grenz, Isaac Backus—Puritan and Baptist, 96-99.
369 Grenz, The Baptist Congregation, 18.
370 See the “future” theme with the church described as sign of the coming age (Grenz, The Baptist Congregation, 18), or as one that “anticipates God’s future” by observing the ordinances (pp. 31, 41, 44).
square, Grenz interjected that the eschatological vision of one writer’s schematic basis for Christian political involvement (i.e., “creation and eschatological recreation”) was highly fruitful, and then affirmed that as important as the “creation motif” is, it should nevertheless be understood “in terms of God’s final goal for creation as derived from the vision of the Kingdom.”

The eschatological rhythm continued in Grenz’s 1988 book on prayer where he identified the model of Jesus’ prayer life as supremely eschatologically-oriented, designating prayer as “an activity directed toward the coming of the kingdom into the present.” Accordingly, prayer is an “eschatological activity” directed to “a transcendent God.” Drawing these thoughts together, it appears that this steady emphasis on eschatology, evolving further into Grenz’s ontological priority of the future, became one way of maintaining a manner of divine transcendence. He later identified this as one of Moltmann’s tactics (presumably, no less Pannenberg’s) for not dissolving the immanent Trinity into the economic, citing that “by advocating the ontological primacy of the future, [Moltmann] has, in effect, provided the basis for such a distinction [between immanent and economic Trinities].” Thus Grenz procured the ontological priority of the future during his early theological formation while en route to his 1990 exposition of Pannenberg’s mature theology. And while not using this principle for the affecting of God’s being ontologically as in Moltmann, Pannenberg, and other social trinitarians, Grenz nevertheless saw it as a significant aspect of God’s interaction with the world.

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376 See Grenz’s later articulation of this in *TCG2*, 479. See also §3.1.3. of this thesis, which explains Grenz’s adaptation of this future principle, particularly as derived from Pannenberg’s emphasis.
377 *RTG*, 87.
378 Grenz did come dangerously close to doing this at some points, however. See his brief articulation of human participation in the divine life (theosis) and the future experience of community in the highest sense. The tension here rests with God’s establishment of community, at one point referred to as “an outworking of God’s own eternal reality” (*MQ*, 239). And while Grenz did not explicitly make the same provision, or wrestle as intimately with the problem, note how Karl Barth and Eberhard Jüngel solve the problem, namely by declaring that within the participation, there is still a difference of degree between Creator and creature that is “qualitatively infinite” (see...
Grenz also seems to have begun moving toward linking immanent and economic trinities with what he first saw in the analogy of “person” employed in Pannenberg’s critique of Marxism, where the intratrinitarian life was utilized for establishing anthropological descriptions. According to Grenz, Pannenberg found Marxism harboring “a flawed understanding of the person, an understanding irreconcilable with Christianity.” Declaring the person as “a function of society” and “the product of social interaction,” human individuality is thus eliminated in Marxism since in that philosophy persons are being deprived of “autonomy and human dignity.” Citing Pannenberg, Grenz identified his mentor’s indictment of Marxist socialism as “alienat[ing] the individual ‘from the constitutive center of his or her human life, i.e., from God.’” In this observation, Grenz’s own theology of personhood would continue to brew for the social model of the Trinity he would work with in the 1990s. This model had already moved him to an understanding of “the divine nature” and “the divine reality” as the ground for human sexuality since the three persons in one essence displayed that “God is the divine community.” Grenz affirmed that “[t]he goal of community finds its ultimate basis in nothing less than the character of the triune God himself” whose interest in establishing a community reconciled to himself “arises out of his own nature.” This new model of the Trinity, then, became the basis for his consequent trinitarian theology which would peak at the beginning of the new millennium.


380 Grenz, Sexual Ethics, rev. ed., 48. This clear statement first made in 1990 is a major key to understanding Grenz’s work on the nature of “community.”
Summarizing the findings thus far, it seems that the rather incoherent trinitarianism of his early mentors, perhaps unaware of gaping holes in their work, left a number of doors wide open for Grenz, in whose work the feature of God’s transcendence remained consistently present even whilst God’s relationality began receiving more and more attention. Additionally, Grenz’s major newfound emphases, community and eschatology, gathered provenience from Pannenberg, although this had not yet been explicitly stated anywhere in his published writings. By 1992, however, the year after volume 1 of Pannenberg’s *Systematic Theology* was published in English, Grenz became overt with his candid assessment of Pannenberg’s contribution to the world of theology and in turn consciously displayed some of its keen materialization in what would become his own program. Hence, while critiquing the neglect of the “community” theme in Pannenberg’s work, Grenz conceded, “[o]n Pannenberg’s behalf, I must note that his elevation of the social trinity to the center of theology provides the foundation for a move to community, but he leaves to others the challenge of developing the idea itself.” In this very important and revealing statement, Grenz anticipated both his own 1993 programmatic work (*Revisioning Evangelical Theology*) followed by his 1994 one-volume systematic theology (*Theology for the Community of God*), and the next decade of his constructive writing agenda which worked in tandem with this fashionable model of God. Therefore the confusing trinitarianism translated

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from Lewis and Demarest, joined with the initial and later work under Professor Pannenberg and supplemented by the observation of the seismic shift taking place in trinitarian theology in the 1980s, led Grenz on a particular journey toward developing a particular social model of the Trinity which he envisioned yielding significant mileage for his theological and ethical work.

### 4.3. Social Trinitarianism

As already indicated, Grenz’s doctrine of the Trinity developed rapidly and in unique ways after his serious engagement with Pannenberg’s mature theology. What he later termed “The Triumph of Relationality” showed that at the turn of the century, “the concept of relationality had indeed moved to center stage,” receiving even a “kind of quasi-orthodox status.” This yielded the conclusion that the most promising starting point for a viable doctrine of God “cannot be constructed from the givenness of the one divine substance but should move from the three persons to the divine unity.” In saying as much, Grenz displayed that the doctrine of the Trinity was still at the center of his work. And yet, as asked before, the question is still on the table: precisely what kind of Trinity will be employed to provide a robust structure for the rest of theology and ethics in Grenz’s program? With the new prominence of sociality as an ontological option, what would happen with Grenz’s understanding of divine transcendence, simplicity, and the more traditional understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity?

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385 Grenz studied for the doctorate with Pannenberg at the University of Munich (1976-78) and returned for a fourteen-month sabbatical research project focusing directly on Pannenberg's theology itself (1987-88).

386 Although the term “social trinitarianism” has been called unhelpful by some (John Webster, “Systematic Theology After Barth,” in The Modern Theologians, ed. David F. Ford with Rachel Muers, 3d ed. [Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2005], 250), it is not unnecessarily used on Grenz who later identified this concept as first appearing in Moltmann (RTG, 80), but then also used it significantly for his own work. See also Grenz’s acknowledgements of revisions of social trinitarianism in RTG, 133.

387 See the testimony in RTG, ix-x, and also Ian Taylor’s assessment of Grenz’s development of a social model drawn from Pannenberg (Taylor, Pannenberg on the Triune God, 96-97).

388 RTG, 117-18. See also the assessment of this relational turn made in Vanhoozer, Rermythologizing Theology, 112-24, who says: “At the end of the twentieth century, theologians awoke (with a groan?) to find their world, and ontology, relational” (p. 117).

389 Grenz stated explicitly: “the central doctrine of the Christian faith—God as the Trinity (theology proper)” yields the structure for Christian systematic theology which is “inherently trinitarian.” Again, following both Barth and Pannenberg on this point, Grenz affirmed that “no teaching lies at the center of Christian theology, if not of Christian faith itself, as does the doctrine of the Trinity” (TCG2, 24, 53, 65).
4.3.1. Enthused “Social” Trinitarianism

Grenz’s 1994 one-volume systematic theology marked the first appearance of the explicit usage of “the social Trinity” in his work, with both the term and concept being used liberally thereafter. The idea (not the term) was present earlier (1990) in the move to begin developing the community theme with God as “the divine community,” both drawing on while seeking to advance Pannenberg’s work. One might have expected the 1993 methodological precursor to Grenz’s theology text to be the place where the social Trinity would begin to gain mileage, since it is noticeably where Grenz’s community theme takes prominence. Yet while the distinguishable emergence of the social Trinity had yet to occur amidst other significant themes developing in his work, Grenz had already begun working with a doctrine of the Trinity which asserted that “through all eternity God is the community of love.” This community of love is Father, Son, and Spirit—“distinct yet united through the love they share.” Grenz had already described God as “a social reality.” And this divine reality which is a multiplicity or, indeed, a triunity within the Godhead, finds its foundation, “with the eternal love relation between Father and Son, a relation of love that is concretized by the third person, the Holy Spirit.”

392 This is explicitly stated in Grenz, “The Irrelevancy of Theology,” 311.
393 See an account of the organic development of some of the most prominent themes in Grenz’s work in §7.1.3. of the present thesis, especially the fading role of the kingdom theme and the budding role of the doctrine of the Trinity.
394 RET, 186-87. Here Grenz cited Augustine, De trinitate, 15.17.27-29, 31; and 15.19.37. For an exposition on Augustine’s point, see Lewis Ayres, “Loving and Being,” chap. 10 in Augustine and the Trinity, 251-72. It is worth noting that the term Grenz used when describing the fellowship of triune love as being “concretized” by the Spirit is a term neither used in the NPNF English translation of De trinitate, nor in Ayres’exposition of Augustine, although Augustine herein goes with the concept of “substance” to communicate the nature of trinitarian love thus: “If, then, any one of the three is to be specially called Love, what more fitting than that it should be the Holy Spirit?—namely, that in that simple and highest nature, substance should not be one thing and love another, but that substance itself should be love, and love itself should be substance, whether in the Father, or in the Son, or in the Holy Spirit; and yet that the Holy Spirit should be specially called Love” (Augustine, De trinitate, 15.17.29, in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 1, vol. 3, trans. Philip Schaff [Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, n.d.], 216). Note also how Grenz’s rendering of Augustine’s usage of substantia coincides with the following definition: “substance; the underlying ‘stuff,’ material or spiritual, of things; that which exists. Emphasis here is on concrete reality as distinct from essentia (q.v.), which indicates simply what a thing is” (Richard A. Muller, Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985], 290 [italics added for emphasis]). Note also the definition for substantia as “The quality of being real or having an actual existence; also, of having a corporeal existence” (Oxford Latin Dictionary, ed. P. G. W. Glare [Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1982], 1850).
In Grenz’s single-volume theology text, the doctrine of the Trinity continued with much of the same emphasis, although with an expanded shape. Almost verbatim with the above assertion, Grenz declared that the foundation of God’s triunity lies “with the eternal relationship between the Father and the Son. They share a fellowship of love, which is concretized in the third person.” The result of this, Grenz continued with further reference to Augustine, is that “the Holy Spirit is the bond of love between the Father and the Son.” While this Augustinian feature remained prominent hereafter in Grenz’s work, of particular interest is how Grenz read the tradition. While he understood that the deity of the Son and Spirit was being affirmed by Athanasius on soteriological grounds, he acknowledged that “the creeds did not answer the question as to how the three comprise God.” He found the Cappadocians asserting “trinitarian distinctions” belonging to God’s eternal nature whereas in broad brush strokes he identified the West as seeing the threeness within the one substance as “relational,” which led Western theologians to posit the joint workings of the Trinity in creation and salvation.

Grenz’s understanding of the tradition resumed in the contemporary period with Pannenberg’s “highly developed” statement of the Trinity which avoided speaking of the one God above the three persons, and instead preferred making reference to “the one God who is the three,” and asserting that “there is no God but the Father, Son, and Spirit.” These three designations were said to “belong to the divine essence throughout eternity.” Grenz picked up his construction at this point, where rather than “an undifferentiated, solitary oneness... threeness is the way God actually is in his essential being.” He identified this one God as eternally differentiated in the internal eternal divine being, which differentiations “constitute actual diversity in the one God.” And yet, while differentiated ontologically and economically, these trinitarian persons “comprise a unity,” the divine being and essence, which nevertheless

395 TCG2, 71. As above, here he also cites Augustine, De trinitate, 15.17.27-29, 31; and 15.19.37.
396 TCG2, 60-62.
397 TCG2, 65-67. See also §5.1.4.3. of the next chapter on “the divine essence.”
“entails a diversity.” The divine essence, then, shows itself forth in the love that binds the trinitarian members together in their very subsistence as the one God whose unity “is nothing less than the self-dedication of the trinitarian persons to each other.” This reciprocal self-dedication of the trinitarian members is the love that builds the unity of the one God. Grenz looked to both Eastern and Western positions of the filioque controversy, each postulating “two eternal movements within the one divine reality which give rise to the three persons.” He affirmed the West’s stronger basis for understanding the eternal inner life of God whose foundation lies in the relationship between Father and Son, which relationship in turn is the Spirit. And yet Grenz also commended the East for the Father’s priority in both eternal movements, in the eternal generation constituting first and second person which in turn leads to the third.

Grenz declared the statement “God is love” as the foundational ontological assertion that can be made about the divine essence, and therefore love as the foundational attribute of God. As late as January 2005, he continued to affirm that love is “the central and only true attribute of God.” As such, love is relational and “requires subject and object between whom emerges a bond.” According to Grenz, this inner-trinitarian love also maintains God’s freedom, since if God were solitary oneness he would need the world as the object of divine love. But Grenz’s doctrine of the Trinity affirmed Father as subject and Son as object of divine love, who is the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, then, for Grenz every description of God’s attributes an attempt at describing his fundamental character as love—i.e., God in relationship.

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398 TCG2, 65-67. See also Grenz’s later designation that if God were “an undifferentiated unity, the incarnation would unavoidably link the deity with the fate of the world in some mythological sense” (RTG, 197).
399 TCG2, 68-69.
400 TCG2, 70-72.
401 TCG2, 72. This does not posit love as an immaterial substance apart from God, but has God as transcendent, whereas love is merely descriptive of the eternal God. See also NGQB, 335-40.
402 Grenz, “What Does it Mean to be Trinitarian in Doctrine?” 2-3.
403 TCG2, 74-77.
Since questions about God’s essence have moved to begin with intratrinitarian relations for Grenz, he ventured to affirm that “[t]he traditional discussion of God as a being is no longer helpful.” As well as being a response to postmodernism,\(^{404}\) what he meant by this is that theological descriptions of divine reality do not reference a God “beyond” the three persons. Instead, “in describing God we are describing precisely the Father, Son, and Spirit in their eternal relations.”\(^{405}\) Grenz’s point is later illumined in his co-authored 2001 methodological work where he evinced dependence on Pannenberg for this theme. Pannenberg was critical of the theological tradition from Augustine to Barth, arguing that “by viewing the trinitarian members as the internal relations within the one God, theologians have made God into a fourth person above the three members of the Trinity.”\(^{406}\)

Grenz moved on (reverted?) in his theology text to affirm that “only the infinite God is fully person.” This personhood is displayed to creatures who experience God’s incomprehensibility, will, and freedom as the ultimate divine reality confronting them while actively engaging in human affairs.\(^{407}\) Yet even these, he asserted, are mere “attempts to put into human words the ineffable essence of God,” which in turn are attempts actually intended to set believers on a doxological orientation. It is to this end that God relates personally to the world in

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\(^{404}\) For more on this, see pp. 121-22 of this thesis.

\(^{405}\) TCG2, 77, 80.

\(^{406}\) BF, 191. Incidentally, Grenz is unwilling to yield this point to Pannenberg, particularly with the trinitarian doctrine of Richard of St. Victor and Thomas Aquinas, leading Grenz to conclude: “Medieval theology is marked by extensive Trinitarian discourse motivated by a robust concern for a proper understanding of the nature of God as triune” (BF, 181-83).

\(^{407}\) TCG2, 84-85, 87. Here, while it seems like Grenz may be articulating Hegel’s notion of person, the position clearly belongs to Grenz, as seen in his lecture, “What Does it Mean to be Trinitarian in Prayer?” from “What Does it Mean to be Trinitarians?” Part 2, Bible and Theology Lectureship, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, MO, 19 Jan. 2005 (unpublished), 5-6. In this lecture Grenz unpacked the concept of trinitarian prayer, addressing the nature of prayer conceived scripturally, addressed to “the God who remains ‘Person’… He remains living and sovereign, and confronts as person alive in love and wrath.” Interestingly, while not exactly the same, this is close to what Grenz borrowed from Zizioulas’s reading of the Cappadocians, which defined trinitarian communal ontology thus: “the three members of the Trinity are ‘person’ precisely because they are persons-in-relationship; that is, their personal identities emerge out of their reciprocal relations,” yielding an attendant ontology of personhood accounting for human existence and personhood as “persons-in-relation after the pattern of the perichoretic divine life disclosed in Jesus Christ” (SGRS, 332).
love, willing his own being as the triune One whose essence and active character coalesce in a love shared with God’s people.408

Following chapters in his single-volume systematic theology text on the revelation and knowledge of God (chap. 1), God as Trinity (chap. 2), and God as relational (chap. 3), Grenz concluded the section on theology proper with “The Creator God” (chap. 4). As eternal, transcendent, and because his nature is love, “God is already actualized apart from the world in the eternal relationship between the Father and the Son, which is the Holy Spirit.” God’s triunity, then, provides the foundation for the freedom of the divine creative act, whose creative principle “lies within the divine reality as the second person of the Trinity.” Accordingly, the basis for the act of creation lies “solely in God’s love,” which is “the outflow” of the intratrinitarian eternal love relationship.409 Grenz then discussed the differentiated roles of trinitarian members in creation, which are grounded in the overflow of the Father’s function as “ground” of the trinitarian life. Apparently non-contradictory, perhaps as a result of Grenz’s milder appropriation of Pannenberg’s future principle, Father and Son are both spoken of as the “goal” of creation, although the Son “exemplifies the proper relation of creation to the Creator.” And finally, the “the dynamic [of love] that binds the Father and the Son—the [personal] power of their relationship—is the Holy Spirit… likewise the essence of God, namely, love… by means of which all things exist.”410

In generalized terms, the above description marks Grenz’s explication of God’s being as he began to pick up the “social Trinity” theme. The idea (not merely the term) continued to appear in subsequent works,411 though with less significance in places where Grenz was not

408 TCG2, 67, 90-91, 95-97.
410 TCG2, 101-6.
411 See the term used in Grenz and Kjesbo, Women in the Church, 155; Grenz, A Primer on Postmodernism, 168; and Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, Who Needs Theology? An Invitation to the Study of God (Downers Grove:
seeking to directly expound trinitarian dogma but was instead simply working from it. His 1997 book on theological ethics also continued with the same trinitarian themes and language. With reference to 1 John 4:8, 16, Grenz stated that because God is triune, the divine reality already comprehends both love’s subject and object—both lover and beloved—as well as the love they share. Consequently the essence of God lies in the relationship between the Father and the Son (love), a relationship concretized as the personal Holy Spirit, who is the essence of the one God (Jn 4:24).  

While the social theme continued here, of significant import is the thematic search for a transcendent base for the human ethical ideal, which Grenz located in the *imago Dei* concept. This theme increasingly became the most important premise for Grenz’s entire constructive program, later employed with a high level of innovation in his 2001 volume in trinitarian anthropology, *The Social God and the Relational Self*. Based on enormously wide consensus, this major explorative work largely assumed that “God is best viewed as the social Trinity.” Citing Ted Peters, Grenz noted that “the idea of person-in-relationship seems to be nearly universally assumed.” Therefore Grenz worked from this basis rather than on it, which was not insignificant for his ultimate shuffling away from it in due course, as will be seen later in this chapter. Additionally, the same posture was taken by Grenz in his 2004 work sketching the twentieth century development of doctrines of the Trinity, although in that work, published just under a year before his death, he asserted that “the triumph of relationality has by no means

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412 MQ, 284-85.  
413 MQ, 238-39. This will also be further unpacked in chs. 6 and 7 of the present thesis, both as understood (1) for his epistemological accessing of the Trinity, via the divine economic actions, but also (2) in his trinitarian sketches, which are always open to revision and yet nevertheless anchored in God’s immanent life. This was a principle he adopted from other theologians (RTG, 48, 196, 162, 212, 222), but nevertheless synthesized in his own terse manner as what might be called the Grenz *grundaxiom* (see §5.1.4. of the next chap.).  
been complete” for the development of the doctrine of the Trinity as there was need to move beyond the trend of the reigning consensus to “a more appropriate perspective from which to understand the connection between the diversity and unity of God.”

4.3.2. Enduring “Western” Emphasis

While it might be fair to say that no two relational models of the Trinity are the same, insofar as Grenz’s “social Trinity” has been explored in this chapter, his model evinces unique features with inherent tensions. In Grenz’s understanding, one might ask whether the divine essence is tantamount to the love binding the three trinitarian persons together, or whether the personal Holy Spirit is the love existing between the Father and Son. This dichotomy denotes an ambiguity inherited from Pannenberg, whether inadvertently or not is unknown. Grenz critiqued Pannenberg’s own vagueness on this point in 1992 when Grenz found his conceptualization of the Trinity unclear “as to whether or not we are to view the Spirit as the third Person who shares love together with the Father and the Son (p. 426) or rather in accordance with the more Augustinian model as the actual love relation between the Father and the Son (p. 429).”

Although Grenz began emphasizing “the social Trinity,” much of his argumentation seemed to advocate and nuance aspects of God’s simplicity, especially as his relational model maintained keen dependence on the doctrine’s particular development in the Western

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416 RTG, 163.
417 It bears repeating (as in p. 71n350 of this thesis) that the characterization of East/West here, while not entirely helpful or accurate, is a nuanced designation for the general schools of thought derived by analytic philosophers, which Grenz himself acknowledged and worked with to some degree.
418 Grenz himself acknowledged this in TCG2, 80.
419 TCG2, 68-69.
420 TCG2, 72.
421 Grenz, “The Irrelevancy of Theology,” 310. Page references in parentheses represent the English translation of Pannenberg, ST, vol. 1. However, perhaps Grenz’s adoption of this feature is part of sustaining the mystery beckoned by postmodern sensitivities that he opted for in the face of what he deemed to be Pannenberg’s “thoroughgoing rationalism.”
tradition. The relational Trinity he developed resisted radical features of models where God is joined to and dependent on the created order (whether self-imposed or not), where God is three centers of consciousness, or three centers of consciousness with Son and Spirit each unilaterally dependent on the Father, or where persons are relations. On the contrary, Grenz gave an expanded view of simplicity that sought to integrate recently discovered aspects of the new relational dynamic while also maintaining a divine transcendence that solicited further exploration for its articulation of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Meanwhile, Grenz maintained numerous features that pointed to an enhanced doctrine of simplicity, even while working to advocate newfound features of “the social Trinity.” He saw the three persons of the Trinity comprising a unity and diversity, but where all are involved in


423 E.g., see Jürgen Molmann, The Trinity and the Kingdom of God, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1981), 52-60, who also asserts, “From the foundation of the world, the opera trinitatis ad extra correspond to the passions trinitatis ad intra” (p. 160). See also Pannenberg, ST, 1:329; and Catherine Mowry LaCugna, God for Us: The Trinity and the Christian Life (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 221-3, about which Stephen R. Holmes comments that “the life of God simply is the life of the world” (The Holy Trinity: Understanding God’s Life [Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2012], 11). Another reason why Grenz may have departed from this particular kind of social-trinitarianism may have been the result of the critical engagement with Catherine Mowry LaCugna’s work in Mark S. Medley, Image Trinitatic: Toward a Relational Understanding of Becoming Human (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002), 40, which Grenz has interacted with favorably on this point (RTG, 157-58, 260). It should also be noted that Grenz had high regard for Medley as a scholar. In a faculty recommendation letter on Medley’s behalf, while highlighting his giftedness as a scholar and promising future, Grenz noted, “In fact, I drew from his work on LaCugna in one section of my recent book, Rediscovering the Triune God,” letter dated 21 Sept. 2004 (unpublished).

424 E.g., see Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., “Social Trinity and Tritheism,” in Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement: Philosophical and Theological Essays, ed. Ronald J. Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 22. Incidentally, for a critique of this position held among analytic philosophers and interpreters of Gregory of Nyssa, including John D. Zizioulas, Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985), see Sarah Coakley, “‘Persons’ in the ‘Social’ Doctrine of the Trinity: A Critique of the Current Analytic Discussion,” in The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O’Collins (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 126-37. This view is also affirmed in Thomas H. McCall, WhIch Trinity! WhIse MonothesIsm: Philosophical and Systematic Theologians on the Metaphysics of Trinitarian Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010). Incidentally, see Rahner, The Trinity, 56-7, which states that the move which understands three persons as three centers of consciousness and activity “leads to a heretical understanding of the dogma.”

425 E.g., see Zizioulas, Being as Communion, 40-41.

426 Fiddes, Participating in God, 34-50, 78-85.
every area of God’s working in the world. Based on the one substance’s relationality, derived from the internal relational threeness, Grenz noted the importance of the Western emphasis on “the joint workings of the Trinity in creation and salvation.” He affirmed that the Western assertion of the eternal relationship of the Son and Spirit provides the “theological foundation guaranteeing the continuity of the present work of the Spirit with the completed work of the Son.” Indeed, since the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, the present activity of the Holy Spirit “is nothing less than the outworking of the work completed by Jesus of Nazareth.”

Grenz understood God’s self-disclosure to be revealing the divine being as “God-in-relation.” He also looked with favor toward the modified realism from medieval theology, which identified God as the ground of his various attributes, meaning that they “are never experienced in isolation from each other.” He understood God’s infinite cognition as being “immediately and simultaneously cognizant of all events as themselves—whether they be what we call ‘past,’ ‘present,’ or ‘future.’” Since “the divine mind” is eternal with reference to creaturely time, therefore, Grenz affirmed that God perceives “the entire temporal sequence… simultaneously in one act of cognition.” Accordingly, since God is “complete in himself apart from the world” and “not bound to creation,” the processes of history “neither actualize nor affect his eternal nature,” and because the entire process of history is “immediately present to him,” his being has no future to itself or in its most private shape. Whereas some statements may suggest the contrary when Grenz emphasized God’s active engagement with the world, he

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427 TCG2, 67-71. Cp. this with the exposition of Augustine’s inseparable action of trinitarian members in Ayres, Augustine and the Trinity, 67-70.
428 TCG2, 62.
429 TCG2, 69-70.
430 TCG2, 81.
431 TCG2, 88-89.
432 TCG2, 92.
433 TCG2, 109.
434 E.g., Grenz stated that “[t]he biblical community… did not claim to know a God who is impassible. Rather, they spoke of the one who is faithfully present through time” (TCG2, 91). Again, Grenz stated, “God is not merely the impassible, unmoved mover of Aristotelian theologies but is active in the world and the historical process” (TCG2, 109). Wayne Grudem takes this notion a step further, not just claiming that the biblical writers
nevertheless affirmed emphatically that there is “no sense of external compulsion” or “internal necessity within God” who himself as “the eternal and transcendent one… must remain totally God in himself apart from the world, even though he is also immanent in the world.” In this way, therefore, God’s immutability, impassibility, and aseity were steadily maintained by Grenz.

In Grenz’s understanding, God’s holiness is meant to refer to his transcendence and uniqueness, while the compassion he bestows on creatures comes as genuine grace. With God willing God’s own being, Grenz found no dichotomy between God’s being and will. He also emphasised divine freedom and employed the apophatic approach to his doctrine of God, which was later explicitly set forth in his posthumously published, *The Named God and the Question of Being* (2005). Over and against Moltmann and Pannenberg, Grenz stressed the importance of the *filioque*, and maintained trenchant dependence on Augustine, as this chapter has already begun to show. Grenz’s relational model of the Trinity, then, came from the West, from Augustine, and not Zizioulas or the stream often identified with Zizioulas. He seemed to have were unconcerned about impassibility, but stating thus: “I have not affirmed God’s impassibility in this book. Instead, quite the opposite is true…” (Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994], 166). Note also the emphasis on presence and action in Augustine, *De trinitate* 14.12.16 which are observed in Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, 233. Grenz’s emphasis on God’s presence as a constant biblical theme, and one drawn from Augustine will be explored in §5.1.4.5. of the next chap.


436 TCG2, 93-94.
437 TCG2, 95.
438 TCG2, 99.
439 NGQB, 320-28.
440 See Grenz’s early assessment of Pannenberg’s *non-filioque* trinitarianism in “Commitment and Dialogue,” 204-6; and also Grenz, “The Irrelevancy of Theology,” 310.
441 Grenz, “The Community of God,” 25n22; and TCG2, passim. There is a slight waning in *SGR* (2001), especially as Augustine has been generally understood as inaugurating the modern concept of the “self,” complete with the idea that the inward journey marked the pathway to God (pp. 60-61). But a reinvigorated interest in Augustine ran afresh with NGQB (2005), passim, esp. pp. 310-40.
442 Contra the assertion in Olson, “Deification in Contemporary Theology,” 197; and see also Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming*, 231. For an account of Zizioulas’s influence on contemporary trinitarian thought, see Stephen R. Holmes, “Towards the Analogia Personae et Relationis: Developments in Gunton’s Trinitarian Thinking,” in *The Theology of Colin Gunton*, ed. Lincoln Harvey (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 39-42. See also John D. Morrison, “Trinity and Church: An Examination of Theological Methodology” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40 (1997): 447, who, while acknowledging Grenz’s trenchant Augustinianism, suggests that the Eastern view of the
read Augustine perhaps more fairly and certainly more usefully than other recent social trinitarians did. 443 And yet he also maintained dependence on Aquinas (1224/5–74) as a helpful voice for his doctrine of the Trinity, along with a brief interest in the earlier medieval theologian, Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173). 444

4.4. Summary

By way of providing a synthesized summary of the data discovered thus far, it seems like Grenz’s interest with the social Trinity, as much as anything else, may have quite simply been the result of an honest, self-coerced employment of his sources for theology (i.e., scripture, tradition and culture), like a pilot following the navigational instruments when not completely able to see clearly, as Grenz moved forward on his journey toward a comprehensive trinitarian ontology. 445


444 For Aquinas and Richard, see BF, 181-83. However, it is only here that Richard appears of any significance for Grenz, which, according to John Franke, was a compromise for the chapter on the “Trinity” in the jointly-authored BF, a chapter which Franke initially constructed. For the 2001 BF, Franke recounted that “in Richard of St. Victor we found enough common ground for the chapter. Stan remained staunchly committed to Augustine” (personal email correspondence between myself and John Franke, 28 June 2010). Richard does, however, make one more brief appearance in the first Matrix volume: “Richard appropriated another of Augustine’s analogies for the Trinity, love, but developed from the concept of love a social understanding of God as triune.” Grenz recounted that “Richard offers a radical departure from Augustine’s psychological approach, looking instead to persons-in-relation for the key to understanding the triune nature of God” (SGRS, 31). Notably, in the 2005 posthumously published NGQB, Aquinas appears throughout, and is especially significant for Grenz for the affirmation of God’s being as ultimately ineffable, with Aquinas offering “a quite different perspective on the via negativa. He declares that the reason that theology falls short of encapsulating the divine is because of God’s surpassing greatness…. It was his conception of the surpassing fullness of God that led Aquinas ultimately to the via eminentiae” (NGQB, 324-25).

445 This aforementioned illustration is no allusion to Millard Erickson, “On Flying in Theological Fog,” in Reclaiming the Center, ed. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth and Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 323-49, although parallels could easily be made, especially since Erickson takes no serious accounting for Grenz’s methodological program, neither in Grenz’s articulate theorizing nor his rigorous application thereof, especially concerning theology’s sources and motifs and how thoroughly trinitarian these were (see §1.4.1.-1.4.2. of this thesis). This holds for the earlier assessments in Erickson, The Evangelical Left, and Erickson, Postmodernizing the Faith, 83-102. Incidentally, in a personal letter to Grenz (6 Dec. 1995), Erickson wrote: “One suggestion I might make to you, Stan, would be that in your writing you try to be a bit more unambiguous.” However, he also noted that commentators such as David Wells and Richard Linus “have criticized my Christian theology [sic] for not being
On his employment of the social Trinity, it seems simply that more is assumed than asserted, articulated, or argued for.446 Meanwhile the confusion still mounted, in turn, displaying at least one feature which remained consistently part of his construction—the re-materialization of Pannenberg’s conflated reading of the description of the Spirit, both the love relation between Father and Son and the Person who shares love with them,447 which Grenz vigorously employed. Progressing into a better understanding about the thorough trinitarian nature of Grenz’s project notes that his most distilled comments regarding the twentieth century’s trinitarian resurgence and its relevance for his own program are most readily observed in his 2004 book surveying the recent trinitarian canvas, which will now be considered.

sufficiently unequivocal as well.” Incidentally, in RTC2, 141-42 (esp. nn89-93), Grenz noted the veteran Baptist James L. Garrett, Jr.’s critique of Erickson’s ambiguity and movement toward fundamentalism. With the single-volume second ed. of Erickson’s theology, however, where propositions are said to need not be impersonal (Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2d ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998], 221), some of Garrett’s critique might more reasonably be tempered.

446 The notion of theological “consensus” played a significant part in Grenz’s work (e.g., see BF, 193).

Chapter 5:
Rediscovering the Triune God:
The Latter Shape of Stanley J. Grenz’s Doctrine of the Trinity

5.1. Rediscovering the Triune God

In between the writing of the first and second volumes of *The Matrix of Christian Theology* series, Grenz offered a full “book-length expansion” of the first chapter of *The Social God and the Relational Self* (2001). He referred to this publication as “a kind of ‘prequel’ to the proposed second volume,” the latter one being later posthumously published as *The Named God and the Question of Being* (2005).448 The “prequel” seemed highly necessary for the continued work he would do in offering a comprehensively trinitarian explorative work that entailed “viewing all aspects of Christian doctrine in a trinitarian light,” and therefore being illumined by “the fundamental Christian conviction that God, who is the ultimate topic of theology, is triune.” Grenz already explained how the methodology in *The Matrix* series was “indebted to the renaissance of trinitarian theology that arose in the wake of Karl Barth’s rediscovery of the doctrine of the Trinity,”449 which left Grenz in a position to develop this more thoroughly. What eventually happened in the “prequel,” entitled *Rediscovering the Triune God*, however, seems to be more or less what he intended to do in the second *Matrix* volume. In *The Matrix* series proposal, Grenz described the second volume thus:

> Foundational to the whole [project] would be the volume on the triune God (working title: God as Community), which would show how the same theological method assists us in understanding God’s triunity as well as God’s relationship to the world as the transcendent/immanent foundation for creation (including human sexuality—a theme I have worked on over the last decade) in the context

448 *RTG*, x.
449 *SGRS*, x.
Oddly, this description is hardly indicative of the book that became the second installment in the series, focusing on “the named God” and “the question of B/being.” In this volume Grenz did not set out centrally to develop “a Trinitarian ontology as such,” but instead aimed to “pursue the deeper question of ontology from a thoroughgoing Trinitarian perspective… [ascertaining] the implications of the Christian conception of God as triune for the question of ontology.”

This would mean, again, that in order to proceed with this thoroughgoing trinitarian theology, he would need a robust doctrine of the Trinity from which to draw on. And Grenz would derive this from his research findings that resulted in the volume precursory to (replacing?) the second Matrix volume. While the second Matrix volume, then, intended to be devoted to the triune God, was originally titled “God as Community” and initially intended to be “foundational” to the six-volume project, the 2004 *Rediscovering the Triune God* functionally replaced what Grenz seems to have initially intended with the second volume. With its contents this replacement volume established the state of the twentieth century trinitarian situation (i.e., both recent tradition and contemporary theological culture) from which Grenz would then build his “trinitarian theo-ontology” in the second Matrix book. Accordingly, *Rediscovering the Triune God* was very much a “prequel,” in the truest sense of the term. This was the one book where Grenz was explicitly on record about the trinitarian developments that would be relevant for his own distinct program as it would continue to develop. In a concentrated manner, with this book he was able to canvass the terrain of features he deemed both helpful and harmful for his own work, drawing from the former while rejecting the latter.

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451 *NGQB*, 7.
That the narrative of twentieth century developments was not only significant for its survey value but was also useful to Grenz’s own agenda is a point made more forcefully as Grenz asked who it is that holds the key to the best trinitarian theology, the theology that is “sufficiently trinitarian.” Before he began his consideration of models offered over the past hundred years, there were a number of features he wanted to commend and highlight as being notable from previous ecclesiastical theologians. First, he observed that for Augustine (354–430), the key for understanding the Trinity is “the concept of love,” which theme is consistently found in Grenz’s trinitarian writings as an essential feature of God’s triune life. In addition to Augustine, Richard of St. Victor took the concept further by recasting the love fully present among the three as involving “persons-in-relation,” or a “social” understanding of God’s triune nature. After observing the waning of trinitarian centrality in the post-Reformation period, Grenz affirmed that “[u]nless God is seen to be internally relational from all eternity, relationality—including the relationality between the divine and the human that is evident in Christ’s redemptive work and the Spirit’s presence within the church—loses all transcendent ground.” It is this dialectic relationship between the Trinity operative in the salvation economy and its transcendent base (i.e., the immanent Trinity) that led Grenz to affirm the correctness of acknowledging how much is owed to Hegel (1770–1831) for his innovative proposal, providing the foundation for what would develop in later trinitarian theology. While Grenz attributed to Hegel the reinvigorated interest between God’s action and the unfolding process of history, even relating to the development of God’s own life and history, it was not until Karl Barth entered the

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453 RTG, 54-55. Contrast this with those whose theologies are “insufficiently trinitarian,” e.g., Schleiermacher (RTG, 24).
454 RTG, 9. Note that this concept of love was conclusively drawn directly and explicitly from Augustine (e.g., see NGQB, 335-40), although not without offering one “corrective” to the way ab exerioribus ad interera, namely, that God is primarily found in “the exteriority of the other” (NGQB, 338).
455 RTG, 11.
456 RTG, 24.
457 RTG, 30.
scene that the trinitarian resurgence began to make its steadiest strides, for which Grenz became highly indebted.

5.1.1 Restoring Trinitarian Theology

The central place given to the triune God of revelation was said to be the heart of Barth’s contribution to theology. Barth advanced this thought by placing divine election within the Father-Son relation, which has its origin and reality in God and not in the creatures, leading Barth unto an innovative, radical christocentrism in his exposition of the Son, which Grenz called Barth’s “revelational christocentrism.” Although this means that Barth rejected the doctrine of the Trinity as the structural motif for his theology, this was nevertheless based on his manner of the prioritization of revelation. Accordingly, Grenz noted that Barth’s “central contribution lay [sic] in the close connection he posited between the idea of revelation and the triunity of God,” which in turn was said to provide interpretive and explanatory use for the whole of theology. And yet while notwithstanding Barth’s remarkable contribution to theology, and Grenz’s self-awareness of its influence on his own work, Grenz found significant warrant for critiquing him.

Drawing a negative conclusion as to whether Barth’s theology itself provided the way forward, and following Alan Torrance’s doxological corrective that engenders “looking toward the eschatological telos,” Grenz continued searching for something much more eschatological “for the key to unlocking the theological treasure chest.” In other words, Barth’s theology is

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458 RTG, 41, 45, 47, 55.
459 RTG, 51.
463 RTG, 55.
good, and has many helpful features, especially as a proponent of a theology arising ultimately out of God’s prior action that humans can only receive, and never initiate. However, a truly adequate trinitarian theology would have to traverse beyond Barth. Grenz explained that whatever the “heart of trinitarian theology” might be, it must both take Barth seriously and be eschatologically-oriented, which set him further along on his journey, seeking out the most splendid trinitarian theology available, perhaps to be found in other worthy twentieth century contenders.

Along with features he found commendable in Pannenberg’s corpus, which were recounted in the previous three chapters of this thesis, Grenz also considered Jürgen Moltmann to be a helpful voice, whose contribution concluded that the heart of Christianity is “the hopeful anticipation… of the coming kingdom of God.” While enthusiastically commending this feature, Grenz refused to follow the Moltmannian notion that the basis for God’s triunity is found in the separation-in-unity experienced in the crucifixion, marking God’s constitution in history. Although Grenz elsewhere affirmed Jesus’ very godforsakenness at the cross, neither this nor any other historical event in any way constitutes God’s being in Grenz’s

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464 See esp. chs. 2 and 3.
465 RTG, 76.
466 In his explication of the mystery of the cross’s dynamic, Grenz explained: “The godforsakenness Jesus bore affected the Father as well as the Son. The Fatherlessness of the Son entailed the Sonlessness of the Father. In this manner, the cross marked the entrance of the pain of human sin into the heart of the triune God. The consequences of our hostility toward God interrupted the relationship between Jesus and his Father, so that we in turn might share in the eternal fellowship between the Father and Son…. [The Holy Spirit] is therefore the Spirit both of that relationship and of our relationship with the triune God” (TCG2, 352). It is at this point Grenz seemed to suggest something like the pneumatologia crucis recently articulated by Myk Habets, The Anointed Son: A Trinitarian Spirit Christology (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010), 253-57.

Incidentally, in the outline and sample chapter of a proposed coauthored book with Phillip C. Zylla, which had as its suggested title, God and the Experience of Suffering, Grenz stated thus: “While agreeing with the construct of godforsakenness in Moltmann’s theology of the cross, we emphasize further the eschatological hope which can also be found in the very experience of Christ’s suffering. The theme of the suffering God as evidenced in the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament writings is further delineated from this eschatological perspective.” In the attempt to develop a theology of suffering, Grenz proposed to construct this by moving from the biblical narrative to the trinitarian life of God, pursuing this goal “by bringing contemporary theological proposals (especially that of J. Moltmann) into conversation with classical thinking (specifically as it is represented by J. Edwards). Setting Moltmann and Edwards in dialogue provides the basis for our own understanding of how the dynamic of the three persons of the Trinity together with the interplay between the trinitarian God and creation offer the theological grounding for a positive engagement with suffering. In this process we take seriously contemporary trinitarian thinking that draws the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity into close relationship.
theology, which is always concerned to maintain God’s freedom from the world and absolute sovereignty over historical events.467

Grenz acknowledged one of Robert Jenson’s key insights, namely, the Christological claim identifying “the social character of both deity and humanity.”468 While favoring this move, Grenz also eagerly attributed credit to Jenson for the ontologically-loaded discovery of God’s self-disclosure “as narrative, temporal, and eschatological,” with its far-reaching implications for the relationship between time and eternity.469 Grenz, however, echoed a “queasiness” toward Jenson’s reading of the biblical narrative where the idea was posed that God (i.e., not just the Father, Son, and Spirit) is a person, something which Grenz saw as risking identifying God as a fourth person alongside the other three. Grenz furthermore rejected the linear caricaturing of

At the same time, we take issue with the widely-articulated suggestion that posits a panentheistic God, for in our estimation this proposal replaces the transcendent God emphasized in the Bible with an unhelpful immanentalism.” Furthermore, in a subsequent chapter of this book, Grenz and Zylla were to argue that “the suffering of creation is an anticipation of the eschatological renewal of all things in Christ. The eschatological dynamic of the New Testament indicates that no theology of suffering can claim to be truly Christian if it leaves out this crucial dimension, for the biblical gospel is the good news about the God who brings creation beyond suffering and through suffering into the eternal community. For this reason, the eschatological perspective provides the uniquely Christian ‘good news’ within the context of suffering” (Stanley J. Grenz and Phillip C. Zylla, “Introduction” to God and the Experience of Suffering, 11 July 2000 [unpublished], 6-8).

While the above details seem to indicate a tension in Grenz’s work, his position does not necessitate his embrace of Moltmann’s genuine break in the divine life or within God’s being since the Spirit maintains that relationship even in its most tense moment. In other words, an interruption is not a rupture, and whatever tensions remain, Grenz seemed quite happy to leave these to “the full mystery of the dynamic of the cross,” where the Spirit is both the Spirit of that interrupted relationship between Jesus and his Father as well as ours with the triune God, which brings Grenz to praise: “How great is the love of our God and Savior!” (TCG2, 352). Perhaps Grenz would have further unpacked this in his Matrix volume on Christology, but this is speculation. He wanted to take seriously “Paul Fiddes’s erudite reflection…warn[ing] against a simplistic embracing of the theology of the cross to explain the existence of suffering without the radical alteration in the concept of God required to sustain such a conception,” which gave “clues” for a theology of suffering for postmodern Christian thought (Grenz and Zylla, “Introduction,” 4). Ultimately this construction never came from Grenz’s pen. And while the book on a theology of suffering was never published or written, and the proposal was drafted around the height of his enthrallment with various aspects of social trinitarianism, of particular note is Grenz’s later comments on Jonathan Edwards’s Trinity and the dispositional ontology of divine self-enlargement which explained Edwards’s creation continua “Insofar as the Son and the Spirit comprise the perfect repetition of the primordial actuality of the Father, both the divine actuality and the divine disposition to repeat that actuality are complete within the divine life.” And by exercising the divine essence in time and space by creating the world, “creation emerges from God as the repetition in space and time—that is, ad extra—of the everlasting process of God’s self-enlargement of what God already is” (NGQB, 72-78 where Grenz cited recent work from Sang Hyun Lee, The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards, rev. ed. [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000], 6).

467 See, e.g., strong affirmations of God’s eternal freedom from outside sources, world events, and creatures in TCG2, 84-85, 98-109, and RTG, 222.
468 RTG, 111.
469 RTG, 113.
eternity found in Jenson. He nevertheless embraced what he saw as Jenson’s great contribution of highlighting the importance of the “narrative dimension” of salvation history.471 By the end of the century, however, Grenz noted that in spite of these helpful offerings delineating divine temporality, there was still no “consensus” about what might take trinitarian theology to the next level. Although, there was now one feature that had rotated into full frontal view—the concept of relationality. Indeed, Grenz argued that it was the relationality of the three trinitarian persons that provided the key to the unity of the Trinity for Moltmann, Pannenberg, and Jenson.472

5.1.2. Realizing Relationality’s Triumph

The first character Grenz considered who replaced substance metaphysics with a relational ontology was one of Karl Rahner’s students, Leonardo Boff. Although drawing from sources similar to Grenz’s, Boff was seen as imbibing too heavily from his contextual (socio-political) situation, while proving negligent with his own Catholic tradition.473 He was also deemed too cavalier in his attempt to prioritize the immanent Trinity, positing it above the economic, and grounding it as the ultimate theme of trinitarian theology. Still, for Boff the economic reveals some true knowledge of the eternal triune dynamic.474 Yet Grenz saw no real connection between Boff’s societal ideal and his doctrine of God, which Grenz suggested was doomed from the beginning as a result of his “commitment to the apophatic approach.” This is not to suggest that Grenz had an aversion to all apophatic approaches. He did not. But this highlights what he observed as a demonstration of “the difficulty inherent in any attempt to ground the human ideal by means of an appeal to the immanent Trinity, while rejecting the ‘vice

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471 RTG, 115, 218. Note that Grenz referred to this as a narrative dimension, and not purely a narrative per se, which would bring into question the historical nature of God’s interaction with the world, as others have charged Jenson of doing (e.g., Francesca Murphy, God is Not a Story: Realism Revisited [Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007], 255-79; and R. Kendall Soulen, The Divine Name(s) and the Holy Trinity, Volume One: Distinguishing the Voices [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011], 105-118).
472 RTG, 117, 218-19.
474 RTG, 126-27.
versa’ of Rahner’s Rule.” Herein was another important thread moving Grenz away from his earlier social trinitarianism and into the more epistemological and ontologically responsible account for accessing the transcendent triune base, which he would later find in the \textit{imago Dei}, as will be explored more fully in the next two chapters of this thesis.\footnote{RTG, 131.} Grenz’s earlier rejection of Moltmann\footnote{Grenz rendered Moltmann’s theology unacceptable because he saw it as ambiguous enough “to lend support to the charge that he has tied the immanent Trinity too closely to the historical process” (RTG, 87).} was ultimately not on dissimilar grounds to his rejection of Boff (and Volf, presumably).\footnote{Miroslav Volf, “The Trinity is Our Social Program: The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement,” \textit{Modern Theology} 14 (1998): 403-23.} For while Boff developed Moltmann’s elevated concept of \textit{perichoresis} and its connections between the community of three persons and the ideal human community for gathering “insight into the ineffable mystery of the triune God,”\footnote{RTG, 219.} he was insufficiently trinitarian because he was “less interested in offering a distinctly trinitarian proposal than in speaking to a social context….”\footnote{RTG, 138-39. See also the rendering of this and important qualifications Grenz maintained in his advance beyond a communion ontology in §3.1.5. of this thesis. See also the influence of Zizioulas on other significant British theologians in Jason S. Sexton, “Stanley Grenz’s Relatedness and Relevancy to British Evangelicalism,” \textit{Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology} 28 (2010): 64-66.}

John Zizioulas is another proponent of relationality. He blazed a pathway in contemporary theology by offering an innovative reading of the Cappadocians for his development of a communion ontology, where “personhood is constituted by the interplay of \textit{hypostasis} and \textit{ekstasis}.”\footnote{RTG, 138-39. See also the rendering of this and important qualifications Grenz maintained in his advance beyond a communion ontology in §3.1.5. of this thesis. See also the influence of Zizioulas on other significant British theologians in Jason S. Sexton, “Stanley Grenz’s Relatedness and Relevancy to British Evangelicalism,” \textit{Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology} 28 (2010): 64-66.} Grenz highlighted a number of significant critiques of Zizioulas’s model. For instance, he noted Alan Torrance’s observance that with the overpowering primacy of the Father, Zizioulas’s model risks elevating the Father (not the Trinity) to being the sole primordial reality, and therefore subordinating the Son to the Father. Torrance further noted that
this may yield a larger problem, with the inter-divine communion existing as a primordial concept for Zizioulas, both ontologically primitive and original. Grenz also looked to Paul Fiddes’s critique of Zizioulas’s unwillingness to grant complete mutuality among the trinitarian persons, and the mutual “constituting” of one another that comes through self-surrendering love. Grenz ultimately found Zizioulas’s thesis lacking, and significantly corrected by Alan Torrance’s revision, which followed Thomas Torrance and drew from Cyril of Alexandria where the Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son, providing a much richer doctrine of “mutual coinherence” between trinitarian persons, rendering the ultimate ontological reality not as “communion,” but as God.

Grenz then considered Catherine Mowry LaCugna’s proposal as the most widely hailed rendition of the Cappadocian reading next to Zizioulas, with its inherent ontology of interpersonal personhood, or “being-as-communion.” She was noted for acknowledging that the Cappadocians elevated person, not substance, as the primary ontological category. And thus, according to Mark Medley, she found person (not substance) to be the cause, origin, and end of both God and everything else, identifying the ultimate source of reality as “toward-another.” The radical nature of this conclusion comes to fore when LaCugna “redefines the idea of the immanent Trinity” as “mystery,” thereby defining all theology by its location within the salvation-economy, and hence, more than any other relational theologian, she “risked collapsing the eternal God into the economy of salvation, thereby compromising the divine freedom.” Grenz’s difficulty with LaCugna’s position did not lead him to discount her contribution altogether since, placed beside her relational-theology colleagues, her work highlights the

482 RTG, 144-46, citing Torrance, Persons in Communion, 292-93.
483 RTG, 145, citing Fiddes, Participating in God, 79-80.
484 RTG, 146.
485 RTG, 157-58, citing Medley, Image Trinitatis, 40.
486 RTG, 220.
presence of “variations on the theme of divine relationality.” Cognizant of her historical location, Grenz’s reading of her work attempted to employ “a more thorough account of the trajectory in which she stands,” locating her theology as part of a much bigger wave. Accordingly, he acknowledged that in some sense LaCugna “drew together impulses from the various innovative thinkers who preceded her in a creative manner that allowed her to add her own distinctive cast to the whole.” This led Grenz to find her work expressive of a larger vein of thought pulsating through the world of trinitarian theology, combining Zizioulas’s insights with other innovations from the major twentieth century developments, which then led her to acknowledge that “the relationality of the three trinitarian persons is first and foremost found in the oikonomia.” This critical insight is one that Grenz took fully on board with what he later went on to work towards developing further in his own imago Dei theology, with its very distinct epistemological and ontological characteristics. The strongest indication that he was not yet satisfied, however, with any of the “variation” on the relational accountings of the doctrine of the Trinity is best seen in the significant fifth and final chapter of his survey of twentieth century trinitarian theology, which considers three more thinkers and their contributions to the field of trinitarian studies, and which primarily emphasized a powerful reassertion of the primacy of the immanent Trinity.

5.1.3. Reasserting Needful Transcendence

While common consensus established the “basic appropriateness” of acknowledging the relationality of the members of the Trinity as critical for understanding the triune dynamic, there was still much more to it. There was more that needed to be understood about the unity and diversity of God. Furthering his journey through the most recent major developments in

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487 RTG, 162.
488 RTG, 148, 219.
489 RTG, 162.
490 RTG, 163.
trinitarian theology that preceded what he intended to be his own contribution to “advancing the scholarly enterprise” in trinitarian theology, Grenz moved on to explore three important thinkers whose work indicated a move in trinitarian scholarship marking “The Return of the Immanent Trinity.”

The return to the immanent Trinity was first spotted in the work of the Roman Catholic feminist theologian Elizabeth Johnson. According to Grenz, the heart of Johnson’s 1992 book, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse,* is the reimagining or renaming of God in female terms, which flowed from Johnson’s desire to emphasize the full humanity of women. Grenz found much to commend Johnson’s work, including its contextual emphasis, generated “in response to the contemporary world.” And while attempting to restore the immanent Trinity to Christian theology, she acknowledged the Trinity as a mystery who can both be spoken of and encountered. And yet Grenz wondered if she had not lost the immanent Trinity in her desire to bring readers close to God.

The next theologian seen setting forth a major, sustained call for a return of the immanent Trinity for trinitarian theology was the Roman Catholic Hans Urs von Balthasar.

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491 This ambitious statement was written to Professor Paul Fiddes in light of Grenz’s request for an academic reference for a number of grant-scholarships that were intended to and ultimately did facilitate the research for the 2001 *The Social God and the Relational Self,* the first volume in *The Matrix of Christian Theology* series. The context of the request to Fiddes reads thus: “As you well know, the competition for grants such as these is very keen. My case will be strengthened greatly by anything you can say that sets aside our typical academic reserve and emphasizes in no uncertain terms the crucial importance of my proposed work in advancing the scholarly enterprise especially as it relates to your own field of study” (letter dated 2 Nov. 1998). In the proposal to Westminster John Knox Press for the publication of the entire *Matrix* series (written 3 Dec. 1998), about this new “contribution to the systematic task or… exercise in constructive theology” (SGR, x), Grenz stated: “I now am in a position to give my attention to the task of working out several of the core themes presented in outline in *Theology for the Community of God,* themes that set forth a theology that centers on the concept of community as its integrative motif indicated in this earlier piece” (Grenz, “Series Proposal: Toward a Matrix of Trinitarian, Communitarian, Eschatological Theology,” 2).

492 This phrase is the title for chap. 5 of RTG.


494 RTG, 167-68.

495 RTG, 180-81.
Grenz deemed his proposal as thoroughly trinitarian, flowing from the aim of producing a robust and biblical theology of the Word—\textit{deus dixit}.\textsuperscript{496} Borrowing from Barth, he appropriated a Christological center for theology, which emphasized God’s self-disclosure in Jesus Christ as the basis for understanding God. And yet he sought to bring this emphasis up to date with new thinking in other areas of theology, like recent debates over the relationship between the Trinity and the cross, or God’s death and its implications.\textsuperscript{497} Grenz noted that, like Barth, Balthasar saw God as an “event,” the happening of which takes place in God’s eternal being or essence, which eventfulness is the basis for “[a]ll earthly becoming.” Here the divine \textit{missio} and \textit{processio} are understood to be intricately tied together, with the divine intra-trinitarian procession being the basis for the triune mission in the world, whilst God’s mission in the world brings creatures into access with the divine intra-trinitarian procession. As Grenz summarized, “the economic Trinity becomes the epistemological source of the immanent Trinity, but the immanent Trinity remains the ontological source of the economic Trinity.”\textsuperscript{498} And yet while he saw Balthasar’s emphasis on the immanent Trinity excelling even that of Elizabeth Johnson, Grenz still had not found entirely what he was looking for.

The next stop on the journey of Grenz’s survey of twentieth century trinitarian theology was the work of Thomas F. Torrance. Inasmuch as Torrance’s work reflects the “Barthian-based revival of immanent trinitarianism” advocated by a number of scholars (e.g., Paul Molnar and Alan Torrance), Grenz followed a similar course, especially insofar as the matter involved respecting God’s freedom.\textsuperscript{499} And while others have offered hopeful modifications of Barth’s

\textsuperscript{496} RTG, 183.  
\textsuperscript{497} RTG, 192-93.  
\textsuperscript{498} RTG, 196.  
\textsuperscript{499} On this point, Grenz followed the lead of Paul Molnar ([RTG, 200-201]).
work, the most influential Barth-oriented theologian for Grenz was Thomas Torrance, not least for how the *analogia entis* gives way to the *analogia relationis* in Grenz’s work. And while not neglecting how epistemologically and ontologically intertwined theology and science are, with particular reference to the process of “knowing,” especially theological knowing, Torrance saw the doctrine of the Trinity as “the ultimate ground of theological knowledge of God, the basic grammar of theology…” And according to Grenz, at the very “heart of the trinitarian character of Torrance’s theology” was the critical role occupied by the second member of the Trinity in the “dynamic” of theological knowing.

Additionally, because the *analogia entis* had no place in Torrance’s work, knowledge of God would have to be brought about by the third trinitarian person, the Spirit. The reason for finding Christ and the Spirit playing such important roles in the epistemological process was based on the patristic *homoousian* concept, which is said to have unlocked the NT’s implicit trinitarianism. It is therefore God’s self-disclosure in Jesus Christ that reveals a God who is “inherently relational.” This not only draws from concepts like *perichoresis*, as other twentieth century trinitarian theologians have done, but looks also to the concept of “onto-relation,” delineating the divine relational dynamic while also explicating the significance of the notion of “person.” For Torrance, then, this “onto-relation” is more or less “a being-constituting relation,” which is further explained as “the kind of relation subsisting between things which is an essential

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500 E.g., see Alan Torrance’s replacement of Barth’s “modes of being” (*seinsweisen*) with a communion model emphasizing the indwelling of trinitarian persons with one another (*RTG*, 201).
501 While not entirely acknowledging specific details of convergence other than the “return of the immanent Trinity” that the present chapter of this thesis is highlighting, this point of Torrance influencing Grenz is acknowledged in Paul D. Molnar, *Thomas F. Torrance: Theologian of the Trinity* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2009), 71-72.
502 See §6.3.1. of this thesis where Grenz is shown to maintain the *analogia relationis* (relational analogy) over against the *analogia entis* (analogy of being), thereby grounding the *imago Dei* in relational community rather than any static notion of being. Here it is the dynamic notion of *being* that conceptually absorbs the *analogia relationis* into the *imago Dei*. The *imago Dei* concept is dynamic, itself denoting *perichoresis* between the other trinitarian members to whom the image relates. The “image” concept also denotes somewhat the perichoretic relationship between Christ’s very deity and humanity, as well as that between Christ and others united to him.
504 *RTG*, 206. Note the centrality of his *imago Dei* Christology in Grenz, “Jesus as the *Imago Dei*,” 627-28.
constituent of their being, and without which they would not be what they are." Accordingly, each member of the Trinity functions as the onto-relational source of qualities characterizing the one God. In this manner, Torrance draws on the concept of an *analogia relationis* between God’s actions toward creation and the intra-trinitarian relations in order to maintain the triune God as not only “a fullness of personal Being in himself,” but also a “person-constituting Being” who constitutes the personhood of humans by entering into relationship with them.

According to Grenz, Torrance’s central contribution to trinitarian theology came from the specific way he relegated ultimate theological primacy to the immanent Trinity, which in turn provided the ultimate ground for theological knowledge. Torrance also went on to provide a procedural basis for fostering trinitarian theology, namely, in the notion of “the stratification of truth” for theological method. Following Albert Einstein and others, this method acknowledged that the human epistemological endeavor ensues by means of a process leading into ever-deepening or ever-heightening levels of the truth of reality: (1) the evangelical and doxological level, where knowledge begins with experience in the gospel and the life of the church; (2) the theological level, reflecting on the economic Trinity and God’s self-disclosure in history and in Christ; and (3) the higher theological level, leading to conclusions about the immanent Trinity.

He understood divine revelation as found, above all, in Christ, mediated by the Spirit through whom humans come to participate in God’s eternal self-knowledge. And the relationality

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506 RTG, 209.

507 RTG, 210, citing Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology*, 43. See also the striking similarities between this position and Ayres’s insights into Augustine’s *De trinitate* 15, where each of the irreducible divine three exist as “the fullness of the divine life” (*Augustine and the Trinity*, 231-33).


intrinsic to the eternal life of the triune God, according to Grenz’s reading of Torrance, “provides the transcendent basis for speaking about human personhood and communion.”

5.1.4. Reflecting on and Advancing Twentieth Century Trinitarianism

At the conclusion of his survey of the resurgent trinitarian theology, Grenz found each thinker offering important insights contributing to the ongoing effort and development of articulating the doctrine of the Trinity. Indeed, every central insight of each thinker appears to be with varying degrees somehow integrated into Grenz’s theology, although never uncritically. In light of this, he concluded:

If the twentieth-century [sic] conversation reached any point of consensus regarding this issue, it is that any truly helpful explication of the doctrine of the Trinity must give epistemological priority to the presence of the trinitarian members in the divine economy but reserve ontological primacy for the dynamic of their relationality within the divine life.

This conclusion is both a perceptive summary of developments, but more than anything represents Grenz’s own conclusion about the way forward. As what could accurately be deemed the “Grenz grundaxiom,” this maxim affirms that the economic Trinity is prioritized epistemologically while the immanent Trinity is prioritized ontologically. This concise synthesis of consensus, however, for Grenz only served to raise the underlying metaphysical question over the issue of the relationship between God’s life ad intra and God’s life ad extra, while seeking to take seriously the importance of the economic Trinity to the immanent, meanwhile steering clear of collapsing the immanent Trinity into the course of salvation history. Grenz was left wondering what kind of ontology could facilitate the development of this kind of trinitarian theology. Concluding that in light of recent consensus the “provisional answer” to this question is one of “an ontology that is thoroughly eschatological and communal,” Grenz also saw his own role as continuing the “ongoing task” of returning to the drawing board to pursue further work toward “[t]he

510 RTG, 221.
511 RTG, 222.
development of such an ontology.” But on the way to this constructive ontology, Grenz made a number of significant moves.

5.1.4.1. The Vanishing Role of Colin Gunton

An illuminating scenario occurred with Grenz’s reading of Colin Gunton in earlier drafts of the outline proposal for the 2004 survey of twentieth century trinitarian developments, *Rediscovering the Triune God*. Gunton, of course, was one of the turn of the century’s leading English-speaking theologians, whose innovative work seeking to develop an ontology built on God’s triunity was well-known. In a total of nine documented outline drafts for the book, ranging from 4 Jan. 2002 to 22 Aug. 2003, Gunton appeared prominent in all but the last two. His early role was very significant in the proposal. In the first draft Grenz allocated the final chapter before the summary conclusion as, “Colin Gunton: Solving the Problem of the One and the Many.” In subsequent drafts 2-7, however, Gunton was always linked with other significant contributors to the resurgence, although never having as prominent of a place as in the first draft. Often Gunton was linked with T. F. Torrance (see drafts 2, 3, and perhaps 4, the lattermost where Grenz intended to “mention Torrance” during his exposition of Gunton), although once the outline shifted from individuals to an overarching thematic approach Gunton was placed with Zizioulas in three drafts: “The Retrieval of the Three Persons” (draft 4, 15 Aug. 2002); “The Triumph of the Cappadocians” with LaCugna and Zizioulas (draft 5, 30 Oct. 2002); and “The Triumph of Relationality: The Turn Toward the East” (draft 6, 1 Nov. 2002). However, Gunton was then featured with Elizabeth Johnson and Balthasar in the final chapter of draft 7, entitled, “Return to the Immanent Trinity” (7 Nov. 2002), after which Gunton would

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512 RTG, 222-23.
513 For a brief statement about Gunton’s agenda and how “more than any other” he was attempting to offer the Christian answer to rival ontologies, see Stephen R. Holmes, “Something Much Too Plain to Say: Towards a Defence of the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity,” *Neue Zeitschrift Für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 43 (2001): 151-52.
not feature again in the outline—not at all. He was completely absent from the eighth (12 July 2003) and ninth (22 Aug. 2003) proposal drafts.514

Ultimately Gunton received a rather insignificant role in Grenz’s survey, and yet Grenz never indicated the cause of this sudden paucity. Of course, most significantly during the period when Gunton dropped out of Grenz’s proposal between drafts 7 (7 Nov. 2002) and 8 (12 July 2003), Colin Gunton died (6 May 2003). But although no further effort would be spent contributing to his trinitarian ontology, this did not indicate that Gunton’s prior work was insignificant. One might speculate that Grenz’s deflated interest in Gunton may have come from Grenz’s own deep commitment to the systematic enterprise, looking forward to the systematic theology that never came from Gunton. Or perhaps more significant might have been the properly conceived trinitarian ontology that the systematic approach, especially Gunton’s, could have yielded. Speculating further, one might suspect that Gunton’s well-known sustained polemical attack of the “Western theological tradition” and especially Augustine,515 coupled with Grenz’s increasing uneasiness with the “social Trinity,” along with problems in Zizioulas’s work516 and the stream of scholarship deeply affected (directed?) by it, may have jaded Grenz toward Gunton’s project. And with the shift in his conception of twentieth century developments (evidenced in his early Nov. 2002 proposed outline draft) that “the return to the immanent Trinity” was the final feature in the recent trinitarian saga, Gunton’s role completely faded from the purview of Grenz’s project. Upon publication of Rediscovering the Triune God, Gunton only received cursory mention in a mere four sentences of the entire book.517

514 These proposals are part of Grenz’s unpublished personal records for the ms., Rediscovering the Triune God.

515 While well known, see this accounted for in Webster, “Systematic Theology After Barth,” 259-60, which may have been a significant factor in the importance Grenz placed on the Western tradition, and especially Augustine, as has been shown already in this chapter.

516 See the quite strident argument made for the deep influence of John Zizioulas on Gunton at the British Council of Churches (BCC) Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine in Holmes, “Towards the Analogia Personae et Relationis,” 39-44.

517 RTG, 145-47.
5.1.4.2. Beyond the “Social Trinity”

Consistent with his apparent disinclination toward Gunton’s work, as Grenz’s explorations progressed in and around *The Matrix* series, and with fastidious development occurring before and during the construction of volume 2, he began taking steps that would move him beyond the so-called “social Trinity.” As late as 2003 he displayed ambiguity when using “relationality” and “community” synonymously regarding the triune God. But the next year, with the trinitarian survey standing as the prequel to *The Matrix* volume on theology proper, Grenz’s final emphasis was on transcendence, which he found progressively displayed in the works of the last notable theologians of the twentieth century, as observed in the previous section in this chapter (see §5.1.3.). Already noted, with his consistent, increasing lean Westward, Grenz never left the *filioque*, nor the cognitive awareness that a number of contemporary social trinitarians were flying dangerously close to collapsing God into creation’s course. Additionally, the posthumously published exploration of the divine being virtually neglected all of his earlier interest in the social Trinity. He stopped using the term for his own constructions shortly after his 2001 publications, although his conception of a relational model of the Trinity remained.

518 Grenz understands the inaugurated idea coming from this term as defined by Moltmann: “In distinction to the trinity of substance and to the trinity of subject we shall be attempting to develop a social doctrine of the Trinity…. This trinitarian hermeneutics leads us to think in terms of relationships and communities…. taking up panentheistic ideas…” (Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, 19). Grenz acknowledged this catalyst as the beginning of the “changing focus” away from a substantia list unity toward a relational unity of three persons or three “centers of conscious activity” in *RTG*, 80-81.

519 Stanley J. Grenz, “The Doctrine of the Trinit y: Luxuriant Meadow or Theological Terminus?” *Crux* 39 (2003): 17. For Grenz, relationality and community would break off into two distinctly separate emphases: (1) relationality, describing the way God is as “Person,” and the way persons are towards one another; (2) community, either referring to God’s life *in se* or to God’s working in salvation history (*TCG2*, 67-70), in order to bring about community in the highest sense, wherein believers participate.

520 One interesting example of this is how he looked to Moltmann and LaCugna’s description of *perichoresis* (Stanley J. Grenz, “Is God Sexual? Human Embodiment and the Christian Conception of God,” *Christian Scholars’ Review* 28 [1998]: 35n39; and *SGRS*, 317) to show how the personhood of the three trinitarian persons is relationally determined: “By avoiding any hint of dividing God into three and yet maintaining the personal distinctions within God, the appeal to *perichoresis* preserved both the unity of the one God and the individuality of the Trinitarian persons” (*SGRS*, 317). Yet by the 2005 posthumously published *Matrix* volume (*NGQB*, 320-40, *passim*), *perichoresis* is not employed at all as the basis for understanding trinitarian oneness.

521 The only exception might be in 2005 where Grenz’s course notes explained that the foundation for the divine purpose of humans living in community as the divine image was akin not to the individualist models of the *imago Dei* but to the communitarian model, whose foundation is “God as the social Trinity—the divine community characterized by love,” with the application being that “[w]e are the divine image only in community—as we show
Indeed, the three proponents of transcendence in Grenz’s 2004 survey (Johnson, Balthasar, and Thomas Torrance) were all commonly understood as developing some kind of relational trinitarianism, but with different emphases than what drove the range of previous advocates of divine relationality.

Although Grenz continued to speak of God as “the divine community characterized by love,” his understanding of divine relationality moved toward greater particularity than what is found in his earlier approach to the divine being in the last decade of the twentieth century and in the first couple of years of the new one. It remains difficult if not altogether impossible to discern precisely what Grenz was moving toward, and how this particularity would have taken shape in his work as it continued to mature. Clearly, he maintained close readings of scripture, and perhaps had arrived at an even deeper understanding of God’s self-revelation, freedom, and prerogative in the divine self-naming, which became a major feature of his final Matrix volume. And clearly he was becoming more Christocentric while developing his imago Dei theo-ontology and epistemology of theology, which reflects what might have been his own uneasiness of combining his earlier prioritization of the historic Jesus of Nazareth with the emphasis on the social Trinity. And yet the components of community Grenz sought to emphasize both related to the triune community as well as that human community of members found in Christ and thereby dwelling in communion with the triune God. This community dynamic was

forth the character of God through our relationships” (Stanley J. Grenz, “Humanity: Personal Identity and the Quest for Home,” Session 2 of “Getting Back to Basics: Truth, Humanity, Church and Scripture,” Critical Concerns Course, Emergent Conference, San Diego, CA, 1 Feb. 2005 [unpublished], 5-6). Of course, this communitarian model of the imago Dei is only appropriate for Grenz when filled out with the necessary understanding of its eschatological dimension which the present redeemed community anticipates. But also interesting is that the “social Trinity” is replaced elsewhere in Grenz’s lecture notes for the 2005 Emergent Conference as “the divine community of love.”

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522 RTG, 220-21.
523 See Grenz’s discussion on this in RTG, 132-33.
525 TCG2, 243-356.
ultimately to be both ontologically and epistemologically located in and with the person and work of Christ, which also explains why Grenz’s Christ-centeredness only increased with his constructive work. Meanwhile, he moved away from the social Trinity, as displayed in his lack of use of the term, and a greater critique of the leading social trinitarian schemes. This thesis has already acknowledged that the doctrine of the Trinity Grenz was aiming for resisted the radicalized features of models that found God conjoined to and dependent on the created order (whether self-imposed or not), where God is three centers of consciousness, where Son and Spirit are unilaterally dependent on the Father, or where persons are understood as relations. And his move away from the social Trinity was also displayed in his emphasis on the cosmic Christ and the *imago Dei* as the epistemological and ontological base from which to begin to understand the triune life in itself as well as the divine working in the world. These moves beyond the social Trinity and toward an *imago Dei* structure are also observed in Grenz’s understanding of both the divine essence and divine personhood, which are considered next.

5.1.4.3. The Divine “Essence”

Indications of divine simplicity remaining in Grenz’s maturest construction are very interesting. Among other things, this is seen in his understanding of God’s “essence.” Expounding the unity and diversity or ontological distinctions within the one God, Grenz declared that, “like oneness, therefore, threeness belongs to the essence of God.” Whilst terms like “generation” and “procession” are said to be metaphors, attempting “to put into human words the ineffable essence of God,” Grenz declared that “Father, Son, and Spirit together comprise the divine being and essence.” In 2001, Grenz understood that God is love “in that the divine essence is the *agape* that characterizes the life of the triune God.” He suggested further

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526 See §5.1.5. of this thesis for an explanation of this.
527 See again §4.3.2. of the previous chapter in this thesis.
528 *TCG* 2, 66-68.
that this lofty conclusion about the eternal dynamic within the divine life comes about “as the extension to the immanent Trinity of the dynamic disclosed within the narrative of Jesus.”

Jesus Christ then is the visible manifestation of the divine reality, and through the cross “revealed the eternal nature and glory of God,” thereby showing himself to be the Son and wisdom of God, through whom God made the universe.

Grenz also allowed for a further aspect of the eternal divine dynamic (which he deemed a more Augustinian one), referring to that which “constitutes the Holy Spirit as the third trinitarian person, who is the concretization of the divine essence.” Indeed, the love constituting the essence of the one God was said to be comprised of the relationship between the Father and the Son (i.e., love), concretized in the third trinitarian person, the Holy Spirit.

Grenz thought this yielded a trajectory positing a thoroughgoing relational ontology where love is seen as the primary ontological predicate. This is not dissimilar to Grenz’s later statement about the “dynamic” of the triune life being “eternal reciprocal glorification,” a dynamic in which those in Christ participate since through the Spirit they “come to share the eternal relationship that the Son enjoys with the Father.”

Believers therein participate together “as God’s children in the eternal communion shared between the Father and the Son.” Indeed, the divine essence, or the sameness that the Father and Son share—the shared love—is the Holy Spirit, who is nevertheless neither the Son nor the Father and thus differs from both. In this manner, “the doctrine of the Trinity teaches that the trinitarian persons share in the one divine

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530. SGRS, 222.
531. SGRS, 314-17. See this as a feature (i.e., the Holy Spirit as “the Spirit of the relationship between the Father and the Son,” and thus comprising “the ‘sameness’ they share, namely, the one divine nature—love”) also identified as part of the Western tradition in Grenz, “Is God Sexual?” 40.
532. SGRS, 314-17. See also Grenz’s acceptance of Torrance’s critique of Zizioulas in RTG, 146-47.
533. NGQB, 364, 366.
essence, for there is but one God; yet they differ from one another, for each is a distinct person who cannot be equated with, or subsumed within, the others.534

In the second Matrix volume Grenz expounded the same notion articulated in the earlier volume. He understood that Jesus’ usage of the term “Father” for the God of Israel conjured up the idea of family inheritance in the ancient context. And the family inheritance goes to the heir. Here Grenz sketched the inter-trinitarian drama, suggesting that the “‘treasure’ is nothing less than the Father’s own character or essential nature, and hence the Father’s own deity.” And what the Son receives from the Father he also returns to the Father, whereby the treasure is shared between the Father and the Son. Showing forth the lengthy theological pedigree for this pneumatological description, Grenz posited, “As the third person of the Trinity, the Spirit is the personal concretization of the very essence or the very deity of God, namely, love.”535 In addition to the deity and love shared between the trinitarian members is the dynamic of “naming,” which itself is a trinitarian act, involving Namer, Named, and Name. With the Name being “bound up with the very essence of its bearer, the third [trinitarian member] emerges as the Name shared by the Namer and the Named.” Exchanging dynamic rather than substantive language, this means that the divine action involves Naming, Being Named, and Name Sharing. What Grenz found in the NT was an event involving Jesus, his Father, and the Spirit, which “suggests a transcendent, eternal dynamic of naming within the life of the triune God,” in turn providing an interconnectedness of language forming a bridge from the saga of the divine name, and from the God of the Bible, to the concerns raised from the discipline of ontology.536

While maintaining a number of concerns he brought to the task of theological inquiry, Grenz still found the naming phenomenon to be “communal,” which indeed it is. But because naming always involves the incorporation of new insights which await the completion of the

534 SGRS, 321.
535 NGQB, 288.
536 NGQB, 290.
narrative of the person denoted by the name, so also names and naming are equally eschatological. Here Grenz declared that the Father bestows “his name—his very essence, namely, the Spirit—on the Son who is other than the Father,” which then brings about the fact that “the Father also finds his name, his Spirit, in the Son (through a saga that is eternal yet temporal).” Here the dynamic within the relational history of the divine Trinity—the communal and eschatological dimensions of the naming activity—is present archetypally even as these dimensions “come into view in the temporal history” of trinitarian relationships. Grenz took one more step, however, viewing the act of inter-trinitarian naming as a noetic act, involving the personal connection to or relationship with a person, which furthermore indicates an eternal dynamic of divine self-naming that yields self-knowledge. This entails the eternal analogue capable of making sense out of passages like Matthew 11:27, which indicates that “this role of Christ as the incarnation of the I AM points toward the eternal noetic Trinity, toward an eternal dynamic of knowing and being known that is connected to the eternal self-naming within the triune God.”

All of this displays the characteristic trinitarian concept of love, which earlier facilitated Augustine’s resolution to the problem of knowing God, characterized as the via amoris which embraced but went beyond the apophatic method since it incorporated the commonplace patristic notion of God’s incomprehensibility. It is therefore the Christian conception of God as triune that “asserts that the primordial, eschatological act of present-ing and substantiating love is complete within the dynamic of the eternal divine life.” In this way, Grenz understood that Augustine’s language of God as “encircling Lover, Beloved, and Love provides the depth-

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537 See a further unpacking of this as it relates to Grenz’s ecclesiology and understanding of the redeemed community in Sexton, “Stanley Grenz’s Ecclesiology,” 20-43 (esp. pp. 34-43).
538 “All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (NRSV).
539 NGQB, 334-35. Note also the similarities between Grenz’s position and the one he acknowledged in T. F. Torrance, that the name-referenced hypostatic interrelations designate the being of God (RTG, 209).
540 NGQB, 337.
grammar for this dynamic of mutual substantiation in the relationship of love.” This opened the
door even further for the inclusion of the Augustinian concept which understood the Spirit as
the shared Gift between the Father and the Son.541 For Grenz, this concept became ontologically
significant in its ability to encapsulate “the graciousness of God who is eternally Other within the
divine reality and yet who nevertheless substantiates the ‘to be’ of a host of others with whom
this God wills to enter into relationship as Other.”542

Along with his equating of God’s essence with concepts like “love,” “deity,” “name,”
and “Spirit,” as has elsewhere been observed in this thesis, Grenz also added the idea of “life” to
this assemblage, since as Spirit, God is the source of created life.543 Indeed, while there is a
“constellation of meanings” said to lie behind the biblical idea that God is Spirit, the Spirit is
identified as the very Gift of Life. Grenz affirmed that behind God’s relationship to the world as

541 NGQB, 339-40. Apart from this, it was not as though Augustine had not featured in Grenz’s earlier
work. E.g., see the following: TCG2, passim, SGR5, 315-16; and John Franke’s mistaken conclusion expressed at the
2009 Edinburgh Dogmatics Conference, recounted on p. 88n422 of this thesis.

As to why Grenz remained so trenchantly Augustinian, especially regarding the Spirit, and while knowing
the criticisms, one could speculate. Perhaps Grenz thought that with the ink spilt over definitions of person, the
issue is no longer one of de-personalizing the Spirit. Perhaps he wanted to redeem Augustine from the “inward”
individualism that Enlightenment theology is often indicted for, whilst finding Augustine’s Trinity acquitted of the
same vices. Perhaps the Father-Son mutuality and the Spirit’s conception as the love or relationship between Father
and Son helped Grenz make better sense of an *analogia relationis* with humankind, and perhaps this related to his
explorations into the *imago Dei*. Perhaps this is the only way that he could see God (penetrating?) bringing human
beings into participation in the very divine life (SGR5, 326; and NGQB, 366, 372). Perhaps this was also part of
Grenz’s making room for what would develop in his *imago Dei* work, maintaining the Creator/creature distinction
whilst making room for the Spirit to convert people, placing them in Christ, constituting them as God’s redeemed
children, Christ’s body, and by communion with the Spirit to so participate in the divine life, ultimately becoming
what they were created to become (see TCG2, 376, 484). Grenz rejected the Orthodox view, with its hierarchical
role for the Father, but maintained *perichoresis* and *theosis* whilst affirming the Western priority of Father (who is
nevertheless constituted by his relationship to the Son), eternal generation, and the *filioque* clause, all from the one
ground (TCG2, 68-71). See, however, the challenge for evangelicals who qualify or deny *taxis* in the Godhead, which
is said to be affirmed by Orthodox and Roman Catholic branches of Christianity in Edith M. Humphrey, “The Gift
of the Father,” in *Trinitarian Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel J. Treier and David Lauber (Downers Grove:
InterVarsity Press, 2009), 99n17. See also Grenz’s dependence on Augustine, who found concluding that “each of
the three members of the Trinity possesses the divine essence entirely, yet in a particular manner that is proper to
that Trinitarian member. It is in this sense that we might say that Augustine started with the unity of the divine
substance and then moved to the triunity of the three persons” (NGQB, 313; see also pp. 313-41).

542 NGQB, 341. Incidentally, as further indication of Grenz’s increasing dependence on Augustine, see his
earlier 2001 hesitation to utilize the concept of Spirit as gift for his construction: “the concept of gift may be too
thin a basis upon which to construct an entire ontology” (SGR5, 328).

543 Although he is cited nowhere in the final chapter of NGQB, Augustine’s notion of “life” echoes
strongly from this section of Grenz’s work. See Augustine, *De trinitate* 15.5.7: “For that which is called life in God, is
itself His essence and nature” (NPNF3 vol. 3, trans. Philip Schaff).
the Giver of life is an eternal divine dynamic marking God as the eternal living one. He explained:

In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus offers an insight into this eternal dynamic: “For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself” (John 5:26). This declaration suggests that the focus of the divine vitality is the relationship between the Father and the Son. The divine vitality entails the eternal activity of the Father who as the fountain of life generates the Son to share in this life. The self-giving of the Father for the Son, in turn, is reciprocated in the Son’s self-giving for the Father. This relationship between the Father and the Son is constituted by the Holy Spirit, who as the gift of life shared between the Father and the Son is the concretization of the essence of the triune God, namely, life.544

The concept of gift here must not be understood apart from the God who comes to his people as trinitarian love, which is “most clearly evident in the love that is evoked in face-to-face encounter with the Other in the other.” It is in human relationality (i.e., relationship to the other), therefore, as Grenz explained, “that we find the *imago Dei* and thus come to know the triune God who is love.”545 The Spirit, the Gift of Being, is the gift of “to be” bestowed on all that is. And while believers are given the gift of life and breath and all things as others are, they are also given that same Spirit in order that they might be “properly named,” being brought to share in the divine intention, being named “in a manner that coincides with the goal of our naming, specifically, our reception of the eschatological new name that the exalted I AM intends to share with us.” In short, “the gift of the Spirit is given so that we might receive the goal of our existence, which is being ‘in Christ’ and hence ‘in God.’” Grenz further elaborated:

In this process, the Spirit’s goal is that we might come to see that our true being lies in the naming dynamic involved in our participation in the divine story and thereby that we are truly properly named only when we gain our sense of being

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544 *NGQB*, 369.
545 *NGQB*, 338. See also the exposition of being *in* and becoming the *imago Dei*, as expounded by Grenz in the final chapter of *NGQB*, 361-67, which names believers “in God,” by participation. This idea will be presented more fully in chap. 6 of this thesis, showing how Grenz conceived the *imago Dei* concept through the range of the systematic loci. Unfortunately, the final chapter of *NGQB*, 342-73, appears to be the least edited chapter of the entire book, and therefore might not represent the erudition of this notion of being in and becoming the *imago Dei* that he might have done otherwise.
from the name of the eternal I AM, that is, from the name that the Father desires to bestow upon us in the Son as the eschatological gift of the Spirit.546

Accordingly, Grenz understood that “[t]he triunity of God is reality to be lived into.”547 By this he meant to emphasize the practical nature of trinitarian belief, elsewhere stating that “the church derives its essential nature from the divine essence,” and this essence, God’s very nature, is love.548 Christians are therefore a community because they are “bound together by the Holy Spirit, who is God’s eternal love.”549

Earlier in 1993 Grenz affirmed that God’s self-revelation, or the divine act of self-disclosure, “reveals nothing less than the essence of God.”550 Based on what he said elsewhere about the Spirit being God’s essence, and the robust role the Spirit plays in revelation, this statement ought to be read as equivocally pneumatologically-loaded.551 Based on surveying his usage of “essence,” this is also consonant with how it appears Grenz eventually backed off from making confident statements about being able to know this essence in se, retreating instead to a pneumatological epistemology, although not one remaining ontologically-aloof. Being ontologically one with God, “sharing in the divine essence which he exemplifies,” and as the very revealer of God, “in Jesus we find the essence of God pictured before us.”552 It is important to note at this point that there was significant movement occurring in Grenz’s conception of the doctrine of the Trinity—he was working from, through, and unto particular doctrines of the

546 NGQJ, 372-73.
547 Grenz, “What Does it Mean to be Trinitarian in Prayer?” 2.
550 RET, 76. Here Grenz affirmed the communal nature of revelation, and that it ultimately stands in the eschaton while nevertheless being a present reality since it has appeared proleptically in history.
551 See also how he would locate the doctrine of revelation under pneumatology in his one-volume systematic theology released the following year (TCG2, 379-404). See also the work of the Spirit in revealing Jesus, who is “the revealer of God” (TCG2, 264-66).
552 TCG2, 264-65.
Trinity.\footnote{See the conclusion of Morrison, “Trinity and Church,” 446-47, who concludes that “The [doctrine of the] Trinity is true theologia and the conceptual-relational-methodological heart of all that Grenz says theologically,” and again that Grenz’s unitary methodology works “in and from God’s triunity.”} Available evidence indicating this movement in Grenz’s conception testifies that he never developed a full-blown doctrine of the Trinity, which the present chapter has attempted to highlight while also reckoning with Grenz’s maturest yet still cryptic formation. Whatever his conception was at any given time, however, he intended it to have power to sustain the weight of the totality of theology, ethics and all reality. But how so?

Having moved from his earlier inheritance of Lewis and Demarest to the “social Trinity” in the mid-1990s, with the community theme taking center-stage, it seems that Grenz’s choice to speak of the \textit{telos} of human existence as “community in the highest sense,”\footnote{See p. 49n241 in §3.1.3 of this thesis.} which, when coupled with his understanding of God’s essence, and the believer’s participation in the essence, moved his model very close to something other trinitarian theologians have rejected.\footnote{E.g., Thomas Torrance is said to have rejected the notion of the believer’s \textit{direct} participation in the essence of God (Myk Habets, \textit{Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance} [Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2009], 157). See also Michael Horton, \textit{The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way} (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 266-67n13.} Yet Grenz seems to have had methodological guards for this potential debilitation. Indeed, sticking close to the sources and motifs for theology was the major means of keeping his theology immune from various divergencies into either heterodoxy or theology that was other than distinctly evangelical.\footnote{See §1.4.1.-1.4.2. of this thesis for an exposition of Grenz’s sources and motifs and how they secured a sound direction for his proposal.}

5.1.4.4. Divine Personhood

One way Grenz conceived this evangelical trinitarian theology was by his understanding of person as it related to the triune God. Although Grenz reflected Pannenberg’s queasiness toward Robert Jenson’s reference to God as a person, risking adding another person to the triune Godhead,\footnote{Grenz, “The Divine Fugue,” 215.} Grenz himself also referred to God as “Person.” In his exposition of
trinitarian prayer, with reference to OT prayer Grenz noted that the one to whom the Israelites prayed “is the God who remains ‘Person,’” which meant that “He remains living and sovereign, and confronts as person alive in love and wrath.” Similar to the point made in 1 John 5:14-15, this displayed “concern about the hearing of prayer on the part of the pray-er, who earnestly seeks to be heard (hence, appeal to God based on past actions, promises, etc.).” OT believers were interested to know that God was with them and for them, which provided confidence in prayer. For Christians, prayer is one aspect of the dynamic of participation, where the Spirit draws us into the relationship the Son enjoys with the Father. Therefore believers ought to be conscious that prayer occurs “in the presence of the God who is Person in the highest sense,” whilst also being triune. Grenz acknowledged the earlier ideas surrounding the notion of “Person” and its relationship to the divine Being, from Walter Richmond to Karl Barth, and seemed to have found in the latter theologian affinity for where most of his sympathies would reside, with an increasingly Christ-centered approach to revelation. This showed itself not least in how he deemed that, “by its very nature, Christology is a theology-informing locus. Christology informs the doctrine of God, for we cannot know who God truly is except through Jesus who as the true imago Dei is the revelation of God.”

Grenz’s idea of “person” seems to have provided him with the impetus to locate everything significant for his proposal in the imago Dei concept, as well as how it is seen to have shaped his epistemology. The affirmation of God’s personhood arose out of the personal “experience of God” as “incomprehensible,” as “will,” and as “free.” According to Grenz, the declaration that “God is person,” then, “means that personhood belongs to the divine reality

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558 “And this is the boldness we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him” (NRSV).
561 SGRS, 32-37.
562 Grenz, “Jesus as the Imago Dei,” 627.
who confronts us.” As “person,” God is “the source of the mystery, self-determination, and freedom of humans, with whom he enters into eternal relationship.” And as “person” and “spirit,” the God of the Bible carries the name of the great “I AM,” which according to Grenz indicates that God is both “the ultimate reality and an active agent in human affairs.” Grenz then explained how the “I AM” invites other human persons to participate in the community of disciples, to enter into relationship with this relational, triune God: “He is the Father who desires that we enjoy fellowship with him, the Son in whose fellowship with the Father we are called to share, and the Holy Spirit who as the bond of the divine fellowship brings us into participation in that relationship.”

5.1.4.5. The Triune Being

Having already mentioned that Grenz viewed the activity of inter-trinitarian naming as a noetic act involving the personal connection or relationship with a person, this in turn invokes the eternal dynamic of divine self-naming that yields self-knowledge between the trinitarian members. As the very incarnation of the eternal I AM, Jesus points toward an eternal dynamic of knowing and being known within the eternal self-naming of the life of the triune God. Understood as flowing from the eternal yet temporal saga of the divine self-naming, this noetic Trinity yields a theology of “be-ing” and “present-ing” which in turn becomes part of Grenz’s theo-ontology since the divine name is something that Jesus both possesses and reveals. On this point Grenz was aware of the concerns of deconstructionist philosopher Jacques Derrida

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564 TCG2, 86-87. See also the argument for how Grenz related Christian experience to his epistemology in Smith, “A Trinitarian Epistemology,” 44-64, esp. pp. 57-64.

565 NGQB, 334-35. Note also the similarities between Grenz’s position and the one he acknowledged in T. F. Torrance, that the name-referenced hypostatic interrelations designate the being of God (RTG, 209).

566 NGQB, 203-4, 335.
and his goal to disavow us from the “metaphysics of presence” and onto-theology. And in subversive style, drawing from his sources, Grenz aimed to show from scripture and tradition especially how God was active and present to his people, and thereby Grenz offers a response to the critique from culture in his own theo-ontology.

As Grenz carried out his theo-ontological exposition of God’s being in the second Matrix volume, contrary to a number of other schemes developed in recent trinitarian theology, Grenz understood that God’s Being (essence) is in “Be-ing,” which indicated quite a number of things, drawn initially from the exegesis of OT texts, and then from the NT, as well as from the Christian tradition. The idea of God’s be-ing, first of all, designates God’s active presence with his people and with all creation. Grenz had already declared, “Central to the divine purpose of establishing community is the presence of God among his people. God’s presence is a constant theme of the Bible.” God is also active, remaining who he is in freedom and therefore faithful to himself for the sake of his people. He is a God who promises and proves faithful to his promises, implying his future and eternal intentional activity. Along with active be-ing, though, Yahweh’s name also indicates dynamic presence, as one who chooses to enter into relationship rather than withholding his name and thereby displaying unwillingness to enter into relationship.

As shown by the disclosure of the divine name, God’s very act of “be-ing present,” which is essential for the meaning of the divine name, also shows itself in the ongoing saga of the divine name which as a triune act “shows itself to be the saga of ‘the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit’ given in the baptismal formula of the Great Commission.” This flows out further into the willingness to share the name with others, showing forth the

567 NGQB, 120-30.
568 NGQB, 249-373.
570 NGQB, 143-45.
571 NGQB, 150.
572 NGQB, 283.
identity of those Christian believers who are also storied by this name, and whose “be-ing present” is shaped by the ontology arising from the fact that the God of the Bible is a named God, and that name is trinitarian.573 Grenz affirmed that “God’s be-ing present involves the presence—the present-ing—of Trinitarian love, which substantiates the other as person.” Explaining further, it is “Love” that substantiates the other as other, thereby setting the other in a relationship that is personal. Accordingly, the dynamic of the divine life “gives rise to beings and hence to Being. As present-ing Love in the act of be-ing present, the triune God brings beings (and in this sense Being) to be.”574 Therefore as a love that substantiates, “this gift of being bestowed freely on us by the God whose very name entails the promise of be-ing present with us at every moment, is mediated to us by the Gift of God who is the Spirit.” Indeed, the very one who gifts the gift of being is the “Gift of Be-ing Present,” and the very “divine Be-ing continually present with us.”575

While Grenz’s description of the divine Being continued to coagulate, based on his own biblical exegesis, and close reading of the very best theologians from the great tradition, there are some tensions that needed to be resolved between his epistemology and ontology. Grenz was convinced that the phrase “the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” functions as single

573 NGQB, 292.
574 NGQB, 339-40. Because of the manner in which Grenz labored to identify God’s presence with his people in the OT and NT, while it could be read ambiguously, referring to the Father, the Son, or the Spirit, this notion of “Being” (with the first letter capitalized) in this context seems to appropriately refer to the Incarnation—God being present with his people as one of them. There are many reasons for this. First, Grenz would not argue that Being (the Holy Spirit) is brought into being in the same way that humans are brought into existence; yet God did bring the Incarnation about in the same way that human beings are brought about (i.e., by human conception). Second, Grenz already labored the point about God’s presence being a significant feature of his be-ing, as has already been shown in this chapter. Third, Grenz also stated in a previous close context, “The God who is Trinitarian love and who comes to us as this very love is most clearly evident in the love that is evoked in the face-to-face encounter with the Other in the other. It is in our relationality, therefore—that is, in relationship to the other—that we find the imago Dei and thus come to know the triune God who is love” (NGQB, 338). Grenz additionally here used gift language to communicate God’s graciousness, whilst regeneration language is also employed—e.g., God brings human beings “to be,” binding these beings to Being. Furthermore, because of Grenz’s unwillingness to follow Hegel on any of these points, and because of his intended emphasis on Christology (displayed in what would have been the third Matrix vol.; found in the 2004 JETS essay, “Jesus as the Imago Dei”; and seen in an inchoate imago Dei ontology), it seems best to view Grenz’s conception of Being in this section as referring to the Incarnation.
575 NGQB, 367, 372.
proper name in the baptismal formula, and that God’s trinitarian nature was to somehow inform all theology. But the important development for Grenz in understanding God’s nature is found in his reverting to revelation—i.e., the biblical witness of God’s action in salvation-history, which is never unmediated, and in which imago Dei becomes the key. This came about in conjunction with his heavier dependence on Barth’s revelational Christocentrism and also how God’s self-disclosure in Jesus Christ reveals a God who is inherently relational.

5.1.5. Toward a New Theo-Ontology and an Epistemology of Theology

Grenz was on the way toward developing a new ontology and an epistemology that would give precedence to the shape of Christian theology. He was not attempting a new trinitarian ontology as such, but rather sought an ontology flowing from a thoroughly theological context. Since that context was thoroughly trinitarian, Grenz’s intention was “to pursue the deeper question of ontology from a thoroughly Trinitarian perspective,” which meant determining implications of the Christian conception of God as triune for the questions raised by ontology. He already declared that the very epistemology of Christian knowing, experiencing, and participating in the “world” reflecting God’s purpose for creation is truly “theological work!” In this manner, Grenz intended his theology to somehow provide the language and conceptual-framework for both his theo-ontology and his epistemology. And the

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576 NGQB, 269-70. Grenz acknowledged R. Kendall Soulen’s point of “the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” being an allusive and reverential reference to the unspoken tetragrammaton, which is the name that belongs to the Father, which the Father gives to the Son, whose praise is evoked by the Holy Spirit (see R. Kendall Soulen, “The Name of the Holy Trinity,” Theology Today 59 [2002]: 254-55). Grenz wanted to take this contribution a step further, acknowledging that the baptismal formula is best rendered “into the name that belongs to ‘the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” This suggested that “name” is the topic of the formula, and is something that the three persons of the Trinity share together; thus the I AM name, together with the tetragrammaton, is a triune name.

577 See §5.1.1. of this chap.

578 See §5.1.2. of this chap.

579 Grenz was inching towards this new ontology from 2001, as he sought to negotiate between substantialist and process ontologies whilst still finding the notion of “gift” as too weak a base for constructing his ontology (SGRS, 328).

580 Although see his admission to the contrary in NGQB, 292.

581 NGQB, 6-7.

582 BF, 54. This is opposed to placing emphasis on philosophical work that might somehow be deemed coherent or fitting with Christian theology.
imago Dei concept was selected to serve as a key for both, as well as a bridge by which to conceive both his theo-ontology and epistemology in a coherent manner.583

Making way for an imago Dei epistemology which was to be anchored in an imago Dei ontology indicates the direction in which Grenz was heading with his movements, having epistemology and ontology working together to undergird something able to bear the weight of his entire system. After a period of employing the relational analogy for accessing the Trinity,584 and working with a relational model of the Trinity, Grenz moved another step in understanding imago Dei as a relational dynamic. This development is found in an article published just three months before his death.585 Here he seemed to be staking a deepening investment in a recovery of the “cosmic Christ,”586 and a deeper understanding of Jesus as the “true imago Dei,” which coincided with his understanding of Jesus’ vocation in the divine program, facilitating a theocentric understanding of creation. In the imago Dei concept Grenz was developing, both communal and eschatological themes began to inhere. While even coming to lament the underdeveloped position articulated in his one-volume systematic theology book,587 this development in his later work gives evidence that on the eve of his Christology volume for The Matrix series, which unfortunately never came, Grenz began to access his doctrine of the Trinity

583 This would also provide further ground for Grenz to develop a more robust Christology, which Keith L. Johnson had already declared to be relatively anaemic: “The ontological divide between God and humanity seems to be blurred, and the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the mediator between God and humanity seems muddled, as Jesus Christ becomes merely the prototype of what every human being can become in time” (“Review of Stanley Grenz, The Named God and the Question of Being,” The Princeton Theological Review 12 [2006]: 36).

584 See the “anthropology” section (§6.3.1.) in this thesis. Although for the major point that nothing is totally analogous to the triune God, see TCG2, 71.


586 Grenz, “Jesus as the Imago Dei,” 626-27. However, cp. Grenz’s earlier understanding of this as a dimension of Jesus’ Lordship, being described as the cosmic Lord, our personal Lord, and the Lord of history (TCG2, 270-71), although not with the comprehensive scope that Grenz emphasized later in contradistinction to more linear-conceived theologies.

587 In his single-volume theology text, Grenz employed “anthropology” as the bridge of all systematic loci (TCG2, 244), with Jesus’ role as “Lord” providing the immanent and economic, ontological and functional bridge (TCG2, 270), and Jesus’ role as the new human providing the bridge between Christology and ecclesiology (TCG2, 286). In 2001 with BF, Grenz borrowed from Barth in seeking to show how a truly trinitarian theology is one where “all of the theological loci are informed by and, in turn, inform the explication of the Trinity... that stands at the heart of the constructive systematic-theological enterprise” (BF, 190). But at both points, Christology had not yet been deemed capable of performing all the work Grenz would deem it capable of doing in 2005.

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through Christology and through God’s self-revelation in Christ who is the imago Dei. He found this Christology capable of integrating and absorbing numerous aspects of the relational analogy. Yet it also found him moving in the orbit of a simple view of the Trinity accompanying his location of the procurement the doctrine of the Trinity in Christology, acknowledging that although revealed, God still remains hidden.  

In what appeared to be movement further away from some forms of social trinitarianism, Grenz appeared to utilize what might be understood as a reverse-anhypostasis position (where there is no independent Logos subsisting apart from the man Jesus), which is highly consonant with his previous formulations. He had stated earlier, “The unity of [Jesus’] person lies in his revelatory significance.” Because of its connection between “disclosure and ontological participation,” this revelatory unity meant that in his revealed person Jesus brings and holds together the truly divine and the genuinely human. As the revelation of God’s nature and the one who shares in the triune community by nature, Jesus’ revelatory significance was said to show forth the unity of deity and humanity in one revelatory unit, a “lynchpin” bringing together “two seemingly discontinuous dimensions.” Grenz viewed this understanding of revelation as avoiding problems of functional versus ontological christologies. He also stated, “Revelation constructs this bridge in that it arises as a conclusion from Jesus’ earthly life but then leads to a conclusion about his eternal reality.”

And where the unity of Jesus’ person is displayed in its revelatory significance, connecting the divine disclosure to humans (epistemologically) with ontological participation, a vision is seen unfolding, bringing believers from the present community (participating in the life of the triune God proleptically) into the ultimate future reality, which is their destiny. It is therefore Jesus as the revelation of the Son’s eternal response to the Father within the intratrinitarian divine reality that “constitutes the paradigm for

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588 NGQB, 327.
589 TCG2, 304-5.
This appears to be drawing from Pannenberg’s understanding of the “indirectness of the identity of Jesus with the Son of God,” where he also rejects any notion of Jesus’ supracreaturally dignity before God, and whose sonship is understood as mediated in his self-humbling. Jesus being not the direct but the “indirect agent of creation” indicates that he stands in this proper relation of creation to the Creator, further indicating the response that creatures owe to their Creator. This debt finds its foundation in the eternal intratrinitarian relationship, which is in turn exemplified in the incarnate Word. In this way, Grenz’s Christology seems just as low as Pannenberg’s, which might reflect further one of the reasons why evangelicals looked quite favorably on Pannenberg’s work, and the emphasis on God’s work in history in Jesus of Nazareth.

Grenz seems to have created somewhat of another tension in his work on this point, observable in his earlier dismissal of the Chalcedonian enhypostasis formula primarily because of its mythological tone, its employment of Greek philosophical categories foreign to Hebrew and contemporary mindsets, its incipient Docetism, and “the dangerous trap of conceiving of the Logos apart from Jesus.” Since Logos is a title for Jesus, Grenz affirmed that “there is no other Logos or Son apart from Jesus of Nazareth. When we speculate about the Logos apart from Jesus’ historical life, we lose the significance of the term as a christological title.” Grenz’s critique of incarnational christologies, then, was made on the basis of his “from below” Christology which focused intently on Jesus’ identity by looking exclusively at his historical life. Grenz is nowhere explicit in showing a deeper investment or a reversal toward, put crassly, a Barthian simplicity/actualization model that absorbs the relational ontology into his Christology while

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590 TCG2, 104-5.
591 ST, 2:373.
592 TCG2, 104.
593 See also §3.1.1. of this thesis on this point.
594 TCG2, 308-9.
595 TCG2, 305-11.
simultaneously affirming a Christ-centered view of the triune God’s self-disclosure. He affirmed what could be understood as greater dependence on Barth, but this was stated in the same sentence as he affirmed dependence on Pannenberg and Lindbeck, all of whose writings provided sources for Grenz’s quest to develop “a nonfoundationalist public theology.” Merging Pannenberg and Lindbeck into a system seems relatively uncomplicated, however, until Barth is added to the mix. But if this is a venture toward a development in an evangelical revelational Christology, then it begins to make sense. It also seems reasonable to suspect that in the next volume of The Matrix series, on Christology, Grenz would have been much more explicit about his Christology and how it would inform everything else.

Instead of developing the relational ontology in itself, then, which others have attributed to Grenz, he instead favored and was concerned with, as a matter of priority and methodological integrity, a Christ-centered revelational, relational epistemology. Indeed, he affirmed that, “relationality… emerges from the divine triune self-disclosure.” And while this feature displayed itself in the trinitarian activity of divine self-naming in the trinitarian “history of relationships,” this narrative of relationships “is most clearly evident in the love that is evoked in the face-to-face encounter with the Other in the other. It is in our relationality, therefore—that is, in relationship to the other—that we find the imago Dei and thus come to know the triune God who is love.” Grenz explained further: “The pathway to God, therefore, proceeds by means of our being caught up into the narrative of the relationality of the Trinitarian persons, which

596 See the similar characterization attributed to Karl Barth, though not without significant problems acknowledged, in Vanhoozer, Remythologizing Theology, 203, citing Barth thus: “What God is as God... the essentia or ‘essence’ of God, is something which we shall encounter either at the place where God deals with us as Lord and Saviour, or not at all” (CD II/1: 261). Vanhoozer describes this as a “unique christological version of the doctrine of divine simplicity.”


598 See TCG2, 84; BF, 190-92; and RTG, 162. See also what Grenz began to develop in the emphases highlighted in chs. 2 and 3 of this thesis, which he borrowed and adapted from Pannenberg, although with Grenz’s renewed emphasis on Christ as the centerpiece for epistemology and ontology.

599 NGQB, 287.

600 NGQB, 282-83, 288, 333-34, 370.
narrative is eternal yet temporal, for it transpires in the history of Jesus’ relationship with his Father through the Holy Spirit.  

Grenz then pursued a theo-ontology that could best be described as being accessed by an epistemology of a coherent *imago Dei* theology. With Barth, Grenz saw the economic Trinity serving as the noetic starting point whilst the immanent Trinity retains ontic priority. With LaCugna, the relationality of the trinitarian persons is found first and foremost in the economy. With Balthasar, the divine *missio* becomes the means of epistemological access to the *processio*, which in turn is the ontological basis of the *missio*. And with Torrance, Grenz saw the economic Trinity as invested with a kind of epistemological priority, while the immanent Trinity maintains ontological primacy. What Grenz derived from earlier thinkers also brought about a new theology yielding both a particular epistemology and a particular ontology, which was further accompanied by a narrative dimension accounted for in scripture, running equally into the present and on into the future. For Grenz this new theology was to be developed by a coherent trek through the traditional systematic categories, bringing a Christ-centered—thus trinitarian—approach to all reality, and therefore finding trinitarian union with Christ by the Spirit, and by the Spirit union with the Father, which then points to, reflects, and shows forth an *imago Dei* ontology. More of this will be expounded in the next chapter, but insofar as it might be understood, Grenz had been on the way to a theo-eschatological-realist-ontology—a trinitarian theology of the whole, informed by, unfolded in, and built on the revelatory event/s of the divine self-naming. His understanding of divine revelation took on significant hermeneutical shape as he sought to recast the *imago Dei* theme first appearing in Genesis in light of its larger canonical context and then into the rest of theology and ethics.

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601 *NGQB*, 338 (italics added for emphasis).
602 *RTG*, 48, 162, 196, 212, 222.
603 Grenz spoke of this transcending narrative as “the Jesus story,” which includes the NT presentation of Jesus, the incarnation-revealing God acting in history in the crucified and resurrected Messiah (*YGRS*, 329).
Grenz began to employ his developing model in the hopes of potentially solving the epistemological and ontological tensions inherent in the relationship between immanent and economic Trinity. And yet it must be acknowledged that Grenz’s theo-ontology and epistemology of theology were both relatively inchoate at the point of his untimely death, although display remarkable sprouting of conceptual development. As has been seen, Grenz acknowledged that a new ontology would be needed for the way forward, which would be observed in and would also anchor his systematic work, meanwhile both yielding and being highlighted and sourced by his systematic work, which would further give way to a particular epistemology, as it had already begun to do with the role the Spirit had in his work. Herein would have been something like an epistemology of theology that has been articulated by other theologians in the contemporary landscape.

5.1.6. Summary

This chapter hopes to have by now carefully charted Grenz’s reception of twentieth century trinitarian developments, including his unique formulation and employment of a social model of the Trinity, which curiously maintained numerous so-called Western distinctives that never went away from his program, and which seemed to resurge back to the center of his writings after a short period of working with the reigning consensus model. This ultimately brought him out of a detour he deemed dangerously bereft of the transcendence necessary for adequate communication of the Christian gospel in the contemporary context.

604 Note a recent study seeking to resolve ontological and epistemological tensions by utilizing the biblical concept of mystery (referring to Jesus Christ) to determine both ontology and epistemology (Chung-Hyun Baik, The Holy Trinity—God for God and God for Us: Seven Positions on the Immanent-Economic Trinity Relation [Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011], 179-89). Incidentally, this study builds on Grenz’s work in significant ways, but faults Grenz’s theo-ontology for unwittingly admitting “a wide gap between the immanent and the economic Trinity” (Baik, The Holy Trinity, 186). However, this study failed to recognize the still relatively early and inchoate stage that Grenz’s project was in, nor does it take into account the imago Dei ontology and coordinate imago Dei epistemology that Grenz was developing.

In assessing trinitarian theology’s recent developments while searching for features deemed fitting for his own project, the proposals and movements highlighted in this chapter offered strategic, pivotal markers for Grenz. And while there may seem to be somewhat lesser real connections between these highlighted thinkers than Grenz’s survey might lead one to conclude, this chapter’s sketch serves to illumine Grenz’s own agenda and assessment of the situation. In spite of what he determined were the best options available, although admitting to have only begun to assess the “fluid lava of the new trinitarianism,” he concluded that a more promising proposal awaited, which was one that he ambitiously reckoned would take more firm shape at the height of his own oeuvre.  

It is worth repeating again that at no point did Grenz have a completed or even a highly developed, well-formed doctrine of the Trinity, which was entirely consistent with his own approach to the systematic task. His own more wide-ranging trinitarian theology was also quite inchoate, although working towards an *imago Dei* ontology that would contain not just inherent proclamation-power, but also the ontological capacity to lift the entire created universe. Grenz was building this model around the divine self-disclosure, rendering a description of God’s presence which provided the substance that cohered with what the *imago Dei* concept would yield, in turn leading to the dynamic of relationality that is experienced by the believer, and not the other way around. In other words, it is not the experience driving the theology. Significant problems and tension points in Grenz’ theology seem to have been perhaps brought about by Grenz’s adherence to the current shape of the trinitarian tide instead of by the detailed appropriation of features from earlier theological debates, or even by biblical exegesis, this latter feature being nevertheless a real strength of Grenz’s theological work. His scriptural exegesis, however, especially as theologically-woven as it was in its most mature stages, yielded steady

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606 RTG, 219.
607 Grenz wrote: “Because the goal of the church transcends the present, our systematic theology remains incomplete” (*TCG2*, 570).
development for his project, the manner of which will be explored in the next chapter of this thesis.
Chapter 6:

Grenz and the *Imago Dei*:

The Trinitarian Shape of Stanley J. Grenz’s Theology

6.1. Introduction

Grenz’s search for a new trinitarian ontology could not be conceived apart from methodological categories. One of his major strengths was in redefining the doctrine of God and Christology not according to fashionable trends but according to his carefully configured theological methodology, which gave him an increasingly firm basis from which to establish a theology that would bear the weight of his ethical engagement, which in turn was the necessary outworking of his theology. Because his work was distinctly theological, he set out to develop a theo-ontology, and a theological epistemology, but only that which could first properly be called an epistemology of theology, as his theology was meant to perform all this work.

The previous chapter in this thesis highlighted some of the difficulties in Grenz’s conception of God. For instance, he left a number of the problems unsolved in his understanding of God’s “essence,” which would have likely been addressed in later *Matrix* volumes on the way to a larger forthcoming systematic project. One of the biggest issues seemingly unsettled had to do with the structure Grenz would have provided for maintaining the Creator-creature distinction. It does not seem that he needed this structure in the same way that reformed theologies do, with the covenantal scheme spanning both eternity (past) and the salvation-economy. Grenz nevertheless was attempting to develop a theo-ontology that first

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608 See Mark Husbands, “The Trinity is Not Our Social Program,” in *Trinitarian Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel J. Treier and David Lauber (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 121, where any theology purporting to be trinitarian “must preserve an ontological distinction between God and humanity in order to maintain an order consistent with their distinct natures.” See also pp. 77-78n378 of this thesis for a way Grenz may have implicitly avoided the critique of blurring the ontological divide between creature and Creator. Although Horton, who says that Grenz eliminates the Creator-creature distinction, was not convinced (*The Christian Faith*, 266-67n13).
reckoned with a transcendent God who is self-sufficient apart from the world while also being present to his creation, wherein redeemed creatures are brought into communion with him.609 Maintaining an understanding of God’s freedom was a consistent priority for Grenz, as was his emphasis on understanding revelation and all creation as God-centered, not human-centered. But while he labored at points to maintain these emphases so as to avoid potential hazards in his own theology, Grenz’s primary theological guards are found in his source-repertoire, with the Bible being theology’s chief spring.610 But the biblical gems could not be drawn upon or imported in isolation. Before a comprehensively-aimed structure could be built, Grenz saw need to test his work through his methodological framework. Part of this seems to be related to his need for theological accountability, which itself resulted from his unique identity as a baptist theologian.

When Stanley Grenz embarked on his explorative trek through the systematic categories in The Matrix of Christian Theology series, he aimed for a constructive approach to the theological task, beginning with anthropology.611 He argued that anthropology provided “the most promising context into which the insights of trinitarian theology can be fruitfully extended.” At the heart of his theological subdivision was the imago Dei, which Grenz saw providing cohesion for additional work in theology proper, Christology, and pneumatology, especially as he saw human and divine relationality mutually informing each another. Yet Grenz “ultimately” viewed

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609 TCG2, 80-81.
610 Note that in spite of the significant role that Pannenberg played in Grenz’s development and theological emphases (see chs. 2-3 of this thesis), the imago Dei concept did not play nearly as significant a role for him as it did for Grenz, where the idea was key for the entire structure. Also, while playing a significant role throughout the history of theology, and while being a helpful aid for articulating the gospel in the contemporary setting, the imago Dei concept was through and through a biblical concept, being drawn from Grenz’s explicit, self-aware methodology.
611 This approach was markedly different from his earlier work. See TCG, which treated the systematic categories thus: theology (proper); anthropology; Christology; pneumatology; ecclesiology; and eschatology. For a discussion of his ordering of the systematic categories, and how the imago Dei concept provided a fruitful way to access the other theological loci, though not from an exclusively anthropological portal, see Grenz, “Jesus as the Imago Dei,” 625-28.
the *imago Dei* as an eschatological concept, highly communal, and therefore ecclesiological.\textsuperscript{612} Although it might seem difficult to see how the *imago Dei* can sustain such a comprehensive role in the broad scheme of systematic theology, for Grenz it was the right key to unlock the doors of theology and all reality.\textsuperscript{613} For him this also included opening the doors of sacred scripture (which he was committed to reading very closely) whilst the *imago Dei* concept was simultaneously being drawn from that same scripture.\textsuperscript{614}

The present chapter is a working attempt to categorize and trace Grenz’s conclusions about the *imago Dei* throughout his development, attempting to detail relevant chronological and theological developments that shaped the formation of his theological program and its hermeneutical outlook. It aims to highlight Grenz’s particular trinitarian theology (an *imago Dei* theology) with a particular theological hermeneutic (an *imago Dei* hermeneutic). With the importance he consistently placed on biblical revelation and scripture’s authority for the theological enterprise as well as for all of life, it is no surprise that he drew from scripture as heavily as he did. And if Grenz had a theologically informed hermeneutic, how precisely did his theology affect his exegesis, and how did his theological readings inform his theological project, yielding ample material from the *imago Dei* concept which would shape his *imago Dei* theology?

6.2. Grenz’s Hermeneutic and Premature Readings of Genesis 1:26-27

Aside from completely ignoring the *imago Dei* concept, the readings of scripture in Grenz’s earlier writings displayed something like a “piecemeal approach” to the biblical data, where he selected relevant passages in order to mine biblical statements or principles to answer

\textsuperscript{612} SGRS, xi. Interestingly, ecclesiology was the only sub-discipline that *imago Dei* did not majorly bear upon in Grenz’s one-volume theology (see the meager reference in TCG2, 483). However, see its later enhanced role in Grenz, “Ecclesiology,” 267-68, also recounted in Sexton, “Stanley Grenz’s Ecclesiology,” 20-43.

\textsuperscript{613} RTC2, 221; and BF, 200-2. And while a long line of theology does something similar, one recent treatment of *imago Dei* is Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

\textsuperscript{614} This is not unique to Grenz. Following Francis Watson, Daniel J. Treier uses *imago Dei* as a test case for theological interpretation of scripture in *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 70-77, 97-100, 119-25, 178-82, 188-99.
questions brought to the biblical text.\textsuperscript{615} This earlier proof-text approach to the Bible can be seen in nearly all of his writings published in the 1980s and early-1990s where Grenz engaged the biblical text. However, moving away from this method of appropriating scriptural data, commencing the work for the systematic task, Grenz turned toward what he called a “theological reading” of scripture.\textsuperscript{616} Above all, this sought to enable him to “read the texts in the light of their convergence in the pattern that centers on God’s work in Jesus Christ and the subsequent sending of the Spirit, which pattern Christians believe lies at the heart of the Bible as a whole… and as such the Bible becomes a single voice… [and] the singularity of voice we claim for scripture is ultimately the singularity of the Spirit who speaks through the texts.”\textsuperscript{617}

Grenz suggested that theology serves the hermeneutic end\textsuperscript{618} of being able to “read the text so that the Spirit might nurture us in the ongoing process of living as the contemporary embodiment of the paradigmatic narrative of scripture.” His hermeneutic entailed “reading the Bible as a whole, confident that the Spirit appropriates the text to create the eschatological world according to God’s intentions as indicated in the Bible.”\textsuperscript{619} Here Grenz employed features of narrative theology, suggesting that “the world we are to inhabit is… shaped by the world

\textsuperscript{615} See the assessment of this approach by Morrison, “Trinity and Church,” 448-50. The approach is most popularly seen in the following definition: “Systematic theology is any study that answers the question, What does the whole Bible teach us today? about any given topic?” (Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995], 21 [italics in original]). For a recent defense of this method, although perhaps unduly generous to those who practice it, see R. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, “In Defence of Proof-Texting,” \textit{Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society} 54 (2011): 589-606.

\textsuperscript{616} Grenz also seems to have made a unique contribution to the contemporary field of theological interpretation of scripture, right at the cusp of this developing school of thought. It is not enough that he contributed the essay “Community, Interpretative” to the groundbreaking \textit{Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible}, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer et al. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 128-29. If he did engage in theological interpretation of scripture, however, to what degree did he, and also what did (might) he contribute to this budding field of study today? And how did Grenz arrive at this practice? Does he do more or less than other evangelical theologians? And while he never produced a theological commentary on the Bible, is his biblical exegesis any less robust than other theological commentators? As a theologian is his work more along the lines of what might be called “biblical theology,” or is it genuine “theological” exegesis? For an more thorough exploration of these questions along with what Grenz might contribute to the contemporary conversation among theological interpreters of scripture, see Sexton, “The Image Dei Once Again,” 187-206.

\textsuperscript{617} BF, 89-90.

\textsuperscript{618} Notwithstanding the use of exegetical methods, i.e., lexical, grammatical, and theological exegesis. However, see his differences over at least one historical-grammatical principle, “authorial intent,” in Stanley J. Grenz, “The Spirit and the Word: The World-Creating Function of the Text,” \textit{Theology Today} 57 (2000): 362.

\textsuperscript{619} BF, 88.
disclosed in the text. Our world is to be the contemporary embodiment of the paradigmatic narrative of scripture constructed through the interpretive framework that emerges from the Bible as a whole.” 620 As such, he warned contemporary readers that “we must never conclude that exegesis alone can exhaust the Spirit’s speaking to us through the text.” 621

This hermeneutical development made Grenz’s earlier readings of scripture and its key (Gn 1:26-27) to look very little like it did in his mature work. And while his work showed a high degree of organic continuity, the early product is not without significant oversights which he later lamented, especially concerning how the significant biblical imago Dei theme should inform theology. 622 Grenz’s early works were not grounded in an imago Dei theology, although they carried impulses indicative of the development that would later occur later in his writings. 623 As he began to explore issues of human sexuality and human createdness, a shift took place in his interest in the image of God. He found Genesis 1:26-27 supporting three emphases observable in the imago Dei concept, which furthermore derive significance from and exhibit a foundational basis in the divine reality. These were (1) that although beyond sexuality, God displays the sexual characteristics of masculine and feminine, (2) that plurality exists within the Godhead, and (3) that loving community exists where “the dialectic of sameness and difference characteristic of human bonding is analogous to the dynamic within the divine Trinity.” 624

With a reading of the Genesis account that yielded data for human sexuality and transcendent features anchored in the divine reality, by the early to mid-1990s Grenz had not moved to integrate imago Dei or Genesis 1:26-27 into a distinct theology, and definitely not a comprehensive one that would take his program into the new millennium. The concept appeared

620 BF, 85.
623 E.g., see Stanley J. Grenz and Wendell Hoffman, AIDS: Ministry in the Midst of an Epidemic (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), which shows themes of his later work—human solidarity (p. 172), human need to love in light of God’s love (pp. 177-91), and eschatological hope (pp. 196-97). Yet as Grenz attempted to develop a “theological basis” for AIDS ministry (p. 175), he never mentioned imago Dei or the Genesis creation account.
624 Grenz, Sexual Ethics, 44-51.
infrequently in his one-volume systematic theology, *Theology for the Community of God* (1994). However, evidence there showed that he was still dealing only with a partly conceived *imago Dei* theology, hardly giving citation of its biblical basis. At one point he advocated a classical structural view of the image, but later presented a merging of the structural, relational, and dynamic views, all seen as valid historical options for interpreting the concept.

In his single-volume theology, Grenz sketched a biblical-theological framework drawing from the book of Genesis to Paul’s writings, out of which he commenced construction of a theological understanding of human beings as God’s image-bearers, identifying this image as providing a special standing (i.e., dominion), a special fellowship (i.e., openness to the world, characterized by love), an eschatological reality (i.e., the dynamic, participatory, future-oriented transformational process of renewal that will bring believers “into full conformity with the image of God”), and a special community (i.e., a shared, corporate, communal reality). What Grenz began to find within the image of God concept was an underdeveloped diversity beginning to drive his theological emphases, and the thrust of *The Matrix* series. Far from the relatively small attention given in his one-volume theology, the initial installment in his later explorative effort was thoroughly saturated with the *imago Dei*, since therein he found the window through which the doctrine of the Trinity was to inform the entire spectrum of theology.

### 6.3. *Imago Dei*’s Journey through Grenz’s Systematic Categories

While Grenz’s hermeneutic may be described as theological, it was more or less biblically-theological, and highly in development. Its development took shape primarily as the range of

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625 Grenz evidenced this by saying, “the residue of the divine image within us is a dimension of general revelation” (*TCG2*, 137) (italics added for emphasis).


627 *TCG2*, 173-80.
theological loci informed it, which, in turn, were informed by close readings of the biblical text. For his constructive approach to theology, as noted earlier, he consciously drew from three sources—scripture, tradition, and culture, with scripture as the primary voice. It was necessary that the categories of his construal, then, must all fit together in an interconnected way, forming an integrated belief system, a coherent “mosaic of beliefs” ultimately coming together in God.

Grenz explained:

Even though systematic theology might best be laid out in accordance with the traditional ordering that runs from theology proper through the other loci to eschatology, in the actual discourse that comprises theological construction all six of the loci must be brought into the conversation at every turn.

In light of the trialogue of sources that were crucial for his theological construct, “sound exegesis of the biblical texts” was a crucial part of the theological enterprise, without which theology could not live at all. Accordingly, he affirmed that “the paradigmatic narrative of scripture,” emerging from the whole Bible in a salvation-historic framework, provides the proper hermeneutic to enable sound exegesis. This exegesis, in turn, informed systematic theology, and then flowed into the very narrative of the lives of members of the redeemed community, which is oriented towards the eschatological fulfillment of God’s work of creating community. Here is where Grenz explicitly drew from NT affirmations of Jesus as the imago Dei (e.g., 2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15; Heb 1:3) affirming that these assertions “must be extended… to all of systematic theology from beginning to end.” As a biblical-theological theme, then, equally rich in the history of theological interpretation of scripture, imago Dei became for Grenz both the lens for reading scripture and for theology, but not untestedly so. Theological and exegetical results needed to be tested on their own grounds, and then in light of one another. Accordingly, this

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628 See some of this exegetical work in, e.g., SGRS, 183-264 and NGQB, 133-246.
629 Cp. this to Treier’s canon, creed, and culture in Introducing Theological Interpretation, 201-2.
630 RTC2, 218.
631 Grenz, “Jesus as the Imago Dei,” 627.
632 BF, 84-85.
633 Grenz, “Jesus as the Imago Dei,” 627.
chapter’s task now moves to explore the theological course that this concept took through the systematic categories as Grenz conceived them, with special observation of the explorative *Matrix* series.

**6.3.1. Anthropology**

Drawing from the canonical narrative, Grenz’s anthropology began with the Genesis creation account. There he identified the *imago Dei* concept as a central motif in scripture, denoting the unity of humankind while also providing a unique manner of telling the biblical story. After tracing historical developments in the church’s understanding of the concept, from structure (as quality or capability) to relation and goal, Grenz acknowledged that it is the “dynamic conception of the *imago Dei*” rediscovered in the Reformation that “launches us on the road toward an understanding that can speak into the postmodern context.” Accordingly, with an observable “dynamic ontology of persons in relationship,” he affirmed that humans are inherently created for fellowship, and that “the essential nature of personhood is seen as consisting of mutuality and interdependence.”

Grenz understood that God’s plan in creation was about establishing community between Godself and God’s creation, with a divinely given goal or destiny from the beginning. While integrating functional and relational aspects, the *imago Dei* was also here deemed “telic.” And yet the idea speaks more about what humans do (i.e., imaging) than what they are. That is,

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634 “Anthropology” receives a slightly lengthier treatment than other categories in this chapter, primarily because it received the most thorough treatment Grenz made of any systematic category. Grenz’s 2005 posthumously published volume, *NGQB*, extended *SGRS* while also heading toward the next work on Christology which, according to Grenz, anthropology necessarily yields systematically, which further explains why it would have been next in *The Matrix* series.


637 Grenz, “What Does it Mean to be Trinitarian in Doctrine?” 4.

from Genesis 1:27 the image is said to dynamically point or mirror. Following Phyllis Bird in her classic essay on the issue, Grenz agreed that the royal background of the image suggests that it “points more to our purpose than to the nature of our being, more to teleology than ontology.”

He saw the image as vocational, then, mediating the Creator’s immanence in the world. The manner in which humans are to fulfill this vocation leads back to an account that includes the “full sweep of the biblical narrative,” ultimately finding the vocational mandate fulfilled by loving. Therefore humans are to ultimately embody the biblical purpose for which God created them, namely to be a community in relation to God and to one another, and thereby reflecting the community of “perfect love” wherein the Trinity exists. Thus, the *imago Dei* concept is not simply anthropological, but is grounded in “divine relationality.”

Representing divine relationality, according to Grenz humanity as male and female suggests that the goal of human sexuality is relational bonding, with marriage being a primary picture of the relationship God desires to have with his people. Grenz saw the divine image

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639 SGRS, 162, 166-70; and Grenz, “The Universality of the ‘Jesus-Story’,” 109.
641 NGQB, 361.
644 SGRS, 299-303. Here Grenz critiqued Barth’s “I-Thou” relational view between male/female (which borrows from Martin Buber’s “I-Thou” relationship), and instead argued for “a communal relationship” with the divine counterpart. However, see the recent conclusion that “[b]oth the individual human being and humankind in its differentiated collectivity are related to the image of God,” and that “[t]his specificity (the ‘thinness’) of God’s masterpiece of creation applies to נפש [necessarily a concrete being] understood both as a singular and as a collective” (Paul Niskanen, “The Poetics of Adam: The Creation of נפש in the Image of נישה,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128 [2009]: 417-436), which is actually quite similar to Grenz’s position.
645 Grenz, “The Doctrine of the Trinity,” 17-18; and SGRS, 294. Of course, this concept, where *imago Dei* is said to be grounded in divine relationality, is prior to the shift where Grenz begins moving away from a social model of the Trinity, as chapter five of this thesis has argued. See also Jason S. Sexton, “Beyond Social Trinitarianism: The Baptist, Trinitarian Innovation of Stanley J. Grenz,” *Baptist Quarterly* (forthcoming). Incidentally, Grenz’s shift toward a stronger paradigm of emphasis on Jesus as the *imago Dei* as the personal basis for access to the Trinity might possibly have caused him the need to revise some of his anthropological descriptions, especially being less inclined to bring the relational analogy directly across into human gendered relations.
646 SGRS, 277. Grenz elsewhere noted Barth’s flaw in failing to acknowledge sexuality as an “embodied” phenomenon, something Grenz saw at the heart of human identity, upholding the significance of the resurrection, and also the basis for community in eternity (SGRS, 299).
647 SGRS, 303. For an extensive description of the theological basis of and implications for marriage, see Grenz, *Sexual Ethics*, 57-116. See also how marriage is just one “obvious” picture, but not the only picture and not
belonging universally to humanity, every member of which is sexual, and hence signifying incompleteness and the quest for bondedness that sexuality indicates. He did not ground sexuality in any sort of incarnational theology, or directly in the divine being necessarily, since Grenz was accessing the biblical story at this point from a narrative, a very human, bottom-up perspective. He also maintained the *analogia relationis* (relational analogy) over against the *analogia entis* (analogy of being), thereby grounding the *imago Dei* in relationship or community rather than any static notion of being.

After humanity’s Fall, the point of scripture’s account of redemptive-history is in establishing a new humanity, from Genesis to the telos, which requires “an intermediate step.” While beginning early with anthropology, humanity and creation were nevertheless designed not to be anthropocentric, but to be theocentric and Christocentric. Like Barth, Grenz found anthropology providing the way to the triune God, showing how anthropology yields a robust Christology, and how even the initial announcement in Genesis 1:26, identifying the human role as divine image bearer, leads directly to Jesus. The very status “human” bears the image that points to Christ, being derived from the transcendent relational analogy. This relational analogy has been criticized by some like Paul Helm, who posed to Grenz, Why not “a triple, a triad, or a

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649 While Grenz asserted, “God is beyond sexual distinctions,” he also affirmed that “God encompasses what to us are the sexual distinctions of male and female” (*Sexual Ethics*, 45; and Grenz “Is God Sexual?” 37-38). He elsewhere argued, “If God is radically asexual, human sexual distinctions have no transcendent foundation, and… human sexuality lies on the periphery of embodied existence” (*SGRS*, 294). See also the treatment of this topic in the next chapter of this thesis (§7.3.1.).

650 I.e., where human relationality (observed in sexual-differentiation) correlates with the relational God, which does not necessarily lead to a correlation of beings, but into an *imago Dei* Christology, which Grenz would move further toward developing. See *SGRS*, 332 on not “static” being, and also the explicit denial of anything remotely seeking to draw from any analogy of being in *NGQB*, 327.

651 *SGRS*, 302.

652 Grenz, “Jesus as the *Imago Dei*,” 627.

653 *SGRS*, 299-303; and *NGQB*, 362. Although not without its failures, Grenz believed that Barth’s most significant contribution to theological anthropology was in his “reintroduction of trinitarian theology into anthropological construction” (*SGRS*, 299).
troika,” with three human persons or sexes? But this premonition eliminates the need for the completedness that only the divine can fill. In other words, and in keeping with Helm’s logic, at creation there already is three—man, woman, and Imago Dei, in whose image humanity is created, and who also is (though not merely) the prototypical human. This leads into the second loi, the theocentric realm of existence and being.

6.3.2. Theology (Proper)

With the creation account of humanity being a theocentric phenomenon, for Grenz this meant having the triune God as the social and transcendent grounding for human relationality and for personhood. He stated, “God’s be-ing present involves the presence—the present-ing—of trinitarian love, which substantiates the other as person. Love substantiates the other as person, in that the presence of love honors the other as other and thereby sets the other in a relationship that is personal.” With other twentieth century theologians who made use of the analogia relationis, Grenz concurred with the entailment of “some type of similarity between humankind and God.” In this he found some sense of human counterpart—dominion and representation—at the very heart of the Imago Dei concept, although not exhausting it since it is part of a much larger narrative.

Upholding the relational analogy while maintaining an ontological connection, Grenz moved to the second installment of The Matrix series, working to establish a “theo-ontology,”

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655 NGQB, 339-40.
656 SGR, 193-202. See also Grenz, “Jesus as the Imago Dei,” 620. Unfortunately, recent theological commentators wishing to focus on Gn 1 as a whole have retracted from offering a comprehensive agenda that the Imago Dei theme might play throughout the entire canon, opening at such a critical place—this inaugural chapter of the canon. These other theological commentators also failed to attribute a comprehensive role to the theme in spite of referring to the phrase as “so important in the history of theological ideas,” or as “one of the weightiest and most influential in the whole Bible,” or even as “presuming both a nature and a future” in a sort of “covenant-oriented” emphasis of the human qualities. See Bill T. Arnold, Genesis (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 44; R. W. L. Moberly, The Theology of the Book of Genesis (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 46; and R. R. Reno, Genesis (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010), 53.
addressing the question of ontology and existence from a theological perspective. He likened the study of ontology to the intellectual critique of myth, cutting through historical-critical debates to present a theology of being, whether human or divine, since “Trinitarian love forms the basis for the be-ing of beings and the ‘to be’ of Being.” Grenz looked to the divine name in scripture as the ground for the conversation of theology with ontology, since the act of naming fills a person’s identity with content through the ongoing history of relationships. Accordingly, a trinitarian-ontology unfolds throughout the narrative of the divine name.

From his effort at developing a theo-ontology, Grenz declared,

The center of this Genesis story is not the creation of all persons from a first human being, Adam. Rather, the narrative builds toward the creation of humankind in the divine image (Gen 1:26). Viewed in this light, being God’s offspring—as well as our unity as those who have been made ex homos—is connected to our status as the imago Dei.

At the Areopagus (Acts 17:16-34) and especially indicated in Acts 17:29, the very belief that humankind is created in the divine image provided “the crucial basis for Paul’s critique of idolatry.” It also provides implications for the trinitarian relational language of Father and Son to open the door conceptually for believers to be adopted into God’s family. And while God is distinct from the creatures, the “Father-Son concept” is something that is shared within the inter-trinitarian life, as well as in the divine relation to the creatures, and in the creatures’ relation to other creatures. On this point, Grenz held that “Father/Son language” does not refer to gender, but to “inheritance” which in the OT context may also be granted to daughters as well as sons. As such, while God-centered via its groundedness in the divine relationality, the imago Dei is really God-centered in a Christocentric manner, which anthropology and theology (proper) together have yielded in the incarnation. The incarnation, then, and crucially Jesus’ resurrection
made the way for the “goal” of human existence to be fulfilled, which is the ultimate “fellowship with God in community” and “participation in the divine life.”\textsuperscript{662}

\textbf{6.3.3. Christology}

In light of the suspenseful ending in Genesis 1:26-27, and since the wider biblical narrative focuses on Jesus as Israel’s Messiah, Grenz saw the creation story opening the way for a transition from “a creation-centered to a Christocentric anthropology.”\textsuperscript{663} From this he emphasized the Son’s cosmic role as “the principle of creation.”\textsuperscript{664} He identified Christ and his incarnate life as revealing “the truest vision of the nature of God,” unveiling God as both triune and inherently social.\textsuperscript{665} As the one who “fully reveals God,” Grenz thereby declared Jesus as “the \textit{imago dei} in fulfillment of Gen 1:26-27 as he redeems humankind.”\textsuperscript{666} Accordingly, the Pauline hymn of Col 1:15-20 finds the Genesis story as only really understood properly when viewed in light of the Jesus narrative, with Jesus himself being “the \textit{eikon} of God.”\textsuperscript{667} As the one who fully manifests the deity of his Father, Grenz declared that “Jesus alone is the image of God.”\textsuperscript{668}

This was a theme Grenz developed further as he lamented the often “linear” direction of contemporary evangelical christologies, primarily when accessed through anthropological lenses or in light of a hamartiology (i.e., doctrine of sin), where the person and work of Christ is seen as the remedy for a sin problem instead of the “theology informing \textit{locus}” that Grenz understood Christology as intending to yield. He asserted nothing less than that “Jesus came to fulfil our

\textsuperscript{662} SGRS, 280; NGQB, 364-67.
\textsuperscript{664} TCG2, 100, 103.
\textsuperscript{665} Grenz, “Universality of the \textit{Jesus-Story},” 109.
\textsuperscript{666} SGRS, 18.
\textsuperscript{667} NGQB, 362.
\textsuperscript{668} SGRS, 217.
human vocation as the *imago Dei*,” and that as “the true human” he embodied the divine purpose for humankind. He explained further:

At the heart of the Christian belief-mosaic is, of course, Christology. Central to a truly biblically informed Christocentric theology is the affirmation that Jesus is the one who came to be the *imago Dei* and to establish the new humanity of those who are confirmed to that image, in completion of what God intended as the human vocation from the beginning.669

From this angle, the divine design was to create humankind in order that they (i.e., male and female) might participate in the divine life, with humanity’s createdness in the *imago Dei* always having been toward the view of God entering into it on their level. In other words, God always had the incarnation in view, with the joining of God and humanity in the one human, the true *Imago Dei*, the Lord Jesus Christ. Creation cannot get to new creation without going through Christ,670 whether in a pre- or post-Fall state. But how new creation comes about requires an additional feature necessary in every trinitarian theology—the role of the Spirit which brings all this about.

**6.3.4. Pneumatology**

*Imago Dei* comes about in the formation of community when the Spirit brings it about. For humans, it occurs when the Spirit effects conversion, uniting individual believers to Christ, and enabling them to fulfill the calling of both being and becoming the *imago Dei* as vocation.671 The Spirit is thus “the indispensable provision for accomplishing God’s program.” Indeed, just as he is the bond of love between Father and Son, completing the immanent Trinity, so also the Spirit is “the completer of the divine program in the world” and therefore “completer of the economic Trinity.”672 The Spirit creates, gathers, and places individuals “in Christ,” and therefore

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669 Grenz, “Jesus as the *Imago Dei*,” 628.
671 *NGQB*, 360-64; Grenz, “Ecclesiology,” 267. See also Paul Sands, “The *Imago Dei* as Vocation,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 82 (2010): 28-41, which completely overlooks this component of Grenz’s view and offers the vocation *imago Dei* as something innovative.
“in God,” or into the dynamic of the divine life. Furthermore, “[b]eing ‘in Christ’ by the Spirit means as well that in the Son, they participate in the Son’s act of eternal response to his Father. In this manner, those who by the Spirit are in the Son participate in the very perichoretic dynamic that characterizes the eternal divine life.” This “fullness of relationality” which “lies ultimately in relationship with the Triune God” is the work of the Spirit. Accordingly, the Spirit gives the redeemed the very privileges of being co-heirs with Christ, and of enjoying all the privileges that he (the Spirit) lavishes on the Son, including the highest privilege of sharing the divine name.

Grenz refused to localize “feminine features” to the Spirit, as has often been done by some. Instead, he referred to him as “the ‘vicar of Christ,’ the mediator of the presence of the risen and exalted Jesus within the faith community. The Spirit teaches, leads, and empowers the Church on the Lord’s behalf. And in so doing, he is the Lord at work within the believing fellowship.” The Spirit is the “key Person” effecting the ministry of a resultant christologically defined anthropology. And therefore the present task of the imago Dei, functionally, is the Spirit-effected and effective witnessing to the story of Jesus, which exercises transcendent superiority over every other narrative. The narrative the Spirit presently brings about consists of an appropriation of the biblical text with the goal of “communicating to us in our situation,” wherein which, “the Spirit creates ‘world’.” Therein the Spirit is given with a ministry that imparts

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673 Grenz, “The Social God,” in Trinitarian Soundings, 98; and NGQB, 360-61.
675 I.e., the participation of baptismal identification, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit (NGQB, 283).
678 SGRS, 251.
a telic orientation,\textsuperscript{681} in view of the trajectory that ultimately culminates at the future day of final glorification where believers will be brought “into perfect conformity with Christ,” when divine love finally guides them home.\textsuperscript{682} Here lies the sharing of the One who as the gift of the Father and Son “is the Gift of the ‘to be’ of beings and is ultimately the Gift of Being.”\textsuperscript{683} The Spirit’s present work, then, is in effectually transforming relational beings into “ecclesial” beings,\textsuperscript{684} which is the next topic under consideration.

### 6.3.5. Ecclesiology

“Wherever community is found” is where the corporate imago Dei expresses God’s triune nature through humans-in-community.\textsuperscript{685} This refers primarily to human sexuality, with humans being embodied persons. Yet the imago Dei takes on an additional role in Grenz’s view of community—the ecclesial, referring to the new humanity called out to live particularly in relation to the triune God.\textsuperscript{686} While an individual may be “linked to God,” which is “closely linked to participation in community,” she still lacks the other human members that fullness of community entails.\textsuperscript{687} The church, then, is the community being brought about by the Spirit in the present context in order “to be the imago dei… to be the reflection of the divine character—love.”\textsuperscript{688} As such, the ecclesial community is fundamentally a relational community marked by persons who “forsake their old life so as to inhabit the new, eschatological world centered on Jesus Christ who is the Word.” They now experience and embody a new “constitutive narrative,” which is precisely “the biblical narrative of God at work bringing creation to its divinely intended

\textsuperscript{681} NGQB, 366-7, 371. By telic, Grenz uses the word generally as an adjective of its cognate “telos.”
\textsuperscript{682} Grenz, “The Holy Spirit,” 11.
\textsuperscript{683} NGQB, 341.
\textsuperscript{684} Grenz, “The Social God,” in Trinitarian Soundings, 98.
\textsuperscript{685} Grenz, “Is God Sexual?” 39-41.
\textsuperscript{686} SGRS, 312. For a more detailed account of Grenz’s ecclesiology, see Sexton, “Stanley Grenz’s Ecclesiology,” 21-45.
\textsuperscript{687} Grenz, “Ecclesiology,” 253.
\textsuperscript{688} Grenz, “Ecclesiology,” 267.
According to Grenz, the relational self is to be understood as the ecclesial self. This testifies to the relational self’s groundedness in the triune God, its embodying of dynamic love, and anticipation of future participation in the divine life, all of which describe the transcending, identity-forming, communal narrative.

Beyond being simply relational, the ecclesial imago Dei is a community being transformed. Notwithstanding the presence of lavish gifts of corporate endowment and empowerment which the Spirit has given to the body, believers are transformed not by how much they look unto those individual gifts, or even unto the Spirit as Gift and Giver of those gifts, but to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the Spirit who performs the transforming work in the lives of believers, both in the present and future. This new humanity is destined to be “formed” according to the image of Jesus in fulfillment of God’s original plan for humankind. This formation occurs as believers transformationally behold Christ—they worship—which has a corporate character and therefore connects “new humanity” with the glorious Imago Dei, into whose image they are being transformed.

And while the transformational process is more about beholding than reflecting the Lord’s glory and image, witness and mission are nonetheless important components of the church’s life as it embodies the divine image. While participation in the divine life “constitutes the ecclesial self” for believers whose identity emerges from union with Christ, being present proleptically this ecclesial self is ultimately future. Therefore the church is to be the

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690 SGRS, 303, 305, 332. For Grenz, the “ecclesial self” is the unique aspect of a human being that anticipates being “in Christ” and belonging to the spiritual community constituted by union with him and in communion with the triune God. This correspondingly anticipates the church, the community of Christ, which will one day experience this relational community in the highest sense. Though often not cited, this notion of the ecclesial self seems to draw from Zizioulas, “From Biological to Ecclesial Existence: The Ecclesiological Significance of the Person” (Being as Communion, 49-65).
691 SGRS, 312-31.
693 NGQB, 362-63.
694 SGRS, 247-50, 322.
“harbinger” of the divine image and “the prolepsis of the new humanity,”²⁶⁹⁵ being presently on
mission in the world, actively replicating Christ’s image which is part of “Christ’s destiny.”²⁶⁹⁶
Following Guder, Grenz saw the missional church as a “proclaiming, reconciling, sanctifying and
unifying” community.²⁶⁹⁷ And therefore, part of being the community here and now in history is
that this trinitarian theology is embodied in such a way that it enables believers to witness,
declare, and “shine forth” Jesus as the imago Dei, not just with words but as “God’s intentions for
humankind are realized in community.”²⁶⁹⁸

6.3.6. Eschatology

Concerning the goal to which everything is now moving, the eschaton refers to ultimate
fulfillment with God in community, moving from creation to new creation. According to Grenz,
the divine image was always eschatological or telic.²⁶⁹⁹ From the start, God’s plan was to establish
community between himself and his creation, which itself “finds completion in the
eschatological vision.”³⁷⁰⁰ Grenz stated,

our role in participating in the great chorus of praise to the Father as those who
are in the Son by the Spirit entails our glorification, because glorifying the Father
as those who together with all creation are in the Son by the Spirit is the ultimate
expression of the imago Dei and therefore marks the telos for which humankind
was created “in the beginning.”³⁷⁰¹

²⁶⁹⁵ SGRS, 281, 303, 331-36.
²⁶⁹⁶ Grenz, “Jesus as the Imago Dei,” 622.
²⁶⁹⁸ NGQB, 362-63.
²⁶⁹⁹ SGRS, 240; and NGQB, 366.
³⁷⁰⁰ Stanley J. Grenz, “What Does it Mean to be Trinitarian in Doctrine?” from “What Does it Mean to be
Trinitarians?” Part 1, Bible and Theology Lectureship, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, MO,
from video of chapel lecture delivered 18 Jan. 2005. The quotation cited comes from this lecture itself, whereas the
lecture notes state, “The vision of the new creation: what begins in the Garden of Eden finds its completion at the
consummation of history, when God establishes the new creation, the realm in which humans enjoy perfect
fellowship with each other, creation and the Creator (e.g., Rev 21:1-5; 22:1-5)” (Grenz, “What Does it Mean to be
Trinitarian in Doctrine?” 5).
³⁷⁰¹ NGQB, 366.
Before the Fall humans had the destiny or goal (though embryonic in Adam and individual in application) of corporately being the *imago Dei*. This was (and still is) a witness to what God is bringing about eschatologically—community in its highest, fullest sense. The Spirit performs this eschatological task as “God at work bringing history to its goal,” which will entail the resurrection of believers and salvation-history's final climax, the fulfilling of Genesis 1:26-27. This climax of new creation, with a glorified new humanity contains a present component of already sharing in the divine image by being “in Christ.”

With his resurrected body as “the paradigm” for those who will share his image, Jesus’ own resurrection is the prolepsis of the final resurrection. For this reason Grenz found it preposterous to relegate sexual embodiment to this age alone, since it would both undercut the significance of Jesus’ resurrection and undermine the basis for community in heaven. Furthermore, in looking to Jesus,

> [n]ot only does the community sense that it is moving toward an ideal that lies yet before it, more importantly, it expectantly looks to the ideal or “eschatological” future, when the purpose and goals—the *telos*—of the community will be fully actualized. This expectation of a glorious future serves as an ongoing admonition to its members to embody the communal vision in the present.

The proleptic, eschatological vision, then, cannot be divorced from the present task of the church, which is still to be the *imago Dei* in the present, receiving both its unique character and instruction from the biblical witness.

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702 SGRS, 177, 331. See also Grenz, “Universality of the ‘Jesus-Story’,” 99.
703 See this theme appearing in Grenz, “Ecclesiology,” 268; TCG1, 30; TCG2, 24, 279; Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 168; RET, 156-58; RTC2, 224; and Grenz, “Universality of the ‘Jesus-Story’,” 110. Grenz, however, seemed to convolute the concept of “fullness,” making it difficult to understand what he meant, particularly about the kingdom (see TCG2, 619).
705 Grenz, “Jesus as the *Imago Dei*,” 623.
706 SGRS, 235-36.
709 SGRS, 18.
6.4. Reinterpreting Genesis 1:26-27: A Genuinely Theological Reading?

In light of the foregoing survey of the *imago Dei*’s expedition through Grenz’s theological categories, how did the theologically-woven notion inform his reading of Genesis 1:26-27? While Grenz recognized that the first appearance of the “image of God” was found in the canon’s introductory chapter, he also realized that its appearance was not isolated here. In this Genesis narrative, Grenz saw a universal, all-encompassing purpose of the *imago Dei* in the overarching creation-fall-new creation drama, which he saw the canon unfolding in its course. So while biblical scholars continue searching for ways to penetrate the text, Grenz’s work shows that theology and theologians tied closely to the Christian tradition continue to offer interpretive options that are both textually-sensitive, canonically-informed, and theologically-driven, with a view toward serving the church in its present proclamation of the Christian gospel.

Readings of Genesis 1:26-27 provided by recent exegetes, occasionally dealing with the passage’s intent, nevertheless leave little distinctly Christian conclusions, and therefore fail to focus on mankind’s purpose in light of a biblical-theological framework. Grenz opted for a “canonical reading” of a trinitarian God working to create humankind as male and female,

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710 See Nathan MacDonald who notes, “For [Phyllis] Bird there is no single way to penetrate the meaning of the text.” He finds this shortfall in others also (“The *Imago Dei* and Election: Reading Genesis 1:26-28 and Old Testament Scholarship with Karl Barth” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 10 [2008]: 307). See also his critique of Middleton’s recent work, stating that “Old Testament scholarship may argue that the ancient Near East is the most appropriate context in which to interpret the biblical text, but this is no longer merely an exegetical argument but also a hermeneutical one!” Moreover, he suggests, “The conversation between biblical scholars and systematics has to be more radical and address the how and why of exegesis” (Nathan MacDonald, review of J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The *Imago Dei* in Genesis 1*, Review of Biblical Literature [2005], http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/4737_4887.pdf [accessed 9 Feb. 2010]).

711 This includes J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), but also Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987). See also Grenz’s interaction with Wenham in *SGRS*, 284-85. Additionally, the question for someone like Phyllis Bird seems to be whether a neutral-theological guide exists for understanding this passage. Or is its location so ingrained in human existence, that to exegese it fully might be akin to the classic illustration of a fish attempting to describe water? Further, in a biblical-canonical framework, does the substance of the motif and its flow through the biblical corpus enrich the meaning of what *imago* is/was, even as something undisclosed in the text or to early interpreters of the Pentateuch, because it defines not simply what a human being was, but also what one unquestionably and fundamentally is?
according to the *imago Dei.* 712 And yet he sought a reconceptualized version of the concept in light of his method for constructive theology.

Concerning the image of God, Grenz began his mature interpretation of Genesis 1:26-27 stating that the text “only hints at what it is.” This led him to refrain from dogmatic conclusions about its exact nature, while concluding that representation was still somehow at the heart of the matter. 713 Ultimately, however, Grenz’s search for meaning was transferred to the biblical narrative as a whole, 714 maintaining conversation with the wider spectrum of systematic theology. Upon his new reading, he saw the *imago Dei* as both “social” and “telic,” made for and endemic to fellowship, yet with a future-orientation. Grenz sought to synthesize both of these into a unit that joined with the trinitarian interpretation of Genesis 1:26-27 in light of an overarching reading of scripture which integrated the best of the history of interpretation along the way. Ultimately he found the NT’s theological engagement with *imago Dei* to be overwhelmingly compelling. 715

For Grenz, the key was summed up in the salvation-historical narrative, where “Rom 8:29 delineates the final exegesis of Gen 1:26-27.” 716 He found Rom 8:29 717 presenting the new humanity in Christocentric language, where those in Christ will be caught up in the Christ event and become copies of God’s Son. The climax of the verse comes in the declaration, “that he might be the firstborn,” which expresses the Christological intent of God’s foreordination, namely, the preeminence of Christ among those who participate in the eschatological reality.

712 *SGRS*, 287.
713 *SGRS*, 190, 200, 202.
714 *SGRS*, 18.
715 Grenz, “Jesus as the *Imago Dei,*” 626.
716 *SGRS*, 231-32. Gn 1:26-27 is not the only passage Grenz derives *imago Dei* theology from, however. Other passages include Ps 8; 2 Cor 4; Col 1; and Heb 1. I am grateful to T. Desmond Alexander for highlighting this point at the Biblical Theology/Christian Doctrine Study Group of the 2009 Tyndale Fellowship meeting, suggesting that Gn 1:26-27 would not bear the massive weight of the theological structure Grenz was building with his *imago Dei* theology. And yet, Grenz came to acknowledge this as the major theme for interpreting all of scripture, theology and ethics; it was not reduced to only appearing in Genesis.
717 “For those [God] foreknew, he also predestined [them] as transformed unto the image of his son, for the purpose of him being the firstborn among many siblings” (Rom 8:29, my translation).
The designation of these as Christ’s indicates the communal interest of the text which marks Romans 8:29 as the final exegesis of Genesis 1:26-27.718

He expounded this further by explaining that

humankind created in the imago Dei is none other than the new humanity conformed to the imago Christi, and the telos toward which the Old Testament creation narrative points is the eschatological community of glorified saints. In this manner, the narrative of the emergence of the new humanity provides the climax to the entire salvation-historical story and becomes the ultimate defining moment for the Genesis account of the creation of humankind in the imago Dei.719

The imago Dei as introduced in Genesis 1, then, is originally open-ended and suspenseful, awaiting the future fulfillment of the quest of the imago Dei, while being proleptically and transformationally present for the redeemed community, yet nevertheless ultimately future.720

Rather than gloss readings of texts or theological musings over and around texts which many theologians are prone toward, Grenz’s agenda included thoroughly theological biblical exegesis which led him to conduct robust biblical exegesis throughout the task of both exploring and constructing his systematic theology.

6.5. Summary

While this imago Dei was a biblical concept, it was not just a biblical concept for Grenz. For him it was also a conceptual tool that gave way to what he was beginning to conceive in his own imago Dei epistemology, and a coordinate imago Dei ontology, both of which were on their way to being built. This was the trajectory and logic of Grenz’s journey, and was thoroughly trinitarian insofar as it accessed the doctrine of the Trinity via the imago Dei, especially in the most mature stages of his writings. In doing so, he further displayed in a consistent manner his deep evangelical conviction of the importance of scripture informing his theology, as well as the importance of having a self-aware and distinctly systematic theological reading of the Bible. He

718 Grenz, “Jesus as the Imago Dei,” 623.
equally displayed the characteristically baptistic feature of prioritizing Christ at the center of both his hermeneutic for scripture and theology. The structure that his hermeneutically-informed work proposed to yield was intended to give further shape to his ethical engagement, which his earlier ethical writings seem to be somewhat representational of, although not having the benefit of his most mature theological insights. It is to these earlier ethical writings which this thesis will now turn in seeking to determine not just how trinitarian his ethical engagement was, but also the coherence of his entire program.

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721 See the Christological principle highlight in Stephen R. Holmes, “Baptists and the Bible,” *Baptist Quarterly* 43 (2010): 418-20, stating, “It is a standard piece of Baptist polemic to insist that Christ alone is the true head of the church; if this is the case, then any account of how authority operates in the church ought, theologically, to be referred fairly directly to Christ. If Scripture is authoritative in the church, as of course it is, then we need a Christological account of that.” See also Stephen R. Holmes, *Baptist Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2012), forthcoming. See also p. 172n813 of this thesis.
Chapter 7:
Grenz and Comprehensive Love:
The Trinitarian Shape of Stanley J. Grenz’s Ethic/s

7.1. Introduction

Scholarship that has focused on particular aspects of Stanley Grenz’s work often overlooked his contribution to theological ethics.\(^{722}\) Much of his efforts in this area proceeded from his early academic career, beginning as Professor of Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics in Sioux Falls, South Dakota (1981). After considering research for another PhD, this time in ethics, he instead began teaching and writing about the subject,\(^{723}\) while occasionally serving as interim pastor in churches which provided fertile ground for his early ethical awareness. Indeed, in spite of training as a systematic theologian, nearly all of his earlier writings were devoted to ecclesial or ethical matters, with considerable overlap.

A significant shift occurred around the time Grenz transitioned to Carey Theological College in Vancouver (1990), the same year his single-volume treatment of Pannenberg’s systematic theology was first published.\(^{724}\) At this point, Grenz’s interests led him into a new trajectory, primarily concerned with theological methodology and systematic theology. This shift


\(^{723}\) A brief recounting of the story can be found in the “Preface” to MQ, 9-11.

enabled his ethical engagement to begin flourishing, with a working constructive theology to substantiate it.\footnote{Along with Reason for Hope, 1990 saw two significant ethical works—Sexual Ethics and AIDS—published, although these did not have the same theological substance as Betrayal of Trust (1995), Women in the Church (1995), MQ (1997) and Welcoming But Not Affirming (1998). The reason for this may be that it was not until RET (1993) that Grenz found a coherent, feasible methodology for his engagement that informed his later works.} And while consistently affirming that ethics logically flow from one’s theology,\footnote{RET, 19; TCG2, 76; SGRS, 251-52; and NGQB, 338, 372.} with Grenz it is difficult to observe where theology ends and ethics begins,\footnote{E.g., see how Grenz integrated belief expressions and practices within personal and community life (RET, 64).} especially since he paradigmatically concluded, “Ethics is theology in action.”\footnote{MQ, 19 (italics in original); see also pp. 255-57.} His program therefore evinced immense organic continuity, even while developing over the years in light of various discoveries.\footnote{E.g., one of these discoveries is seen as late as 2004 in Stanley J. Grenz, “Jesus as the Image Dei,” 617-28, where Grenz discovered an imago Dei Christology as the “theology-informing locus” (p. 627), carrying “ethical” dimensions for present transformation (p. 624). That is, ethical writings and issues were to be upheld by the imago Dei trinitarian structure Grenz was building.}

### 7.1.1. Coherent Theological Program

Before establishing the shape of Grenz’s ethic itself, particular questions may help determine the degree to which Grenz’s entire corpus might be seen as organic, comprising a whole, especially regarding his conception of the relationship between ethics and theology. Did he completely relegate ethics after theology?\footnote{See an alternate approach in James Wm. McClendon, Jr.’s, Ethics: Systematic Theology, vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986). For Grenz’s assessment of McClendon’s “narrative ethics,” see MQ, 181-83, and for an assessment of McClendon’s ethics as insufficiently trinitarian, see Sexton, “Stanley Grenz’s Ecclesiology,” 27, esp. n47.} Did he locate ethics anywhere in his theological or ethical methodology?\footnote{E.g., as informed by scripture, tradition, culture, or perhaps structured trinitarianly, integrated communally, and oriented eschatologically? See also §1.4. of this thesis.} Did he have a comprehensive trinitarian ethic that viewed ethics as theology? And can these categories clearly be nuanced in Grenz’s work? These questions set in motion this chapter’s task, serving to guide the present exploration of considering the organic development of Grenz’s corpus. This is particularly important since many of his ethical writings chronologically preceded the methodological and theological ones, and since he had no known...
agenda to engage any isolated ethical topics beyond the works forthcoming at his death.\textsuperscript{732} And yet he clearly affirmed theology’s incompleteness apart from ethics.\textsuperscript{733} There are therefore two key areas that readily display the coherence of Grenz’s program in his writings: the relationship that theology and ethics share; and the development of key themes significantly utilized in his work.\textsuperscript{734}

7.1.2. The Relationship of Theology and Ethics

The first area showing forth the coherence of Grenz’s program is found in how he joined theology and ethics, with a distinct ethic being grounded in distinct doctrine. This is contra Mark Medley’s assessment that “[Grenz] does not understand ethics as something we do after we have done theology.”\textsuperscript{735} Quite the opposite, Grenz saw ethics both based in and flowing

\textsuperscript{732} I.e., Grenz would not address a topic in the same way that he addressed AIDS, sexual ethics, clergy immorality, homosexuality, and women’s roles. Incidentally, there were two semi-ethical works in the queue: a book proposed to be co-authored with Phillip C. Zylla entitled, \textit{God and the Experience of Suffering}, and a collaborative project to be co-edited with Ronald T. Michener tentatively titled, \textit{Being a Theologian: How 10 Leading Scholars Live an Academic Life}. This latter project (which is understood as still being pursued by Michener and Greg Strand) aimed to “interview 10 leading Christian theologians on the ‘practical’ side of an academic career in teaching, research and publication. The primary intent of the book would be to learn from the experiences and disciplines of these scholars to inspire young theologians and promote ongoing theological scholarship from upcoming Christian academics” (see Stanley J. Grenz and Ronald T. Michener, “Book Proposal: Being a Theologian,” 23 Aug. 2004 [unpublished], 1). Thus, it was a book on understanding the practice (read: ethic) of being a theologian. Further, Grenz planned to propose a compilation volume to Eerdmans mainly consisting of previously published essays on the subject of popular Christian ethics tentatively titled, \textit{Mapping the Christian Life}, outline last updated 12 July 2004 (unpublished), 1.

\textsuperscript{733} Grenz stated explicitly that “a systematic delineation of Christian doctrine is not the ultimate goal of the theologian’s activities. To construction we must add application. Theological commitment must be applied to life—to the theologian’s own Christian walk and to the life of the church—in order that faith can issue forth in discipleship. The application of Christian commitment to life situations, therefore, likewise belongs to our activity as Christian theologians. At the same time, however, this application is the specific task of Christian ethics, which is an extension of the theological discipline” (TCG2, 25).

\textsuperscript{734} A possible third area showing the continuity and coherence of his work is simply seen in the ease with which he was able to revise earlier works with little or no change. E.g., \textit{Created for Community, Betrayal of Trust}, and \textit{Theology for the Community of God} went through new editions with different publishers while being identical with the first editions. \textit{Sexual Ethics} went through a slight revision whereas \textit{Prayer: The Cry for the Kingdom} maintained the same themes while updating language, adding and rearranging some material as the book went through a thorough revision. His early book \textit{The Baptist Congregation} was also due to be revised by 31 Dec. 2005, as was his \textit{Theology for the Community of God} in 2012 once Grenz finished the explorative six-volume \textit{Matrix} series in preparation for a larger three-volume \textit{Systematic Theology} which he planned to begin in 2013 (see Grenz, “Writing Deadlines,” 1). So he saw continuity in his own work, labored toward that end, and the eagerness to revise and ease displayed in his revisions display this.

\textsuperscript{735} Mark S. Medley, “An Evangelical Theology for a Postmodern Age: Stanley J. Grenz’s Current Theological Project,” \textit{Perspectives in Religious Studies} 30 (2003): 93. When Medley says, “In claiming ‘doctrine has a [sic] moral function,’ Grenz rightly suggests that we are already doing ‘ethics’ when we struggle to speak of God,”
out of theology. He affirmed: “To [doctrinal] construction, we must add application,” for “Christian ethics… is an extension of the theological discipline.”

Before constructing his own theological ethic, Grenz customarily surveyed the biblical documents, which he modeled his own ethic upon. From a canonical reading, Grenz observed three features related to the grounding of ethics in theology: (1) that the OT “covenant” concept “provides a theological foundation for holy living”; (2) that Jesus stressed “the theological foundation for the ethical life”; and (3) that Paul also “indissolubly linked” the “great indicative” as providing “the basis for the ‘imperative’.” He again asserted that “the ethical life is integrally linked to… a theology.” It is not surprising, then, that once Grenz turned to developing the most robust aspects of his theological program (following the methodological, co-authored Beyond Foundationalism [2001]), he never returned to addressing isolated ethical topics as he had before.

The last book Grenz wrote addressing a specific ethical issue was Welcoming but Not Affirming (1998), which he initially did not want to write. Nothing indicates that he found it

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Medley both misquotes Grenz and attributes to him a concept nowhere found in MQ. Medley simultaneously misrepresents Grenz’s position which was succinctly stated on the very page Medley cited. Grenz stated explicitly: “The ethical life arises as we live out our fundamental theological convictions in the midst of the situations of life” (MQ, 255).

For his conclusions, see also Harris, “Revisioning Evangelical Theology,” 78.

See this methodological commitment articulated in RET, 93-96; and worked out more thoroughly in the expanded BF, 57-92.

MQ, 109.

MQ, 119. See esp. n85 for careful dependence upon Michael Parsons, “Being Precedes Act: Indicative and Imperative in Paul’s Writing,” in Understanding Paul’s Ethics, ed. Brian S. Rosner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1995), 217-47. This point also relates to the importance Grenz placed on the ethical shift from “doing” to “being, which correspondingly has been paralleled by a “rethinking of Christian discipleship,” which has become less a matter of following Jesus’ example and more a concern to “exemplify Christlike character.” As an example for this view Grenz cited James McClendon (MQ, 202), although Stanley Hauerwas might just as easily fit here. More on this ethic of “being” will be seen later in this chapter. Note also that Grenz elsewhere noted the indwelling Spirit as the link between Paul’s indicative and imperative (MQ, 127).

MQ, 230 (emphasis in original).

Edna Grenz suggested reasons for not wanting to write the book included the “volatile” nature of the subject, and that it would “take time away from things that he really did want to write about.” Yet ultimately, “he then agreed to write it because he recognized the importance of an evangelical academic writing on the subject” (personal interview, 19 Apr. 2009, Vancouver, BC).
unimportant to address explicit ethical issues. And yet, in light of his subsequent work pursuing a comprehensive theological project that was deemed most important, his efforts would permanently shift. For his program, he envisioned a theology that would provide substantial ground for carrying the weight of Christian existence, both for a coherent proclamation of the gospel, and for its implications for Christian living. He began to access this theology via the focal, unifying theme of all reality as he saw it—the *imago Dei*. He found promise in this unifying theme drawn from the biblical narrative as a theme that “must be extended to the other three theological *loci* [God, creation, and humanity] and hence to all of systematic theology from beginning to end.” As such, its reach includes and aims for the ethical idea of transformation, which is not merely ethical, but also ecclesial, theo-ontological and eschatologically-realistic. This is also perhaps the main reason why Grenz chose to devote the entirety of his major corpus to theology rather than to the ethical issues that his theology intended to undergird and produce. This is the comprehensive dimension of “comprehensive love,” which focused very little on ethics as such, or on individual ethical categories, but instead was devoted to a theological ethic—an “ethic of being.”

### 7.1.3. The Development of Key Themes

Along with the relationship of theology to ethics, the second area revealing the coherence of Grenz’s program is seen in a survey of his employment of specific terms and

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744 Grenz, “Jesus as the *Imago Dei*,” 627.
745 See, e.g., SGRS, 240-64, 331-36; and NGQB, 360-73.
746 SGRS, 312-34; NGQB, 292; and TCG2, 619-20. See also Grenz’s eschatological realism unpacked in §3.1.3. of this thesis.
747 This was more consistent with the coherent theology that he saw in Pannenberg rather than, e.g., Wayne A. Grudem, who is currently working on a comprehensive book on ethics that he anticipates will take up the remainder of his academic career, but hopes will parallel and build upon his earlier 1,291-page *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995) (personal conversation, 7 July 2009). It seems clear that Grudem’s work will be devoted to ethics rather than to a comprehensive or coherent theological ethic, as in Grenz.
748 *MQ*, 41-42, 205-12, 219-21. See also the nuances Grenz made between the terms ethic and ethics in his short excursus, “Ethics or Ethic,” 25 Jan. 2004 (unpublished), 1, used in the course, “Pastoral Ethics” (GS232) at Carey Theological College. Note that others who have commented on Grenz’s “ethic of being” have completely overlooked this point (e.g., Lenow, “Community in Ethics,” 166-84).
phrases that illuminate the canvas of his program.\textsuperscript{749} Even as they evolved, these key markers highlight the major developmental themes pulsating through and driving the entirety of his work.

7.1.3.1. Community

The first theme, “community,” is found quite early in the book, \textit{The Baptist Congregation},\textsuperscript{750} already defining the Trinity as “community” and also more specifically as the “divine community.”\textsuperscript{751} By 1990, Grenz’s “theological basis” for AIDS ministry is grounded in the triune God who is “a community of love.” Seen as the foundational moral attribute of God, love binds the three trinitarian persons together.\textsuperscript{752} The same year, “community” became a major theme for his work in the book \textit{Sexual Ethics}, further preparing the way for his work in \textit{Theology for the Community of God} (1994) and its methodological forerunner, \textit{Revisioning Evangelical Theology} (1993) where the “community” concept was summoned as theology’s “integrative motif.”\textsuperscript{753}

7.1.3.2. Narrative

Another concept that became dominant in Grenz’s writing is “narrative,” employed when describing present-day believers as both participating in and being “the contemporary extension of the biblical community of faith.” He started using “narrative” in this theological sense as early as 1992 to speak of the “covenanting event” that believers enter into with God and the shared community life.\textsuperscript{754} The theme also became significant in \textit{Revisioning Evangelical Theology},

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\textsuperscript{749} These are different from the motifs Grenz saw as essential components to all \textit{Christian} theology, namely that it be “trinitarian in content, communitarian in focus, and eschatological in orientation” (see \textit{BF}, 166). Details cannot be given here about how these motifs in Grenz’s later methodology evolved from \textit{RET} (1993).

\textsuperscript{750} Grenz, \textit{The Baptist Congregation}, 16, 18, 47-50.

\textsuperscript{751} Grenz, \textit{The Baptist Congregation}, 18. Incidentally, he later uses “relationality” and “community” synonymously in Grenz, “The Doctrine of the Trinity,” 17. However, “social Trinity” is first employed in \textit{TCG} and then quite liberally thereafter. See also \textit{RET} 186-88, and \textit{Sexual Ethics}, 48, and \textit{passim}, along with the narrative account of Grenz’s usage of the “social Trinity” in §4.3.1. of this thesis.

\textsuperscript{752} Grenz, \textit{AIDS}, 173-77. Note that Grenz did not utilize Augustine here, which erstwhile usage was highlighted in §4.3.2. and §5.1.4. of this thesis.

\textsuperscript{753} \textit{RET}, 147-62; and \textit{TCG2}, 23-24.

\textsuperscript{754} Grenz, “The Community of God,” 21, based on his inaugural lecture as Pioneer McDonald Professor of Baptist Heritage, Theology and Ethics at Carey Theological College and Regent College, Vancouver, BC. See also Grenz’s explanation of the narrative phenomena in mainline theology and how evangelical spirituality has always conceived the Bible as the paradigmatic story (\textit{RET}, 126).
Theology for the Community of God and is used liberally for the remainder of his work, drawing from George Lindbeck and others,755 although always emphasizing the importance of historical events.

7.1.3.3. Kingdom

A third central theme Grenz utilized was the “kingdom” concept, generally described as God’s overall reign.756 He first related “kingdom” to ecclesiology in 1985, calling the church a “sign” or “mirror” of the kingdom.757 By the early 1990s, urging caution against both equating and radically separating the two, he referred to the church as “the product of the kingdom.”758 After Revisioning Evangelical Theology (1993), however, “kingdom” was no longer a theological motif intimately coupled with “community,” as it once had been.759 It is still present somewhat while arguably having been relocated. Yet by the time of his “Ecclesiology” essay (2003), “kingdom” had completely vanished from Grenz’s ecclesial scene.760

Precursory to and anticipating the term’s later relocation, in 1992 Grenz declared that the “reign of God” is “left vacuous unless we pour into it its proper content, which, I believe, is disclosed in the concept of ‘community’.”761 Later, in 1997 he stated, “The kingdom refers ultimately to the eschatological consummation of history in the eternal community in which God’s will is fully actualized throughout all creation.” And yet, this future power is presently active when God’s will is actualized in his reign, which occurs “[w]herever and whenever community emerges in our fallen world.”762 In locating the kingdom completely future, albeit with some kind of present working, Grenz situated the kingdom under the auspices of a

755 Of interesting note might also be the narrative theology of James McClendon, which represents a baptist converging with these ideas for his ethical engagement (see MQ, 181-83).
758 Grenz, “The Community of God,” 24 [italics in original]. See also TCG2, 472, 478.
759 RET, 139-47.
760 E.g., Grenz, “Ecclesiology” 252-68, which makes no reference whatever to “kingdom.”
761 Grenz, “The Irrelevancy of Theology,” 311. See also RET, 162.
762 MQ, 271. Note again that Grenz’s employment of the term “community” always maintained the that the triune community serves as the transcendent basis of any kind of community in the economic situation.
Christian ethic. And while never fully realized on this earth, for Grenz the kingdom (i.e., God’s reign) becomes worked out in the Christian ethic amidst believers’ present longing for God’s kingdom to be fully revealed, the revelation of which God alone will effect. Accordingly, the kingdom became less of a factor in Grenz’s later writings as he found more promise in the *imago Dei* paradigm, where the church is called to be a “foretaste” of the kingdom, rather than the kingdom itself. And yet the church nevertheless cries for and labors towards in-breakings of the kingdom of God’s future rule which God will ultimately cause to invade the present sphere of existence at the new age, which in turn provides the theological vision that is worked out in Christian living, or the present Christian ethic.

Is it also possible that “kingdom” went away as a theme because in the contemporary context when viewed from a post-colonial Western mentality this idea seems difficult to reconcile with “love” language. Grenz later located the “dominion” concept under “Jesus,” while lamenting his earlier lack of seeing these concepts all underneath the cosmic dimension of Christology which he saw as a result of his earlier lack of understanding Jesus as the true *imago Dei*. This also seems to have made room for the notion of God’s election of Christ as the primary “human,” which itself also lends a narratival reading of salvation history. But Grenz could also easily be identified as simply having been much more concerned with an “ought to” (i.e., ethics) that is based on a “will be” or an “is becoming.” Although seeing the firm disjunction between history and the eschaton, Grenz declared that what believers will be made into is not what they are now.

765 Cp. Grenz, *TCG2*, 352, 504 with Grenz, *RTC2*, 331. Note also that *BF* omits “kingdom” in the index, and sees this motif completely replaced by the Trinity as theology’s structural motif with eschatology as theology’s orienting motif. See also the expressed reticence to use “kingdom” in *BF*, 234-35.
766 Grenz, “Jesus as the *Imago Dei*,” 619-21.
767 Grenz, “Jesus as the *Imago Dei*,” 625-27.
7.1.3.4. Trinity

The doctrine of the Trinity is a fourth comprehensive theme and, as this thesis has been arguing, is the primary one that served as the transcendent heartbeat of Grenz’s entire program, providing the “fruitful starting-point for theological and ethical reflection.”\(^{768}\) His program was thoroughly trinitarian, although with an evolving consciousness of a doctrine of the Trinity.\(^{769}\) He employed “the social Trinity” throughout *Theology for the Community of God*, which could have been anticipated in 1992,\(^{770}\) although it was absent from his initial methodological treatment (1993). Yet while the doctrine of the Trinity is to be deemed the most significant theme in Grenz’s overall program, he became increasingly convinced that it could only be accessed by the *imago Dei*, which might also be considered another feature indicating the coherence of his program, the comprehensive relevance of which (for Grenz’s conception) was explored in this thesis’s previous chapter. For Grenz’s ethical writings, on the other hand, the *imago Dei* concept first appeared in 1990 with his books *Sexual Ethics* and *AIDS*, and was the means by which he found access to the “transcendent grounding” for his entire program, and the means by which people can know both God and humanity.\(^{771}\) Providing insights into both realities is where the Christian ethic (and consequently Christian ethics) begins, for Grenz understood all theology as necessarily yielding ethics from itself, and as entirely incomplete without this result.\(^{772}\)

In exploring Grenz’s theological ethic of comprehensive love, the remainder of this chapter hopes to do two things: (1) establish the vision (i.e., the theology, method, and substance) of Grenz’s ethical engagement; and (2) showcase Grenz’s own engagement with a selection of particular ethical issues. In short, the final two sections in this chapter will ask, What is Grenz’s ethic? and How does it work out into his consequential ethical engagement with the

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\(^{768}\) Grenz, “The Doctrine of the Trinity,” 17.

\(^{769}\) See chs. 4 and 5 of the present thesis.

\(^{770}\) See his reading of the need for this move in Grenz, “The Irrelevancy of Theology,” 311.

\(^{771}\) Grenz, “The Doctrine of the Trinity,” 17; and Grenz, “Jesus as the *Imago Dei*,” 617.

\(^{772}\) TCG2, 25.
pressing ethical issues of the day? Establishing the conclusions to these questions will settle the matter of whether or not Grenz’s project was comprehensively trinitarian.

7.2. Comprehensive Theological Ethic

Having already established a methodology sufficient to construct a distinctly Christian theology in the present context (1993), after his seminary-level theology text (1994) Grenz’s work of constructing a Christian ethic was carried out in the same manner. Methodologically, it too would draw from scripture, carefully selected church tradition, and the present cultural situation.

7.2.1. The Human Quest

After presenting parameters for an informed discussion about general categories of morality within the contemporary context, Grenz surveyed ethical aims of the major ancient Greek philosophers. He also considered Augustine, Aquinas, and Luther as models of classical constructions of a Christian theological ethic. And he finally surveyed a variety of twentieth century attempts at establishing a Christian theological ethic. Throughout these proposals, repeated themes related to the universal human quest for the “good life” are observed.

It is at this point that Brian Harris suggests that “the contemporary context... seems to be the main driver as Grenz develops his ethical model in the remainder of the book.” This conclusion, however, is a bit overdrawn. Certainly Grenz did construct his ethic in light of questions and trends in the contemporary context. Yet there is nothing substantially conflicting

773 It seems that very few, if any, commentators on Grenz’s writings understand the comprehensive nature for which he envisioned his theology and ethics. One exception to this might be Brian Harris’s work on Grenz’s methodology since it sought to evaluate implications for Grenz’s methodology in both his theology and ethics, assuming that his method would have shaped these in a somewhat comprehensive manner. See Harris, The Theological Method of Stanley J. Grenz.
774 RET, 19; and SGRS, 251-52. See this point also as the basis for the study in Harris, The Theological Method of Stanley J. Grenz, 269-75.
775 Western Enlightenment philosophers (e.g., Kant, Hume, Locke) did not receive much attention from Grenz.
776 Harris, “Revisioning Evangelical Theology,” 78.
between the ethic he constructs in chapters 6-8 of *The Moral Quest* and the *biblical* ethic presented in the third chapter of that book. As with each of his constructive works, Grenz selectively presented material with a sweeping view coming to a crescendo in the present context so that he might adopt helpful threads into his program which also had emerged erstwhile in church tradition. But what was it that truly drove Grenz’s comprehensive ethic of Christian love?

### 7.2.2. The Christian Ethic of Comprehensive Love

An interest in the transcendent basis for ethics can be seen in Grenz’s earlier ethical writings. He understood “oughtness” (i.e., morality) to be a universal feature of humanness, and yet deemed every model of general ethics standing disconnected from divine revelation to be “untrustworthy.” He explained the “grave reservation” he had about the philosophical ethical enterprise, and concluded it capable of only yielding a wasteland cul-de-sac of anthropocentrism. Grenz’s ethic, alternatively, moved in a much different direction with a completely different orientation.

#### 7.2.2.1. Reorientation to God-Centeredness

Coming out of this man-centered ghetto, Grenz began accessing his ethic from the transcendent base he had long been looking for. He found this in the “Christian gospel” which provides a unique answer in its foundational message that the “goal of life” is a reconciled community, including fellowship with God, others, and creation. This goal of human existence is revealed “most completely in Jesus Christ,” who by his work modeled the divine principle of life in intimate fellowship with his Father by the Spirit who indwelt him. Grenz declared that this vision of God as “the social Trinity and our creation to be the *imago Dei* provides the

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777 See also the conclusion in §1.4.1.3. and §8.1.1. of this thesis about Grenz’s use of “culture.”
778 Grenz, *AIDS*, 173-77; and also *Sexual Ethic*, 34-36, 45-51.
779 *MQ*, 212-13.
780 *MQ*, 163, 203, 213, 235-37.
781 *MQ*, 56-58, 216-18.
transcendent basis for the human ethical ideal as life-in-community.” Thereby, the reconciled community reflects God’s own loving nature. It is the Holy Spirit, however, who creates this reconciled relationship, transforming believers into Christ’s image in order to fulfill the divinely given design for them to be the *imago Dei,* which “can only be expressed in human relationships.” The point here is a major one, and contra Pannenberg or Von Rad, who sought to establish the “image” as what humans are created “according to,” with a stronger individual archetype than the corporate one Grenz maintained, and also contra those who seek to establish the Image of God from eternity past (e.g., a *logos asarkos*). This, however, may be precisely why Grenz did not go with Pannenberg, Von Rad, or the *logos asarkos.* It seems that for Grenz “Image” referred to the singular reflection of the triune God which, when imaged, takes on a corporate, creaturely shape which thus further images itself by bringing those further determined to image (when joined to the Image) into the life of the triune God, whom the Image both reveals and fully *is* by nature. Thus Grenz can firmly state that the image of God can only be *expressed* in human relationships because the Image is Jesus of Nazareth, crucified, risen, and glorified.

In accordance with this new way of living, believers are positioned to reject the idea Grenz characterized as “heteronomy,” by which he referred to a malforming, nonrelational approach to divine revelation that focuses on the text of scripture to the exclusion of the Spirit. Simultaneously believers are to reject “autonomy,” which focuses on revelation being present within the individual, and separate from the written Word. Grenz himself opted for a third option: the “theonomous way,” borrowing from Paul Tillich, which sought to maintain Word and Spirit in a proper relationship that honors God by being theologically-driven and thereby finding the Spirit shaping Christian identity, forming believers into Christ’s image. This happens

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783 *MQ,* 253, 256, 275, 277.
785 *MQ,* 242-51.
by speaking through the pages of scripture, which “serves as the primary source for our shared understanding of the God who enters into covenant with us and therefore of ourselves as… his covenant people.”

This dynamic relationship leads to an ethical understanding of life always and only both under and before God. That is, life under God’s authority and in God’s very presence. Therefore it is theological living, or “theology in action.” Believers thus understand all things as deriving value from the God who values his creation, and wherein “rights” are determined based on what God values. These rights are also displayed in the community of Christ’s character, which is designed to be God’s vehicle for expressing his love and justice for all, in many forms. By means of their union with Christ by the Spirit’s effect, members of the community of Christ’s character are themselves anchored in the Trinity, whose character is love, and who calls believers to be the imago Dei and to so mirror this very character of God’s relational dynamic—love. Living before God implies that the human being is a responsible unified person for whom God’s intention is holistic. But since enslavement to sin characterizes and taints every action of every human, and since people are unitary, whole sinners, they must be holistically healed, which has been met by “God’s gracious provision in Christ.” This provision now creates an entirely new way of living (ethic), with Jesus as the center and focus since he is “God’s disclosure of both the divine essence and the divine intention for human existence.” Jesus reveals that as the divine principle of life—the foundation for true living which is love—and as the true human, “he is the revelation of what we are to be.” So far as it relates to God’s intention for the transformation of this universe through Jesus Christ, he is not just the bridge between ontology and

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786 MQ, 251-57.
787 MQ, 257.
788 MQ, 258-59.
789 MQ, 260-63.
790 MQ, 263-67.
791 MQ, 267-68.
epistemology, and between Creator and creature, but Jesus is also “the bridge” between creation and new creation, marking believers’ eschatological and ethical orientation.792

Consistent with the Pauline emphasis noted earlier, Grenz explained that the present orientation toward the eschaton yields the ethical imperative which in turn is based on the indicative of “the ethical ideal that we have personally experienced, which ideal characterizes the life of the eternal God.”793 This experienced ethical ideal is “constituted by a relationship” that enjoys “filial status” with God, which is “exactly the relationship the Son enjoys with the Father.”794 As such, Grenz’s exhortation is that believers ought to “[l]ive in the present in accordance with the perfect conformity to Christ which one day you will enjoy, because in fact you are the glorified saints you will one day be.” Furthermore, Grenz understood that believers need to embrace the identity the Father has lavished on them in the Son, “thereby becoming the very persons God has declared us to be in Christ.”795 This is the awakening of their new identity.

7.2.2.2. Reorientation to True Identity

The biblical imperative for believers is based on their “true identity,” which Grenz asserted “lies in God’s future.”796 And yet, the transformative working of the Spirit is now present in the midst of Jesus’ disciples, mediating both the vision of God’s goal and the self-identity of God’s children. The Spirit calls and brings believers as far as possible in the present age into being the community of love and peace that characterizes the “reign of God,” structured around the principles of God’s eternal community.797 Hence, the Christian ethic appeals to what ultimately will be in the eschatological new creation, since “in God’s eternal

792 MQ, 226.
793 MQ, 269. See also the statement in Grenz, “What Does it Mean to be Trinitarian in Doctrine?” 5: “The ideal society—the society patterned after the divine life—is one in which the multiplicity of individuals within it forms a higher unity, but in such a manner that the personhood of each member is not only retained but actually enhanced through the mutual relationality that all participants enjoy.”
794 MQ, 269-70, 295.
795 MQ, 270. For Grenz’s avoidance and dismissal of the so-called naturalist fallacy, see MQ, 46-47, 222-24, where he notes that seen from the present, the “is” is future tense—i.e., the “is” is what “will be.”
796 MQ, 269.
797 MQ, 271-75.
community what ‘ought’ to be ‘is,’ and what ‘is’ is what ‘ought’ to be.” God is the one who “effects the divine will for creation.” His will “both defines the ‘ought’ and accomplishes it,” and thus he ultimately brings about what “ought” to be. For their part, believers today embody the present calling that will bring, as far as possible, the convergence of “ought” and “is” in the present. This necessitates continual inquiry about “how our purpose as designed by God should affect, motivate, and even determine798 the present situation.” And in this way, “the future good has ontological precedence over the present life.”799

Grenz’s development of an ethic of comprehensive love was concerned with the character of the kingdom to come, and on the biblical “story line which focuses on the God who acts in the constancy of divine love.” The story of Jesus is “the focal point of God’s loving provision and the supreme expression of divine love,” which in turn leads believers into loving him in response, which love then naturally moves out toward others. Thus out of all the dimensions of the moral life, Grenz found that “love is central to the whole, for it alone provides insight into the coming age.”800

Grenz received a number of criticisms for his ethic of “comprehensive love.” Some rejected his emphases as indicative of a liberal social-gospel, or else indicative of an experientialism equated with Schleiermacher.801 David Dockery opined that “Grenz elevated the love of God over all other attributes of God to such a degree that... God’s love was almost personalized, thus becoming a fourth member of the Trinity. The implications for the doctrine

798 This is not like the future “determining” the present in part of Pannenberg’s definition of “bestimmen” (see p. 51n254 of this thesis).
799 MQ, 224, here Grenz cited the Munich theologian Trutz Rendtorff, Ethics, trans. Keith Crim (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 181. However, note how this is nuanced in Grenz’s theology. Its vision for ethics is really where Grenz most suitably located this concept. Compare this with his evaluation elsewhere: “According to the viewpoint of the biblical writers, therefore, our true identity lies in God’s future, and not in either our past or present as some given essential nature that we already possess as humans” (MQ, 269).
800 MQ, 281-83.
801 See p. 34n153 of the present thesis.
of God and the atonement are obvious." These criticisms seemed to be quite far-fetched and largely unsubstantiated, the latter particularly coming from a seemingly very weak moment of historical-theological (trinitarian) amnesia. Arguably, love is at the heart of the biblical story, and Grenz’s emphasis of it as a present and future quality, grounded in the divine relationality of the triune God which then grounded the redeemed community in God’s love and life is both biblically and historically sustainable. Grenz began his entire course theologically—trinitarianly—and with a robust anthropology (including the understanding of present humanity as fallen). His own personal development is simple enough to see through his intellectual and professional chronology which eventually gave pride of place to the community theme and the premier role for theology to the doctrine of the Trinity, which was also intended to transform living.

7.2.2.3. Transformational Relational-Living

This leads back to where Grenz began, with the purpose of God’s self-disclosure to bring humans into relationship with himself. This relationship is transformative, becoming “the wellspring for true obedience.” Grenz understood this relational dynamic as carrying implications for understanding scripture’s imperatives, which he admitted “fulfill a somewhat negative function.” Specifically, he asserted that the biblical “prohibitions and injunctions serve to indicate the parameters within which the relationships God desires for us can flourish.” As Christians then seek to live “within the realm toward which the law points, the indwelling Spirit creates the kind of relationships that honor God.” Because the ethical life is relational, God desires believers to develop in “person-to-person relationships which reflect God’s own relationality.” And so, therefore, “true obedience is not marked by outward compliance to a set


803 MQ, 245-46.
of laws but by inward piety (e.g., Mk 7:1-23),” which then yields these God-glorifying relationships.804

Grenz’s piety seems to have resulted from marrying trinitarian theology to Christian ethical living. As the piety of comprehensive love is lived out, then, believers are to reflect the ultimate answer to humanity’s problem(s), namely God’s gracious provision in Christ. Thus believers point to the Other who transforms while they embody the transformation he brings about in the form of an ethic of “being”805 that is equally a “personal knowing” or an “ethical Otherness.” This is grounded in the dynamic within the triune reality, as “an Otherness that takes a stance of being ‘for’ the Other to the point of finding one’s own identity in the Other.” It is thus an ethical engagement lying at the heart of God’s life, best characterized by the term agape.806 Grounded in who God is and what he does (has done, is doing, intends, and will do) and the realization of this action in human relationships,807 this is not self-actualization,808 but is actualization “in Christ” and in the love experienced and pursued as a result of union with him. Yet it is also simultaneously longing for the kingdom and being transformed into Christ’s image in the present, yielding a personal identity for believers that is after God’s future.809

In Grenz’s mature work (The Matrix series) he began with the relational analogy, but seemed to imply that he did not think he could access this straightaway. Evidence of this is highlighted when he moved from his work in The Social God and the Relational Self (2001) to an

804 MQ, 253, 278.
805 See also the comments about the consensus in Christian ethics on being or exuding character rather than doing, which is identified as a major shift in recent rethinking of Christian discipleship (MQ, 202).
806 NGQB, 335.
807 This contra the Hegelian notion of evil’s necessary (anthesis) correlation to good (thesis) resulting in the ideal synthesis. Note also that the entis Grenz seeks comes about in the transformation process, as believers are conformed to the image of Christ, becoming the image of God. It is the “new creation” God brings about—God’s provision to bring about things as God wills them to be according to his ultimate purpose—and not something inherently existent in the created being. With the proleptic experience giving way to the reality, Grenz echoed Pauline language, giving the imperatives in light of the indicative: “Be/become who you are! Live in the present in accordance with the perfect conformity to Christ which one day you will enjoy, because in fact you are the glorified saints who you will one day be” (MQ, 269-70).
808 MQ, 346n93.
809 MQ, 269-70. See also MQ, 223-27, 275, and RET, 183.
emphasis on God’s defining Godself via his self-naming in a narrative, as described in *The Named God and the Question of Being* (2005). Grenz then moved back to the *Imago Dei*, looking to Christ as the corporate unifying key for anthropology and all of systematic theology. His development and approach are definitely carried out with a *from-below* perspective, and carried residue of a social model of the Trinity with relationality being a central feature concerning both God and a Christian ethic. But he seemed to be moving in a direction that was not quite satisfied with this. His work was evolving and as such, becoming more Christ-centered.

7.2.2.4. Christ-Centered Transformation

Grenz moved from *analogia relationis* and *imago Dei* to an *imago Christi* for access of the Trinity. It is not entirely clear as to what the next steps would have been for his doctrine of the Trinity, or how this might have done something different to his ethic or his earlier ethical writings. Perhaps it may have more deeply grounded the world to God (or God’s image) rather than working with the more general relational model of the Trinity somewhat *in abstracto*. But he did not think it possible to “know what it means to be human without looking to Jesus, who

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810 Grenz stated, “When we find ourselves in Christ, we find that we are not alone there. God’s purposes are to bring us together” (Grenz, “What Does it Mean to be Trinitarian in Doctrine?” from video of chapel lecture delivered 18 Jan. 2005).

811 Grenz stated, “The doctrine of the Trinity is a conceptuality—a way of transforming all reality—changing how we think and how we live” (Grenz “What Does it Mean to be Trinitarian in Doctrine?” from video of chapel lecture delivered 18 Jan. 2005).

812 See this displayed esp. in chs. 5 and 6 of this thesis.

813 While seeming like a reversal of his early work (e.g., *MQ*, 261-64), it is significant to note that Grenz saw ethics neither as merely social, nor merely personal. At the very least, Christian ethics would need to encompass both in a very distinct manner: “Grounded in the triune God and focused on the living Lord Jesus Christ present among God’s people through the Holy Spirit, the Christian ethic flows out of the vision for God’s goal for creation which marks the climax of the biblical narrative” (*MQ*, 271).

Baptist historian Ian Randall suggested that perhaps Grenz’s Christcenteredness was primarily a feature of his distinct identity as a Baptist (discussion following my presentation of a paper entitled, “Social or Simple? The Motion of Grenz’s Trinity,” presented at the Christian Doctrine Study Group of the Tyndale Fellowship, Tyndale House, Cambridge, England, 1 July 2010), which would be consistent with his emphasis on Christ’s centrality (though it only increased in prominence) in his earlier ethical writings. The trinitarian nature of Evangelicalism’s Christocentricity is also noted in Fred Sanders, *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 168-75, which Grenz also exhibited. And while in a more caricature style, Evangelicalism’s Christocentrism has also been noted by Sinclair B. Ferguson, “A Preacher’s Decalogue,” *Themelios* 36 (2011): 263.

814 Although during the times when “the social Trinity” was prominent in Grenz’s writings, so also was the priority of the Lord Jesus Christ as the model or “paradigm” for human relationships (*MQ*, 263).
as the *imago Dei* embodying the divine purpose for humankind is the true human."\textsuperscript{815} For Grenz, then,

humankind created in the *imago Dei* is none other than the new humanity conformed to the *imago Christi*, and the *telos* toward which the Old Testament creation narrative points is the eschatological community of glorified saints. In this manner, the narrative of the emergence of the new humanity provides the climax to the entire salvation-historical story and becomes the ultimate defining moment for the Genesis account of the creation of humankind in the *imago Dei*.\textsuperscript{816}

This theological accounting of Christian ethics bore fruit for the structure undergirding Grenz’s sometimes engagement with particular ethical issues, a number of the most important of which will be considered in the remaining portion of this chapter.

### 7.3. Comprehensive Trinitarian Ethic Employed for Ethics

Grenz’s reconceptualization of the *imago Dei* as a social reality included the divine calling “to be the image of God,” or the “ecclesial *imago Dei,*”\textsuperscript{817} which is part of his eschatological realism.\textsuperscript{818} He understood that “the connection between the new humanity and the *imago dei* as focused on Christ is both an eschatological goal and a present reality.” As such, he asserted that this “already–not yet” aspect “leads to an ethical imperative for life in the believing community.”\textsuperscript{819} In other words, it is precisely “those who are destined to be the new humanity and as such to reflect the divine image, [who] carry the ethical responsibility to live out that reality in the present.”\textsuperscript{820} According to Grenz, this is not an outward “imitation” of Christ involving personal or social ethical betterment, but it is similar to Maximus the Confessor’s position that denotes

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\textsuperscript{815} Grenz, “Jesus as the *Imago Dei*,” 627.
\textsuperscript{816} Grenz, “The Social God,” in *Trinitarian Soundings*, 91.
\textsuperscript{817} See §6.3.5. of this thesis, and also Sexton, “Stanley Grenz’s Ecclesiology,” 43.
\textsuperscript{818} *SGRS*, 15, 232. See also §3.1.3. of this thesis.
\textsuperscript{819} *SGRS*, 224.
\textsuperscript{820} *SGRS*, 251-52.
God’s working out God’s own action in the economy: “God the divine Logos wishes to effect the mystery of his incarnation, always and in all things.”

Contrary to a postmodern relativism Grenz was occasionally accused of, he fixed ontological certainty to the *imago Dei* narrative that he called “the Jesus-story,” one which in the context of “the drama of creation-fall-new creation gives a universal cast to the biblical salvation narrative.” Within this, the human quest to be community is simply a quest to mirror amidst all creation the eternal reality of God, and thereby not just by reflecting but also by being the *imago Dei*, which Grenz understood as an “outworking of God’s own eternal reality.” Everything else either springs from or points to this coherent “Jesus-story,” which began at creation, and marks precisely how Grenz sought to conceive the doctrine of the Trinity working into all reality. The brief sketch offered in this chapter of how Grenz saw *imago Dei* working through ethics is limited

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822 See, e.g., Mohler’s conclusion in “The Integrity of the Evangelical Tradition and the Challenge of the Postmodern Paradigm,” 81-84, which Grenz called “the most thoroughgoing” in “actual documented substance” (Stanley J. Grenz, personal email correspondence with Stephen D. Kovach, 19 Mar. 2002). See also Carson, “Domesticating the Gospel,” in *Reclaiming the Center*, 50. See also the abstract of a recent PhD diss., which suggests that “Grenz’s postmodern approach reduces moral understanding to a relativistic view of virtue ethics” (Lenow, “Community in Ethics,” xiv; see Lenow’s thesis succinctly presented on p. 128). However, this argument is not substantiated in Lenow’s dissertation, which elsewhere admits that Grenz indeed did not capitulate to postmodern relativism (see Lenow, “Community in Ethics,” 152, 178). This understanding of Grenz’s communitarian-based ethics as working from a postmodern foundation rather than a trinitarian one (Lenow, “Community in Ethics,” 10-11) also fails to acknowledge that Grenz was well aware of potential pitfalls of a communitarian ethic, especially as it might seem “to undercut any claim to express a universal ethic.” Instead of building on a so-called postmodern foundation for his ethics, then, Grenz deemed the communitarian understanding of ethics as holding promise “as a way of articulating the Christian ethic in the emerging postmodern context” (*MQ*, 233-35) (italics added for emphasis).
823 Grenz, “The Universality of the ‘Jesus-Story’,” 98. This point is overlooked by Mohler, “The Integrity of the Evangelical Tradition,” 77-81, and Carson, “Domesticating the Gospel,” in *Reclaiming the Center*, 50n13. Note also Jonathan Chaplin’s question of how the creation-fall-new creation (Reformed) narrative can be compatible with a Christ-centered understanding of creation (this question was posed during the discussion following my paper presentation of “A Comprehensive Trinitarian Ethic? The Theological/Ethical Shape of Grenz’s Ethic/s of ‘Comprehensive Love’,” presented at the summer seminar of the Kirby Laing Institute of Christian Ethics, 29 June 2011, Cambridge, England). But of course, if the image of God is the first movement or action within the divine life, spilling out and further moving out into/as creation, it thus becomes not only the basis of creation, redemption, new creation, etc., but also an overarching way of narrating the particular way of God’s working in the world. Alternatively, without an overarching, coherent way of explicating this narrative, the creation-fall-redemption model is simply not as thoroughly trinitarian as it could be with the assistance of the *imago Dei* genus.
824 Grenz, “The Universality of the ‘Jesus-Story’,” 110. This not in the process or Hegelian sense, but in the *expression* of God’s relational love, which is the character of the divine life.
to only a few select categories in the attempt to show how he worked toward the final goal of the theological task—love.\textsuperscript{825}

Insofar as the following account of Grenz’s particular ethical explorations serve as test-cases, they are much different than recent tests conducted by Brian Harris which focused more on the “revisioning” theme in Grenz’s work.\textsuperscript{826} Instead, tests conducted in the present chapter attempt to show how Grenz may or may not have been consistent in developing a distinctly trinitarian grounding for his ethics, and whether his ethical engagement with particular issues was really grounded in the doctrine of the Trinity or might be deemed trinitarian at all. The investigation will not evaluate every ethical category Grenz explored in his writings,\textsuperscript{827} but perhaps some of the most important to his work, having received significant attention in his writings, which may be designated as belonging to the different categories of civic-societal, ecclesial, marital and/or sexual ethics.

\textsuperscript{825}NGQB, 338.

\textsuperscript{826} Harris’s work considers whether the methodology Grenz employed for revisioning evangelical theology was equally carried over into his ethical engagement, with the issue of homosexuality as a primary test-case. Although Harris never cites Grenz’s intention on this point, it is a fair evaluation to make since Grenz believed that “a revisioning of evangelical theology demands a revisioning of evangelical ethics” (RET, 19).

7.3.1. Human and Divine Sexuality

The issue between human and divine sexuality was critical for how Grenz sought to conceive implications of the doctrine of the Trinity for human ethics. He explored this chiefly in the relationship between what the *imago Dei* concept “suggests” about the “connection between our essential human nature and the divine reality.” Grenz saw Genesis 1:26-27 suggesting that the existence of humans as sexual creatures embodied as male and female is “somehow constitutive” of what it means to be the *imago Dei*, and “must indicate something about the Creator,” whilst human experience of sexuality also “must have some implications for language about God.” Grenz explored this connection while seeking to show how God is “the transcendent foundation for our experience of being sexual creatures.”

He sought to develop an understanding of the divine image as “primarily a relational concept” that is not reflected individually, but only in relationship, in “human community.” This nuanced definition of “sexuality” refers to fundamental existence as “embodied persons,” which Grenz explained as follows:

This includes the way we relate to the world as male or female, the way we think, and the way we view others and ourselves. The sexuality involved in embodied existence also includes our capacity for sensuality, for enjoying all kinds of bodily sensations as we experience the world around us. Above all, sexuality involves our fundamental incompleteness as embodied creatures. This incompleteness draws us out of our isolation into relationships with others and ultimately with God.

Accordingly, he affirmed that the purpose of human sexuality is “bonding,” and this is so that individuals might be brought to one another and to God, reflecting a trinitarian dynamic indicating a capacity to bond within the triune God, and thereby being reflective of a feature of

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829 Grenz, “Is God Sexual?” 25. Contrast this with the recent mistaken suggestion proposing that Grenz understood “heterosexuality as the basis for all human relations” (DeFranza, “Intersex and the *Imago*,” 192).
831 Grenz, “Is God Sexual?” 25 (italics added for emphasis). Note the distinction (not the equating) Grenz makes between sexuality and sensuality, the former being the basis for the latter.
Sexuality in a manner that might be described of trinitarian members.\footnote{Contrary to the overreached conclusion in DeFranza, “Intersex and the Imago,” 232, Grenz never described God as “sexual.” He did warn against concluding that God is non-sexual, which “risks disengaging human sexuality from the imago Dei. Thereby humanity loses all transcendent foundation,” and thus relegates sexuality to the periphery of what it means to be human (Grenz, “Is God Sexual?” 30; see also SGRS, 294). As DeFranza notes, Grenz found scripture using masculine and feminine language to refer to the divine persons. Specifically, based on the notion of the mutual indwelling inherent in the perichoresis concept, a notion reflected in the idea of trinitarian inseparable operations (TCG2, 67-71), Grenz affirmed that “whatever masculinity and femininity are present within any trinitarian person are likewise shared by the other two.” Thus, “although God is neither strictly male nor female… God somehow encompasses what to us are the sexual distinctions of male and female. And sexuality… derives its significance from the divine reality” (Grenz, “Is God Sexual?” 36-37).} Sexuality, as defined by Grenz, is therefore described as “the primary force” that gives humans the drive towards bonding.\footnote{Stanley J. Grenz, “The Purpose of Sex: Toward a Theological Understanding of Human Sexuality,” Crux 26 (1990): 34; and Grenz, Sexual Ethics, 34-36. Note that this is not “sexual incompleteness” (see DeFranza, “Intersex and the Imago,” 221), but it is “sexuality, understood as the sense of incompleteness and the corresponding drive for wholeness… [that] forms the dynamic that not only seeks human relationships but also motivates the quest for God” (SGRS, 280) (italics added for emphasis). Unfortunately, DeFranza reads meanings of “sex,” “sexual,” and “sexuality” into Grenz’s writings that their contexts do not bear out, while she forsakes the manner in which he carefully nuanced these ideas as referring “to our fundamental existence as embodied persons” (Grenz, “Is God Sexual?” 25). See also Grenz’s definition of human sexuality in its “foundational sense,” being understood actively and functionally (i.e., being “at work”), which DeFranza never references, which is “the incompleteness endemic to embodied existence, together with the quest for completeness that draws humans out of isolation into bonded relationships” (SGRS, 303).} As a desire driving humans to one another and to God, this bonding is realized for believers within the redeemed society, whose members exist in fellowship with God and subsequently with one another. Therein, where men and women in the most complete way possible become the *image Dei* in the present, male-female relationships will develop and flourish in the most wholesome and pronounced manner. As they do, drawing from the analogy between the divine dynamic, these relationships will be marked by mutuality, love toward, and empowerment of the other.\footnote{Grenz, “Theological Foundations for Male-Female Relationships,” 624-30. He drew this from an understanding of Pannenberg’s trinitarian theology, with the Son being dependent on the Father in history for his identity, while the Father also depends on the Son’s person and work in history for the establishment of his own identity and deity (see §3.1.5. of this thesis). Grenz’s understanding of mutual submission between Father and Son led him to conclude that “the foundation for godly human relationships lies in the subordination of the Son to the Father together with the dependency of the Father on the Son. The application of this transcendent mutuality within the divine dynamic to the human sphere leads quite naturally to an emphasis on the interdependency of and mutuality between male and female” (Grenz, “Theological Foundations for Male-Female Relationships,” 619).}

At this point there seems to be somewhat of a tension in Grenz’s trinitarian or Christological theology. For while not wanting to attach soteriological necessity to Christ’s maleness, he also did not want to remove its soteriological significance. Instead, Grenz upheld...
that Jesus’ embodiment necessitates his sexuality.\textsuperscript{835} This might indicate one significant reason why Grenz was so critical of Chalcedonian Christology.\textsuperscript{836} He would not isolate or localize any one gender exclusively for any one member of the immanent Trinity, believing that “whatever masculinity and femininity are present within any trinitarian person are likewise shared by the other two.”\textsuperscript{837} Otherwise, contra the \textit{opera inseperabilis}, various biblical accounts of distinctly masculine and feminine ways God relates to the world must be minimized, and the transcendent basis for human sexuality would also be either blurred or lost.\textsuperscript{838} Being consistent, Grenz refused to access the person of Christ in eternity past, but instead began by understanding the Logos of the Trinity via the exclusive access of a bottom-up Christology, identified primarily as the historical male, Jesus of Nazareth. According to Grenz, Jesus’ maleness was essential because it was integral to the completion of his task. More particularly, being male facilitated Jesus in revealing the radical difference between God’s ideal and the social structures of his day. Only a male could have offered an authoritative critique of those power structures…. Jesus acted as the paradigmatic human standing against the patriarchal system, bringing women to participate in the new order where sex distinctions no longer determine rank and worth.\textsuperscript{839}

But while Jesus’ maleness was as undeniable as his humanness, Grenz refused to relegate maleness to Father and Son language for the members of the Trinity. With regards to the Trinity he insisted:

\begin{quote}
The language of Father and Son, when it is used in a patriarchal context in this manner is not at all indicating gender. The main point is not that God is gendered. In fact, we know from Scripture that God is not—that God is beyond male and female while forming the basis for maleness and femaleness in their relationality.\textsuperscript{840}\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{836} \textit{TCG2}, 308-9.
\textsuperscript{837} Grenz, “Is God Sexual?” 35-36.
\textsuperscript{838} Grenz, “Is God Sexual?” 30, 37-41.
\textsuperscript{839} Grenz, “Biblical Priesthood and Women in Ministry,” 282.
For Grenz, to have conceived a Christology by any other means than the man, Jesus of Nazareth, would have led him to mythologize Jesus as the *imago Dei*, and perhaps also convolute the manner in which humans (male and female) might be able to reflect and become the *imago*. This might have also begun to erase the concrete ontological hinge that Jesus as the human image of God provided. Perhaps Jesus could have been female in a different socio-economic setting, yet Grenz never speculated on the point. Instead he was always keen to note the importance of Jesus’ maleness, coming into a patriarchal society in order to provide an authoritative critique of prevailing power structures while blazing a new way of living in freedom and equality. Grenz deemed human sexuality an essential part of human (i.e., embodied) existence, finding a purpose in sexuality that existed at creation, which exists in the redeemed community, and will therefore also exist eschatologically.841

7.3.2. Marital-Bonding (and Singleness)

Marriage is the primal sexual bond between human creatures in the present, penultimate age. Yet marriage does not exhaust human relationality, nor does the physical union of male-female constitute the essence of human sexuality. Drawn from the biblical writers, Grenz affirmed that “the exclusive bond of husband and wife forms a fitting metaphor of the divine-human relationship,” with the sex act being “the ritual celebration of this exclusive bond.”842 Not only does the sex act celebrate the exclusive bond between husband and wife, but it also extols the mutuality of the relationship, as well as the openness to new life that may result from the bond.843 Not all sexual beings will experience this covenant bond of marital union, and yet it

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841 Note that while sexuality is an eternal feature for humans, modeled after Jesus’ resurrected humanness, and therefore maleness and femaleness will always exist, Grenz understood genital expression as relegated to this penultimate age only. For when the eschatological reign of God comes in its fullness, “genital sexual activity will be a thing of the past” (Grenz, *Sexual Ethics*, 255).


843 Grenz, *Welcoming But Not Affirming*, 108. On this last point, a criticism is made against Grenz for elsewhere advocating modern technology for infertile couples to conceive, supposedly applying “subtle pressure”
nevertheless remains a picture of the exclusive relationship God has with his people, highlighting
the primacy of the faith community in the salvation-historical drama. In other words, marriage
points. It signifies inasmuch as it (in itself) reflects the dynamic within the triune God. Thus,

the divine life entails the relationship between the first and second persons who
share the same divine essence but are nevertheless differentiated from each other.
The bond uniting them is the divine love, the third Trinitarian person, the Holy
Spirit. As marriage incorporates its divinely-given design to be the intimate,
permanent bond arising out of the interplay of sameness and difference, this
human relationship reflects the exclusive relationship of love found within the
Trinity, the unique relationship between the Father and the Son concretized in
the Holy Spirit.

The marital bond is an exclusive relationship, with a relational intimacy uniquely shared
between two people who are sexually “other” and who come together in a lifelong, holy, bonded
connection that brings glory and honor to God. It not only represents the dynamic present
within the eternal divine life, but also reflects God’s love for creation and the holy exclusive
relationship that God desires to have with his people, as articulated by the OT prophets and in
Eph 5. This bond binding a man and a woman together in an exclusive relationship is a
metaphor showing how God’s love for his people also creates an exclusive, holy bond which no
other relationship is to rival. But marriage is not the only relationship whereby which men and
women are able to reflect the divine love. Marriage is “one expression of the divine will to
community.”

Since not everyone is married, or will marry, singleness is also an equally alternate lifestyle
choice and a healthy means of expressing oneself sexually. Since Grenz understood that
humanness necessitates sexuality (i.e., being male or female), to be sexual “means to be

indicating that the childless marriage is somehow “incomplete” (see K. T. Magnuson, “Marriage, Procreation and
more careful reading of Grenz’s position, however, see Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, Kingdom Ethics:
Following Jesus in Contemporary Context (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 303-5.

844 SGRS, 302-3.
846 Grenz, Sexual Ethics, 181.
847 Grenz, Sexual Ethics, 181-222.
incomplete as an isolated individual.” This state of incompleteness and isolation thwarts people from reflecting the fullness of humanity, and thus the fullness of God’s image. Needing fulfillment from beyond ourselves is the very dynamic “that leads to the desire to develop relationships with others and ultimately with God.” This dynamic—the drive toward bonding with others in community—exists for marrieds and singles alike as an expression of fundamental human sexuality, which “goes deeper than body parts, potential roles in reproduction, and genital acts.” Grenz admitted, “Most of the bonds we form are nonmarital,” with perhaps the most obvious bond being the relationships that are formed with single people, which are “neither necessarily permanent nor exclusive.” Grenz explained:

The nonexclusive nature of all nonmarital bonds provides a powerful image of another dimension of the divine love. Whereas marriage is by its nature intended to be exclusive, the nonmarital bond is expansive, unbounded, always open to the inclusion of others. As a result it is an appropriate representation of the openness of God’s love. Nonmarital relationships remind us that the loving God continually seeks to include within the circle those yet outside the boundaries of God’s covenantal people.

The expansive, unbounded, consistent openness to the inclusion of others that is characteristic of the nonmarital bond reflects the characteristic of grace within the Trinity.

7.3.3. Deficient Sexual Expression: Same-Sex Unions

For Grenz, the issue at stake with any “illicit sexual relationship” is that it “mars the divine image.” This malformation results from any kind of genital sexual activity based purely on physical attraction, selfish intentions, or in any nonmarital union. This also includes the

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848 Grenz, *Sexual Ethics*, 193. For a negative view of Grenz’s reading of all human relationships through the so-called “lens of the sexual,” reflecting the so-called “Freudian spirit of the age,” see DeFranza, “Intersex and the Image,” 221-22. To concur with this reading, however, would mean that DeFranza adequately allows Grenz to define his own terms. However, she seems too driven by her own argument to fairly read his work without convolution, doing more robust eisegesis on Grenz’s corpus than exegesis, creating a much more Freudian Grenz than his writings actually allow, meanwhile ignoring his theological descriptions and definitions of terms.


851 He referred to this as the essence of adultery, indeed “the triumph of *eros* over *agape*” (Grenz, *Sexual Ethics*, 111). “Whenever *eros* triumphs over *agape*,” he explained elsewhere, “unethical relationships emerge” (*MQ*, 291).
homosexual union. In addressing the issue, Grenz resorted not to biblical proof-texts or safe attempts to echo denominational party-lines or even the historic position of the church. He also did not follow cultural trends on the issue. Instead, he found that it is amidst a “Christian ethic of love” that “biblical precepts, commands, and prohibitions gain significance.” Therein “texts about homosexuality, which must be read in the context of the whole Bible, must inform our understanding of the message of the Bible.” Within a trinitarian context of scripture, before coming directly to particular biblical passages, Grenz understood the relational imago Dei, reflected as male and female, as establishing the very deficiency of the homosexual sex act. Indeed, human sexual intercourse is “the coming together of two persons as sexual beings into a one-flesh union… at the deepest level of their beings.” It is “readily expressed” only between a man and a woman, where the whole human body is engaged, but primarily those body parts which “most explicitly symbolize their existence as embodied, sexual beings that most explicitly separate male from female, and that most readily allow male and female to complement the other.”

In same sex intercourse, on the contrary, the symbolic dimension of two-becoming-one present in male-female sex is lost. For in it, some other body part “routinely substitutes for the sexual organ that neither partner can provide.” When this occurs, “because it is not the definitive mark of the person as a sexual being, it is not normally viewed as sexual.” Because it is not between two different sexes, there is nothing inherent about that sexual union that would limit it to two, privileging an exclusive “monogamous” commitment based on human personhood (i.e., embodied and therefore sexual). Viewed from this perspective, Grenz argued that “same sex

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852 Brian Harris concludes that in this way Grenz was inconsistent in his revisioning project for evangelical theology, asserting that with “culture” as a source for his revisioned program, Grenz should have revisioned his theology and ethics in a manner that would affirm homosexual unions. Here, Harris asserts, “the voice of culture has not been heeded as a serious conversation partner,” indicating a “failure to follow through on his own proposal” (Harris, The Theological Method of Stanley J. Grenz, 249, 256-58).

853 Grenz, Welcoming But Not Affirming, 97.

854 Grenz, Welcoming But Not Affirming, 110.
intercourse entails a confusing of the bond of informal friendship with the male-female sexual bond of marriage.” The marriage of man and woman therefore remains as the normative physical, social, and moral sign that humans are not designed to be isolated individuals, or to focus on relationships with those who are only like us. Rather, humans are created to be in a relationship with the human other and the divine Other. 855 This again gives ample illustration of the exclusive bond between husband-wife which displays the exclusivity of the divine-human relationship, which in turn is a feature grounded in the transcendence of the eternal triune dynamic. 856

7.3.4. Transsexuality

It must be stated from the outset that Grenz did not explicitly address transsexuality in his writings. But since the issue of “intersex” provided the basis for a recent critique of Grenz’s views on sexuality, 857 it is worth briefly exploring connections between transsexuality 858 (or

856 For an example that uses the Trinity as a basis for resisting sharp definitions of gender, see Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., Sexuality and the Christian Body (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1999), 195-268. However, see the critique offered by Bernd Wannenwetsch, “Old Docetism—New Moralism? Questioning the New Direction in the Homosexuality Debate,” Modern Theology 16 (2000): 353-64, esp. pp. 363-64, for the critique against using the Trinity as a model for sexual unions. Wannenwetsch prefers that sexual unions instead be modelled after Christ and the church, an analogy which Grenz utilizes while Rogers does not. Incidentally, the kind of critique offered by Wannenwetsch may also be why Grenz became less-oriented toward utilizing the “social Trinity” as his transcendent base, and became more inclined toward a revelational Christocentric image Dei for his access to the transcendent triune being. Although unaware about whether Grenz may have addressed Rogers directly, Grenz’s view would have understood Rogers’s position (see the comment about Rogers’s “marginalization of the meaning of bodily differences” in Wannenwetsch, “Old Docetism—New Moralism?” 364) as having relegated human sexuality to the periphery of humanness (see Grenz, “Is God Sexual?” 30).
858 The adjective “transsexual” is defined thus: “1. Of or pertaining to transsexuality; having physical characteristics of one sex and psychological characteristics of the other. 2. Of or pertaining to both sexes. Also, intersexual.” As a noun: “A transsexual person. Also, one whose sex has been changed by surgery” (Oxford English Dictionary Online, s.v., “transsexual,” http://www.oed.com:80/Entry/205059 [accessed 12 June 2011]). “Transsexualism” is defined thus: “The state or condition of being transsexual, manifested in an overwhelming desire to belong to the opposite sex” (Oxford English Dictionary Online, s.v., “transsexualism,” http://www.oed.com:80/Entry/205060 [accessed 12 June 2011]).
transgenderedness\textsuperscript{859} and intersex\textsuperscript{860} along with features that might be drawn from Grenz’s engagement with these issues in some ways. Contrary to Megan DeFranza’s understanding of what entails Grenz’s “essential” categories for human sexuality,\textsuperscript{861} which (for DeFranza) presumably means the categories of “male” and “female,” Grenz actually much more carefully nuanced his position. While DeFranza never acknowledges this in her critique, on the very page she cites, Grenz stated, “In most cases, a person’s genetically based sex forms the foundation out of which normal psychological sexual identity emerges.”\textsuperscript{862} He elsewhere stated this: “To be human means to be an embodied creature, and generally to be embodied means to be either male or female.”\textsuperscript{863} These statements provide enough ground for Grenz to avoid the critique that he “failed even to mention that there are those whose bodies do not naturally fit the categories [of male and female].”\textsuperscript{864}

Most interesting about Grenz’s position, however, are the essential provisions his theology makes for those in transsexual, transgendered, or intersex situations. Addressing the question of the sinfulness of homosexuality, he expressed the importance of delineating an understanding of sin itself (referring “basically to the failure to measure up to God’s standards”), and the relationship between sin, fallenness, and condemnation.\textsuperscript{865} Because of the world’s present fallen state, it does not measure up to the fullness of God’s intent, yet meanwhile longs for the liberation which it will experience at the consummation of God’s activity in history. Similarly,

\textsuperscript{859} Often used more generically and inclusively, the adjective “transgender” is defined thus: “Of, relating to, or designating a person whose identity does not conform unambiguously to conventional notions of male or female gender, but combines or moves between these; transgendered” (Oxford English Dictionary Online, s.v., “transgender,” http://www.oed.com:80/Entry/247649 [accessed 12 June 2011]).

\textsuperscript{860} Defined as “the abnormal condition of being intermediate between male and female; hermaphroditism” (Concise Oxford English Dictionary, 11th ed., s.v., “intersex”).

\textsuperscript{861} Incidentally, on the page DeFranza cites, Grenz did not offer any “categories he believes are ‘essential’” (contra DeFranza, “Intersex and the Imago,” 193), but rather offered his take on the “essential nature of sexuality” itself, conceived through the doctrines of creation and the resurrection, with their inherent implications for understanding human sexuality (see Grenz, Sexual Ethics, 24-26).

\textsuperscript{862} Grenz, Sexual Ethics, 24 (italics added for emphasis).

\textsuperscript{863} Grenz, “Is God Sexual?” 25 (italics added for emphasis).

\textsuperscript{864} DeFranza, “Intersex and the Imago,” 193.

\textsuperscript{865} Grenz, Sexual Ethics, 231-32.
human fallenness extends beyond human actions “to our existence in its various dimensions—including body (which will be transformed at the resurrection) and disposition (which one day will be conformed to the character of Christ).” Present physical and dispositional features that fail to reflect God’s design will be remedied in the future, therefore, when God’s design will be “fully present.”  

A practical situation occurred in a local church ministry context where Grenz was summoned for his theological expertise on this point. The scenario included a person who had become a Christian, was baptized and received into local church membership. Sometime afterward, some church members approached the leadership to suggest church discipline since they understood this member to be actually from the opposite sex of what was being presented in public, and which the church had been led to believe. Thus they thought this member was deliberately deceiving the congregation about his/her sexuality. Upon investigation, the situation was understood as involving a transgendered claimant who had a surgical operation over a decade prior in order to allow this individual to attain, to some outward degree, the gender which was claimed to belong to this individual’s professed “true self-identity.” A leading surgeon, a certified psychologist, and a theologian (Grenz) were consulted by the church leadership about the matter. And while Grenz provided no written statement, one of the church leaders involved recently recounted Grenz’s position:

Stan’s essential point was that it was critical to understand our human sexuality under the rubric of our human fallenness. The dissidents’ position was predicated on the assumption that from conception onwards we are all unambiguously male or female. The effects of the fall however are not merely spiritual (separation from God, being subject to his wrath, etc.) but also extend to the physical creation which “groans” with longing for its liberation, and that “groaning” includes reference to our physicality, and hence our gender identity as a fundamental aspect of our humanness. Accordingly, we ought not to be surprised that there are a small percentage of human persons who are neither unambiguously male nor unambiguously female from birth, i.e. their gender hard-wiring does not clearly gel with their genitalia. This dissonance in such cases also

866 Grenz, Sexual Ethics, 232.
extends to the effects of the fall on their psychological development, and all of this is further affected by a botching up in their fallen nurturing environment (as with all the rest of us). Hence, what is the church to do with persons in its membership who are struggling with these effects of the fall of creation? Excommunication is clearly not the way to go (assuming that the individual is in other respects living a consistent Christian life), not least because it cuts them off from the support of a (generally!) supporting and healing community.

Stan also, as I recall, noted that in the case in question, since the surgical operation which effected the gender change had been carried out [over a decade] previously, the demand by the dissidents that [this person] undergo a reversing operation as part of his [=her] repentance (even in the extremely unlikely circumstance of finding a surgeon who might be prepared to perform such an operation), was somewhat parallel to demanding, in the case of a married [person] who had initiated a divorce some [many] years previously in order to marry a paramour, that he/she should as a proof of his/her penitence, return to [the] first spouse as a requirement for congregational membership. Apart from the multiple relational barriers to such, it is contradicted by Paul’s call for peace in 1 Cor 7:15.867

As seen in the above interview account, Grenz was highly consistent in his understanding of non-ideal scenarios encountered in the present fallen situation. But he believed that to simply accept the fallen features as part of a paradigmatic principle would be a denial of the gospel, and the triune God’s working in the world. Grenz understood God’s ideal as conceived via a biblical account of creation, the resurrection, and the eschaton. What was really important for him, then, was that there will come a day when fallenness will be completely overturned forever, where the Creator’s ultimate intention will forever remain. This is far more than any kind of socio-scientific rendering of the present situations, but is a radically biblically-derived position, which shaped both Grenz’s theology and ethical engagement. And it is this very transformational, eschatologically-oriented, Jesus-as-the-*imago-Dei*-centered understanding of human identity that made Grenz’s approach to these issues distinctly trinitarian.

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867 In order to preserve necessary confidentiality in accordance with properly ethical pastoral practice, further details of this case, including church, leaders, and individuals involved cannot be disclosed (personal interview, 27 May 2011). Comments in brackets are also meant to obscure details of the situation.
In his book, *Women in the Church*, Grenz did not begin his apologetic for the egalitarian position with Genesis 1, but asserted “mutuality” as a principle reflective of “the new humanity” that God is in the process of creating. This new humanity will be ultimately complete in the eschaton, when it will enjoy the fullest sense of community, but which nevertheless is reflected in a deeply mutual relationality in the present situation. while unfortunately failing to acknowledge the gift-office fallacy, Grenz wanted to see women and men equally sharing all positions in church leadership among those most gifted to complete ministry tasks. Earlier he grounded his position in the relational analogy of the Trinity, and thus his relational view of the *imago Dei*, which for Grenz also carried the same function of mutual submission as the household code. He understood God’s goal as establishing a people who are the *imago Dei*, who presently enjoy the future realization of this as a foretaste while being transformed into Christ’s image, where the Fall’s effects no longer need to dominate human relationships. Having inaugurated the realization of God’s (original) intention for humankind in this eschatological vision, then, “the Church is to be the community in which such differences do not constitute the foundation of personal identity and corporate activity.” Application of this point might be as follows:

The task of the Church is to allow this vision to transform the present. Our corporate life ought to point toward the perfect fellowship of God with humankind that will characterize God’s eschatological community, which is a fellowship of mutuality. Just as our Lord’s teachings undermine racial and socio-economic discrimination, so also his followers can no longer acknowledge gender as a basis for assigning responsibilities within the fellowship. If we would be the foretaste of the community God is establishing, we must create structures that

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868 Arguably this could be considered a theological issue (anthropology), but since other evangelical ethicists consider it an ethical matter (Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 313-24), there is no question about it being addressed that way here.


promote mutuality, which includes welcoming the contribution of both male and female in the Church.\textsuperscript{872}

The basis for this vision may have changed slightly on the eve of Grenz’s movement away from the \emph{analogia relationis} towards a more Christocentric revelational approach to the Trinity, especially as this related intimately to his ecclesiology. And while parting from some of his egalitarian colleagues in shifting the basis of his argument,\textsuperscript{873} this did not by any means diminish his egalitarian commitment. Grenz went beyond other social trinitarians who inadvertently seemed to forfeit the transcendent base for their position. Indeed, it seems that the revelational Christocentric trinitarianism was key to maintaining his egalitarian position as it provided the ground for maintaining the Creator/creature distinction while still affirming Jesus of Nazareth as the inaugurator of the new humanity displaying God’s ideal of justice and equality for all.\textsuperscript{874} Jesus provides access to the transcendent basis for human relationships while also transcending human relationality. And as the ontological mediating feature of human relationships, himself a human, he is able to blaze the ideal way forward for human (and ecclesial) ethics.

Grenz also viewed ordained clergy as ontological representatives of the Lord insofar as they represent the church, Christ’s body. “Because Christ is creating one new human reality (Eph. 2:15) in which distinctions of race, class and gender are overcome (Gal. 3:28),” Grenz argued, “the church—and consequently Christ—is best represented by an ordained ministry


\textsuperscript{873} E.g., Kevin Giles, \textit{The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate} (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002). However, see an assessment of current attempts to build both the egalitarian and complementarian gender arguments upon intertrinitarian relations in Sexton, “The State of the Evangelical Trinitarian Resurgence,” 193-95, especially with Graham Cole’s echo of Bird and Shillaker’s call for “a moratorium on using Trinitarian arguments in support of any view related to the women-in-ministry debate” (Michael F. Bird and Robert Shillaker, “Subordination in the Trinity and Gender Roles: A Response to Recent Discussions,” \textit{Trinity Journal} 29 NS [2008]: 82).

consisting of persons from various races, from all social classes, and from both genders.\textsuperscript{875}

Identifying Jesus as offering a critique of first century social structures that at the time only a male could have done, Grenz declared, “On behalf of women Jesus acted as the paradigmatic human standing against the patriarchal system, bringing women to participate in the new order where sex distinctions no longer determine rank and worth.” The implication for this, of course, is that the church “best reflects, embodies, and announces the liberating significance of Jesus’ incarnation as a male by following the principle of mutuality he pioneered. This mutuality emerges as women and men work together in all dimensions of church life, including the ordained ministry.”\textsuperscript{876}

\textbf{7.3.6. Business Ethics}

A final area of consideration as a test-case for the trinitarian nature of Grenz’s ethics concerns his approach to business ethics. Grenz was concerned that Christians discover a sense of divinely-entrusted mission for their roles and work in the marketplace. While part of faithful witness, he also saw this as part of participating in God’s goals for the world. Although profitability is important, profitability was merely part of facilitating God’s program, which understood legitimate business as “a servant to the public, seeking to promote participation in ‘the good life’.”\textsuperscript{877} But the whole point of the good life, Grenz argued, is “nothing else but God’s goal for his creation.” This goal is “‘community,’ the establishing of a reconciled people living in harmony with creation and enjoying fellowship with the triune God.” All claims about any kind of “good life” must be measured according to this goal of establishing community not just in the present, but in the eschaton, “in the highest sense.”\textsuperscript{878}

\textsuperscript{875} Grenz, “Biblical Priesthood and Women in Ministry,” 282.
\textsuperscript{876} Grenz, “Biblical Priesthood and Women in Ministry,” 282-83.
\textsuperscript{878} Grenz, “God’s Business,” 23.
Grenz understood business as legitimate insofar as “it facilitates human participation in some aspect of the community God is creating.” The two marks of God’s community that commerce ought to facilitate are, first, “the widespread enjoyment of the good things of the earth as capsulized in the petition in the Lord’s prayer, ‘Give us this day our daily bread’.” Second and most importantly, “God’s highest purpose is that humans organize themselves so that they reflect the character of the triune God, namely, love.” A further outgrowth of this is that “human societies are to honour God’s desire that justice prevail in the world.” Therefore, in fulfilling its “primary role,” every business ought to “facilitate love and justice in human activities and to promote harmony within creation.” It is the realization of these things that forms the foundation for the Christian sense of “vocation,” which in turn leads a Christian to understand that her mission in business is “to engage in the ongoing task of appraising the performance of the company in its calling to serve God’s purposes in the world.”

In 2003, Grenz and a professional medical doctor offered business seminars at churches in the greater Vancouver area on the nature of human success. While in his lecture notes he did not refer specifically to the *imago Dei* and the meaningful role that it had begun to play in his writings, he drew a significant principle illustrated from the creation account: “the goodness that we discover in all aspects of life comes as a gift of grace that is to be received in gratitude.” Grenz observed that from Genesis 1, as God created humankind and then rested, so humans began by resting, then working, establishing a principle that we receive first and then exert effort. This is keenly related to features of the ecclesial *imago Dei*, where endowment and empowerment are given for the sake of a task. Specifically, the divine image is given with a goal in view, and therefore is both a present reality and a goal which can only be realized by divine enablement and

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accomplishment. The deeper implication Grenz found for this can be summed up in lives that exude worship, as he affirmed that “in all aspects of life, we receive first and then exert effort. In this manner, we live our lives in gratitude for what we have received.”

7.4. Summary

From the role that ethics played in trinitarian aggregation, and with the test-cases explored in this chapter, a sensible judgment can now be made about what it meant for Grenz’s ethics to be trinitarian, how this related to his earlier and later thought, and also whether Grenz’s ethic and ethical engagement adequately displayed the attempt to be thoroughly trinitarian. It seems to be the case that Grenz was much more conscious of his trinitarian emphases in his latter work than in the earlier, although the earlier work engaged ethics more directly, as well as the notion of a Christian ethic. But although his work became more exacting in its aim for building a new ontology maintaining the immanent Trinity’s ontological priority while granting epistemological priority to God’s work in salvation, it seems that Grenz’s work can be properly called trinitarian throughout, from the earliest point until the end. For Grenz this meant giving a properly theological account of God as the triune Creator, with humans as God’s creatures, made by God in and to be the image of God, with the enormous implications this brings for a robust, complete theology of the Christian life with all its impending ethical readiness and comprehension for navigating the important ethical issues faced in life. And thus it was this thoroughly trinitarian construction—this theological work necessarily yielding ethics—that became his priority.

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As Grenz worked towards an articulation of the *vision* (i.e., the action of *seeing*) of the eschatologically-realist vision (read: image), his ethic of being would also take shape *en route* and accordingly, thus leading to genuine fellowship, unity in truth, faithful Christian witness, and God-glorifying worship.\footnote{See §3.1.3. of this thesis and cp. with the critique that this position “begs the question of what constitutes ontological reality in Grenz’s mind. If truth can only be known in the eschatological future because that is the only true reality, then can one know for certain that this present world actually exists?” (Lenow, “Community in Ethics,” 148n72). However, see Grenz’s provision for this: “In short the biblical vision of God at work establishing community is not merely a great idea that God devised in all eternity. It is an outworking of God’s own eternal reality.” And thus at the heart of the quest for human community “is nothing less than the quest to mirror in the midst of all creation the eternal reality of God and thereby to be the imago Dei” (Grenz, “The Universality of the ‘Jesus-Story’,” 110).}

This takes place in community, in the church, and furthermore means that “the church is to pioneer the future community in which God dwells with his people; and… the church is to explore the implications that the vision of the future has for life in the present.”\footnote{Grenz, “What Does it Mean to be Trinitarian in Doctrine?” 8}

Therefore, at whatever point, and almost in spite of the emphases in Grenz’s particular conceptions of the doctrine(s) of the Trinity, his ethics were always grounded in an understanding of the triune God as the basis for his ethics. Indeed, as with his inchoate theology and the ensuing epistemology of theology, while necessarily flowing from theology, unique trinitarian engagement seems to have always existed for Grenz in a reciprocal, mutually-informing, perichoretic (?) relationship with his ethic/s.
Chapter 8:

Conclusion:

Evangelical Theology’s Reception of Grenz’s Trinitarian Project

8.1. Grenz’s Theology in Hindsight

This thesis has thus far attempted to highlight the primary features inherent in Stanley Grenz’s theology—features which he believed to be at the very heart and center of not just theology, but the Christian faith itself. These features are trinitarian insofar as they are distinctly and thoroughly shaped and fashioned by the doctrine of the Trinity. And they are distinctly evangelical insofar as they are committed to both Grenz’s self-conscious situatedness in the evangelical tradition, reflecting even the more conservative spectrum of this movement, as well as his commitment to serving it. By way of summarizing the findings of this thesis, the issue of his evangelical commitment will be considered first.

8.1.1. A Comprehensive Conservative Evangelical Project

Grenz was labelled by both critics and backers as a postconservative theologian. By critics, he was called “postconservatism’s Professor,” with Brian McLaren being its pastor and Roger Olson and Robert Webber being its publicists. Supporters like Roger Olson have also labelled him as “postconservative,” embodying a new “style” of evangelical theology. And while the various groups within Evangelicalism have somewhat tended to hijack Grenz’s theology for

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884 Justin Taylor, “An Introduction to Postconservativism and the Rest of This Book,” in Reclaiming the Center, ed. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth and Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 18. See, however, Grenz, “Review of Brian D. McLaren, The Last Word and the Word After That,” Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 52 (2009): 663-65, which shows that while Grenz had a wide-range of companions, he did not accept them uncritically. Note also Roger Olson’s comments that “[Grenz] told me privately on a number of occasions that he was ‘gravely concerned’ about open theism and the emergent church network [sic]. He considered people in both movements friends, but he was dismayed by what he regarded as their all too easy and quick abandonment of theological tradition in favor of theological or ecclesiastical innovation” (Roger E. Olson, “Stanley J. Grenz’s Contribution to Evangelical Theology,” Princeton Theological Review 12 [2006]: 27).
their own agendas as they have mounted their forces, in the face of stringent criticism Grenz saw himself as “hopelessly conservative” in his approach to the evangelical tradition. One of the most frequent areas he was critiqued for, his doctrine of scripture, has received much more generous readings from more even-handed scholarship, which suggests in some ways that his view of scripture was understood very well. His desire to develop a trinitarian, pneumatologically-driven, Christ-centered, account of and hermeneutic for scripture whereby which faithful biblical exegesis would be carried out was completely missed by most North American evangelicals who were aware of his work. And even today, in light of the significant developments in the theological interpretation of scripture school, Grenz’s approach would probably be much more welcome in the evangelical scholarly guild than it was in previous years. Other critics who have suggested that his method had become “shackled” to the culture also took very little if any account of Grenz’s intent to develop a distinctly evangelical theology which saw the triune God at work in the world both in and through culture.

One of the key features of Grenz’s proclamation of the gospel message (kerygma) was that it was shaped by theology’s primary norm—scripture. In particular locations, the Spirit is said to speak “through scripture” in the situations wherein we live, as we seek to proclaim the

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885 See the propagation of the labeling whilst explicitly refusing to engage with Grenz’s writings in Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, Why We’re Not Emergent: By Two Guys Who Should Be (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 21-23; and see also the “Foreword” by Brian McLaren in RTC2, which, while capturing many of the themes in Grenz’s writings, seemed to romantically set Grenz forward as a visionary theologian even more “radical” than McLaren himself (RTC2, 7-14). Again, for Grenz’s own self-aware and contrary reading, see his posthumously published, “Review of Brian D. McLaren, The Last Word and the Word After That,” JETS 52 (2009): 663-65.

886 Personal correspondence between Grenz and Kovach (2 Mar. 1998).


888 E.g., while not entirely convinced by his proposal, there is an entirely different level of thoughtful engagement with Grenz’s position in Daniel J. Treier, Virtue and the Voice of God: Toward Theology as Wisdom (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 77-78, 141-44, 194-95.

889 E.g., Knowles, Beyond Evangelicalism, 1, 68, 82, 172, 181.
manner that can speak within the historical-social context.” This commitment to take culture seriously does not come without possible dangers of seeing the biblical message accommodated to cultural dictates. But this is why vigilance is needed, so that the gospel continues “to speak to culture,” without being swallowed up by it. In other words, Grenz did not grant culture the weight of “being the normative standard determining the nature of the gospel message itself, but as a conversation partner that as theologians we must take seriously in our constructive articulations of the ‘faith once delivered.’” In other words, culture provided Grenz the essential conceptual tools that “can assist the church in expressing its world view in current thought-forms and in addressing current problems and outlooks.”

This perspective on culture is remarkably similar to one communicated recently by Tim Keller, Pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York City. In a lecture entitled, “Being the Church in Our Culture,” Keller addressed the issue of how to relate doctrine to culture amidst culture’s ever-changing situations. His understanding of gospel contextualization saw gospel ministry as aiming to see the cross as the completion of a person’s “cultural narrative” because “only in Christ can your cultural story have a happy ending…” In other words, Jesus “both confronts and completes the cultural narratives.” Ever aware of the possibility of over or under-adapting to culture, Keller defines contextualization as “not giving people what they

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890 BF, 161. This is not merely a speaking that can be discerned individually, lapsing into a necessary subjectivism, but is discerned within the context of the redeemed, gathered community which is embedded in a social-historical context. See also BF, 68, 92, 160-66; and RTC2, 217-19.
891 RET, 99, 106-8 (italics in original); and BF, 151, 159.
893 TCG2, 19-20.
894 Cp. with Grenz: “Personal reception of the gospel includes becoming aware of one’s need and discovering that Christ is the answer to that need” (TCG2, 504).
want, so you’re adapting to their culture…. Contextualization rather is giving God’s answers, which they may not want, to the questions they’re asking, in forms that they can comprehend.\footnote{T]\footnote{T} Tim Keller, “Being the Church in Our Culture,” address delivered at the Reform and Resurge Conference, Seattle, WA, May 2006, http://thesurgence.com/2006/07/04/being-the-church-in-our-culture-audio (accessed 18 Oct. 2011).

The striking similarities between what Grenz saw as theological construction in particular contexts and what Keller defines as “contextualization” suggests that the descriptions Grenz’s work often received from critics and advocates served to obfuscate the reception of his project within evangelical theology. In other words, Grenz was deeply misread. He repeatedly recognized and stated this,\footnote{E.g., see Grenz, “Toward an Undomesticated Gospel,” 456-57; Grenz, “The Virtue of Ambiguity,” 361-65; as well as the handwritten notes in the margins of two papers written by Stephen D. Kovach, which show Grenz’s point-by-point alarm and responses to many of the common characterizations of his work: “Christ as Community: Inclusivism and the Theological Method of Stanley J. Grenz,” unpublished paper presented at the Evangelical Theological Society, 21 Nov. 1997, Santa Clara, CA; and “Evangelical Identity and Postmodern Notions of Community: Stanley J. Grenz as a Test Case,” unpublished paper presented at the Southeastern Regional Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Knoxville, TN, 1998. See also the personal exchange between Grenz and Millard Erickson about Erickson’s paper presented at the Nov. 1995 meeting of the Evangelical Philosophical Society entitled, “Is Post-conservative, Revisioning Evangelicalism an Adequate Response to Postmodernism?” In this written exchange, Grenz also commented on Millard Erickson, “Review of Theology for the Community of God,” Southwestern Journal of Theology 38 (1996): 45, which prompted Grenz to state, “I seem to find your private comments generally more supportive than your public statements” (personal letter to Millard Erickson, 21 Feb. 1996).} but with seemingly very little if any promptings of revision or even reconsideration. This has already been observed throughout this thesis, and may often be the result of a common failure of Grenz interpreters, thinking that the ideas he lays out in his “historical” or “cultural” and “contextual” sketches are those that he also embraces; meanwhile they remain simply the ways in which he sees the developments of ideas closely in light of which he proceeds to construct his own subsequent theological positions. In this way, he may also be one of the best readers of his interlocutors while the same level of generosity was rarely returned. But the other issues relate to the very shape of his construction, the desire to rearticulate doctrine in a new context as he sought “creatively and constructively to rethink evangelical theological method in order to lead it out of what he perceived to be its bondage to modernity.”\footnote{Vanhoozer, “On the Very Idea of a Theological System,” 182.} Some of this was seen earlier in what could have been Grenz’s direct response to


\footnote{\textsuperscript{897} Vanhoozer, “On the Very Idea of a Theological System,” 182.}
the critique of Pannenberg made by Shults. Contra Pannenberg, Grenz took the postmodern challenge seriously, he integrated anthropological insights into the theological task, and he avoided Pannenberg’s modernistic language. And yet Grenz also displayed his soft-foundationalism in how the doctrine of the Trinity informs and answers the questions leading to a relevant, constructive Christian theology. Here this issue of building a theology did not minimize questions arising from the context, since these questions are an essential feature of theology’s “context.” But Grenz wanted to bring the doctrine of the Trinity, epistemologically prioritized and historically established, to bear on these, which is where, in light of the supposed demise of foundationalism in the postmodern situation, Grenz’s Trinity was found able to serve as theology’s entire structure. And he developed one of the key postmodern ideas—the community theme—in his own theology. This, of course, was something he noted as largely absent even in Pannenberg’s work. And yet by elevating the social Trinity to theology’s center Pannenberg was acknowledged to have provided the foundation for Grenz’s move to “community,” which he observed as central to scripture and systematic theology.

If Grenz’s program really is organic, as this thesis has argued, then a huge burden remains on those who were critical of his project for taking Evangelicalism in a new direction, especially those who previously endorsed his work. And yet none of these have reckoned with the overwhelming trinitarian shape of his work. Millard Erickson claimed that Grenz’s view of postmodernism is “key to understanding and evaluating his proposal.” Al Mohler stated that Grenz is “well described as postmodern in approach and worldview,” ascribing to Grenz a view understood as denying the absolute truth claims of the gospel, and ultimately rejecting a genuinely evangelical system. In The Matrix proposal, Grenz stated his position: “Basically, we

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898 See p. 36 of this thesis.
899 See p. 63 of this thesis.
900 Erickson, Postmodernising the Faith, 83.
901 Mohler, Jr., “The Integrity of the Evangelical Tradition,” 81, 84.
are carving out a postfoundationist method for the postmodern context.” And yet, his work was intended to be a “response” to this context. Grenz explained that in his work

I would attempt to set forth the dimension of the division of theology most appropriate to the postmodern discussion and show how the theological method I am using, and especially the trinitarian, communitarian, eschatological nature of theology, provides the contours of an appropriate Christian response to the postmodern problematic in this aspect of theology.

He went further to clarify that

[t]aken together, the project would explore how the type of theology I am advocating results in a coherent statement of central aspects of the Christian faith that provides a point of conversation with the contemporary context in which the church is called to live and minister. In short, the series would delineate a matrix of postmodern Christian theology, one that is trinitarian, communitarian and eschatological.902

Much of the difficulty Grenz received from critics was on the basis of his view of culture being some kind of capitulation that supposedly forfeited the gospel, immersing it in the culture in such a way that the gospel never returned as gospel. However, never considered by critics was the trinitarian impetus and manner in which he arrived at the conclusions for his project, and how his doctrine of the Trinity lent both towards this conclusion and to this kind of engagement with this twisted and fallen world that is still very much God’s creation, and in which God is manifestly at work in a manifold manner. The issue of gospel and culture continues to be an emotionally-charged one amongst evangelicals.903 But for all of Grenz’s engagement with what he read to be the postmodern shift in culture, it must be noted that he was always involved in seeking to discern relevant issues in the culture around him. If the dominant mood in the culture was being discerned as something else (other than postmodern), he no doubt would have been there, trying to theologically meet the demanding needs of the present day context. The overall assessment of Grenz’s relationship to postmodernism could not be succinctly captured any

better than it has been by Kevin Vanhoozer when he stated that “Grenz is not so much capitulating to as correlating with postmodern sensibilities.” And as these sensibilities were discerned, Grenz sought to bring the doctrine of the Trinity, which is the heart of the Christian understanding of God and an essential dimension for maintaining the Bible’s central message, to bear on them in the proclamation of the gospel. And therefore in this way not only was Grenz’s project an evangelical one, but it was also a thoroughly trinitarian one.

8.1.2. A Thoroughly Trinitarian Project

In his survey of recent evangelical trinitarian developments Fred Sanders made an acute assessment of the state of the doctrine of the Trinity within evangelical theology—namely, that the trinitarian resurgence took place entirely separate from evangelical theology. In his narrative account Sanders declared it impossible to report on any major trinitarian work by an established evangelical thinker because there simply were none. However contestable this claim might be, the situation at least in the North American setting was for the most part as Sanders described. Sanders did, however, note that evangelicals had produced some work. But this was relegated to footnotes, mainly as “accessible introductions and summaries.” And this is where he located Grenz’s work, unfortunately. This was not as though Sanders was not aware of The Matrix of Christian Theology project; it was simply that he did not realize the weight that Grenz had invested in the trinitarian shape of the work, which reflected something that had been brewing in Grenz’s own thinking for quite some time, as the present thesis has shown. The reception of Grenz’s work usually read him as anything but a distinctly trinitarian operator. This

904 Vanhoozer, “Evangelicalism and the Church,” 67.
908 Although the mistaken account of that series, said to be made “complete” with the books on christology and pneumatology, betrays not a little lack of familiarity with Grenz’s emphases and this particular explorative project. The series was always meant to be six-volumes (SGRS, xi), with ecclesiology following christology, and eschatology following pneumatology, which was a very important framing for Grenz’s accountings of the systematic loci.
could possibly be explained by the pejorative readings of Grenz’s work often designated by evangelicals, which may have considerably put Sanders off toward Grenz’s work. Or perhaps the failure to see the scope and intention of Grenz’s aim and reach may have resulted from a reticence toward carefully reading his work in light of what other evangelical critics were already saying. But from a survey of his writings, it is plain to see that Grenz was a trinitarian theologian with a much more ambitious project than the evangelical scholarly world was aware of. And it is for this reason that whilst engaging Grenz’s writings for his own work on anthropology, David Kelsey notes that for Grenz, “the doctrine of the Trinity explains, not what it is to be a person, but how the triune God makes us ‘selves’.”

For Grenz, the Trinity and the doctrine of the Trinity did the work. This is where he would disagree with Brunner, who held that the doctrine of the Trinity “defends the central faith of the Bible and of the Church.” Brunner did not believe that the doctrine of the Trinity was central to the church’s message, but only guarded it. Grenz, on the other hand, held that it not only guarded the church’s message, but was equally an essential component of it.

Roger Olson noted that Grenz was the only evangelical theologian who maintained the doctrine of the Trinity at the center of his constructive proposal. After surveying the canvas of possible options, including Volf, Bloesch, and Vanhoozer, Olson stated succinctly: “Stan is the evangelical trinitarian thinker.” This was also acknowledged in Kärkkäinen’s survey of the “evangelical” doctrine of the Trinity, where he pointed out that “so far theologically and ecumenically the most promising evangelical Trinitarian proposal, in critical dialogue with voices from all Christian traditions, has come from the pen of the late Stanley J. Grenz.” But that the Trinity was central to Grenz’s program did not explain why it was. Olson suggested that this

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911 Personal interview with Roger Olson, 23 Apr. 2009, Waco, TX (italics indicate verbal emphasis).
912 Kärkkäinen, The Trinity, 216.
resulted from Grenz’s “antipathy to individualism and modernism within Evangelicalism.”\textsuperscript{913} While this was clearly a part of his proposal, it does not account for what the doctrine of the Trinity was meant to do in it, which the present thesis has sought to do, spanning much more than anthropology. The primary catalyst for Grenz’s work was derived from his time with Pannenberg, first as a doctoral student, and then during a sabbatical year. This influence set his course toward the reconceptualization of the entire systematic enterprise, which he would need time to flesh out. Accordingly, the distinct methodological features that were shaped by Pannenberg’s doctrine of the Trinity were the same ones that Grenz had to some degree begun to reflect, adopt, and adapt, which were explored in chapter two of this thesis. Chapter three continued the study by surveying the distinct catalytic features Grenz adopted and adapted from Pannenberg’s trinitarian theology itself. These two chapters highlighted not just Pannenberg’s influence on Grenz, along with some significant divergences, but also served to highlight the initial stirring in Grenz that caused him to want to harness the doctrine of the Trinity for what it might do in the entire theological and ethical enterprise.

And yet, the features that both stirred Grenz, some of which he developed and advanced in useful ways, were not placed onto a \textit{tabula rasa}. Being an evangelical from a pietistic Baptist tradition, Grenz already had a particular theology and a particular way of understanding the doctrine of the Trinity and the rest of systematic theology. But it was the initial catalyst from Pannenberg that had begun to animate Grenz’s doctrine of the Trinity. This became the subject of study in chapter four, which showed the movement from Grenz’s earlier and underdeveloped trinitarianism, and then onto his enthusiastic reception of the social Trinity, all while he maintained many of the features that were part of a trinitarian commitment he had maintained previously, reinforced by his reading of Augustine. Chapter five of this thesis considered Grenz’s survey of twentieth century trinitarian innovations. He conducted this survey in the book

\textsuperscript{913} Personal interview with Roger Olson, 23 Apr. 2009, Waco, TX.
Rediscovering the Triune God which he intended to serve as the prequel for the volume on theology proper in *The Matrix* series. As a prequel, this volume effectively served to highlight key impulses indicating Grenz’s particular understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity. Chapter six then explored the issue of how he was conceptually seeking to access the doctrine of the Trinity through the *imago Dei* concept upon which he had also begun moving toward an inchoate *imago Dei* ontology. Consistent with Grenz’s evangelical commitment, this concept was derived from scripture and began to give shape to his theological reading of the Bible. Following this, the culminating crown of systematic theology was explored in chapter seven, namely, Grenz’s trinitarian ethics. Because most of Grenz’s ethical writings preceded his theological works chronologically, it became important for this thesis to establish the relative coherence of Grenz’s corpus which to varying degrees remained trinitarian throughout, and increasingly so. Sketching Grenz’s understanding of the Christian life, test-cases of his engagement with particular ethical issues were also explored in order to determine the extent of his trinitarian ethics, and therefore the trinitarian nature of his entire enterprise.

Grenz’s trinitarian work must be understood in light of the non-trinitarianism of North American Evangelicalism, and Evangelicalism’s early reception of recent developments in trinitarian theology. It also needs to be seen in light of what his work yielded for his anthropology and his engagement with the discipline of ontology (theo-ontologically conceived), and questions arising out of his engagement with the contemporary culture’s most pressing issues—e.g., homosexuality, gender-issues, and postmodernity. Grenz’s explorations and articulation of the doctrine of the Trinity have led him into more cautious explorations that have generated a degree of intentionally innovative abstraction and consequent ambiguity for those wanting more before his work had reached full bloom. This was according to plan, since he wanted a gospel shaped by a trinitarian theology that would lend itself toward proclamation. Grenz’s explorations therefore were not as innovative as perhaps some others, but rather more
strategically positioned in close relation to the biblical text (discerning a way of telling the story with an overarching theme—*imago Dei*), church tradition (from the patristic era to more recent time), and the contemporary culture’s questions (within church culture, from pop-culture, and other academic research findings), which led him into a coherent, proclamation-worthy theology for the present world, where he saw abounding opportunities for the gospel.

8.2. Conclusion: Renewing the Center

In the book that seemed to have gathered the most critique near the end of his career, Stanley Grenz sought to sketch a path forward for how the evangelical church might experience renewal in the Spirit for the present context. Because Grenz understood Evangelicalism to be a theological phenomenon more so than a sociological or historical one, he aimed to locate the root and trajectories that might set it even further on the road to the glory of God as he sought to see the center of evangelical theology renewed. As with before (and after), in *Renewing the Center* Grenz was pushing matters of evangelical identity in a distinctly trinitarian direction. While indices from both editions of the book only list two pages where the term “Trinity” is found, these references recount his treatment of evangelical theology as distinctly “Christian” theology, which must by nature be “truly trinitarian.” Indeed, here was a place where Grenz as consistently as elsewhere rearticulated the doctrine of the Trinity as evangelical theology’s “structural motif,” affirming that “the centrality of God’s tri-unity goes beyond the doctrine of God (or theology proper)... [giving] structure to other aspects of the Christian belief-mosaic as well.”

With Grenz’s robust meaning of community understood as being the church’s central motif, with the church being centered on Christ, the gospel, and scripture, the church is the location where “regenerative faith is present through the power of the Holy Spirit, whose

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914 *RTC*1, 212-13; and *RTC*2, 220-21.
915 *RTC*2, 221.
916 *RTC*2, 321.
917 *RTC*2, 323-25.
energizing Word and sacrament leads to the transformation of the lives of those gathered to hear and participate." \textsuperscript{918} Since this said transformation is unto the image of Christ who is the premier Image of God, and because “the confession of the triune God is the \textit{sine qua non} of the Christian faith,” \textsuperscript{919} it follows that Grenz’s entire argument in \textit{Renewing the Center} is completely trinitarian, merely reflecting an impulse within his own agenda that had been sparked years previously and which was coming to fruition. In other words, the evangelical “center” to which Grenz was calling the church is none other than the doctrine of the Trinity, and its implications for everything else. \textsuperscript{920} Consistent with the progress of doctrine and Grenz’s own development up to this point, the only thing needed was more time for that center of evangelical theology to become and blaze more explicitly trinitarian in ways that resembled the very best of careful and celebratory evangelical theology as it fuelled the church’s mission in the world. \textsuperscript{921} It is this recovery of the doctrine of the Trinity at a critical point in the history of evangelical theology, along with how it might serve the rest of theology and ethics, which remains the most significant and lasting legacy of Stanley J. Grenz for evangelical theology.

\textsuperscript{918} RTC\textsuperscript{2}, 347.
\textsuperscript{919} RTC\textsuperscript{2}, 220.
\textsuperscript{920} This trinitarian thrust was for the most part overlooked by RTC’s ardent critics. See also this emphasis noted on p. 80n389 of this thesis.
\textsuperscript{921} Note that while present in RTC\textsuperscript{2}, 327-29 and elsewhere, and while Grenz’s emphasis was always on the articulation and proclamation of the Christian gospel, which is the whole point of constructive theology, the \textit{missional} emphasis was something that Grenz was ultimately unable to develop, but which John R. Franke his erstwhile co-author has been able to contribute to in significant ways as a leading voice in the present missional conversation. Recent works, however, have not been hesitant to employ Grenz for missiological work, e.g., Darrell Jackson, he Futures of Missiology: Imaginative Practices and the Transformation of Rupture,” in \textit{Walk Humbly with the Lord: Church and Mission Engaging Plurality}, ed. Viggo Mortensen and Andreas Østerlund Nielsen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 278-9, 295-6.
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