

**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

Jason S. Sexton



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.

Date _____ Signature of candidate _____

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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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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Abbreviations

- BF* Stanley J. Grenz. *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context*. Coauthored with John R. Franke. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001.
- CD* Karl Barth. *Church Dogmatics*. Edited by Geoffrey William Bromiley and Thomas Forsyth Torrance. Translated by T. H. L. Parker, W. B. Johnston, Harold Knight, and J. L. M. Haire. Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 1957.
- MQ* Stanley J. Grenz. *The Moral Quest: Foundations of Christian Ethics*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997.
- NGQB* Stanley J. Grenz. *The Named God and the Question of Being: A Trinitarian Theology*. The Matrix of Christian Theology, Volume 2. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005.
- RET* Stanley J. Grenz. *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993.
- RFH1* Stanley J. Grenz. *Reason for Hope: The Systematic Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- RFH2* Stanley J. Grenz. *Reason for Hope: The Systematic Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg*. Revised edition, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005.
- RTC1* Stanley J. Grenz. *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-theological Era*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000.
- RTC2* Stanley J. Grenz. *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-theological Era*. Second edition, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006.
- RTG* Stanley J. Grenz. *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004.
- SGRS* Stanley J. Grenz. *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei*. The Matrix of Christian Theology, Volume 1. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001.
- ST* Wolfhart Pannenberg. *Systematic Theology*. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 3 Volumes. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991-98.
- TCG1* Stanley J. Grenz. *Theology for the Community of God*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994.
- TCG2* Stanley J. Grenz. *Theology for the Community of God*. Second edition, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.

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

¹ Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier, “Acknowledgements,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, ed. Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), xv; John R. Franke, “Stanley James Grenz (1950–2005),” *Theology Today* 6 (2006): 94; and John Stackhouse, personal email correspondence discussing Grenz’s role in contemporary Evangelicalism (12 Sept. 2011).

² Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 131.

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, *Revisoning 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,”⁶ “postmodern in approach and worldview,”⁷ and even post-evangelical, this lattermost designation being less of a label and more of a description of his work.⁸ 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.⁹ And yet not only did Grenz see himself as “hopelessly conservative,”¹⁰ 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.”¹¹ 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

of others like Kevin Vanhoozer and John Franke. See also a history of the term in Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming*, 10-15.

⁶ Gerald McDermott, “Evangelicals Divided: The battle between Meliorists and Traditionists to define Evangelicalism,” *First Things* (April 2011), <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2011/03/evangelicals-divided> (accessed 15 Oct. 2011).

⁷ R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “The Integrity of the Evangelical Tradition and the Challenge of the Postmodern Paradigm,” in *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David S. Dockery (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 81; and also Millard J. Erickson, *Postmodernizing the Faith: Evangelical Responses to the Challenge of Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 83-102.

⁸ The first critique opening the door to this wider understanding of his work as post-evangelical seems to have come from D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 481, who while commenting specifically on Grenz’s approach to scripture, stated, “With the best will in the world, I cannot see how Grenz’s approach... can be called ‘evangelical’ in any useful sense.” It is merely incidental that on the very page of this wide-ranging critique, the very title of Grenz’s single-volume work is incorrectly cited as, *Theology for the People of God* (see Carson, *The Gagging of God*, 481n75). See Carson’s characterisation uncritically reflected in James Leo Garrett, Jr., *Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009), 695-96; and David S. Dockery, “First Person: When Piety is Not Enough,” *Baptist Press*, 14 Mar. 2005, <http://www.bpnews.net/bpcolumn.asp?ID=1763> (accessed 5 Sept. 2011). Incidentally, the book that popularized the term, Dave Tomlinson, *The Post-Evangelical*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003) presented highly questionable proposals (see Stanley J. Grenz, “Review of Brian D. McLaren, *The Last Word and the Word After That*,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52 [2009]: 664), leaving Grenz to ultimately reject post-Evangelicalism as a viable option (Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000]; 2d ed. [2006], 174-91 [hereafter, *RTC1* and *RTC2*, respectively]).

⁹ See the illuminating written and email exchange between Grenz and Stephen D. Kovach ranging from 11 Feb. 1998 to 30 Mar. 1998 discussing Grenz’s work and multiple academic papers Kovach presented.

¹⁰ Personal correspondence between Stan Grenz and Stephen D. Kovach (2 Mar. 1998).

¹¹ Personal correspondence between Stan Grenz and Christopher G. Petrovich (6 Jan. 2005). This notion also runs contrary the assessments of Jay Smith who was under the impression that Grenz had decided after *Renewing the Center*, he would not publish any longer with evangelical publishing houses (personal interview with Jay T. Smith, 24 Jan. 2009). And yet, according to his personal records Grenz had a number of proposals being drafted for submission to Eerdmans (two volumes of collected essays and one based on Romans 1-3) and had these proposals either accepted or under review with InterVarsity Press: *The Message of Humanity in The Bible Speaks Today* series, ed. Derek J. Tidball; a co-authored book with Edna L. Grenz, *Worshiping in Spirit and in Truth: Leading Your Church into God-Honoring Worship*.

“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.”¹²

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.¹³ 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.¹⁴ The initial approach for the doctoral research aimed to locate Grenz and Erickson’s particular doctrines of the “social Trinity,” and how these

¹² R. Douglas Geivett, “How the Grenz Stole Christmas: A Case Study in Evangelical Epistemology,” unpublished paper delivered at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Philosophical Society [Colorado Springs, CO], 14 Nov. 2001).

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 apparent 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.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.¹⁶ But since his death, a

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

¹⁶ See, e.g., Jay T. Robertson, "Evangelicalism's Appropriation of Nonfoundational Epistemology as Reflected in the Theology of Stanley J. Grenz" (PhD diss., Mid-American Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002); and Chauncey Everett Berry, "Revising Evangelical Theological Method in the Postmodern Context: Stanley J. Grenz and Kevin J. Vanhoozer as Test Cases" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003).

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

¹⁷ See, e.g., Brian S. Harris, "Revisioning Evangelical Theology: An Exploration, Evaluation and Extension of the Theological Method of Stanley J. Grenz" (PhD thesis, University of Auckland, 2007), later published as Brian S. Harris, *The Theological Method of Stanley J. Grenz: Constructing Evangelical Theology from Scripture, Tradition, and Culture* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2011); Evan C. Lenow, "Community in Ethics: A Comparative Analysis of the Work of Thomas Aquinas and Stanley J. Grenz," (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010); Laurie A. Mellinger, "Teaching Theology as a Christian Spiritual Practice: The Example of Stanley J. Grenz" (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 2010); and Megan K. DeFranza, "Intersex and the *Imago*: Sex, Gender, and Sexuality in Postmodern Theological Anthropology" (PhD diss., Marquette University, 2011).

¹⁸ Exceptions to this might be the recent works of Daniel K. Magnuson, "Postconservative Evangelical Theology in a Postmodern Context: Three Proposals" (PhD diss., Luther Seminary, 2010), and Steven Denis Knowles, "Postmodernism and Evangelical Theological Methodology with Particular Reference to Stanley J. Grenz" (PhD thesis, University of Liverpool, 2007), later published as Steven Knowles, *Beyond Evangelicalism: The Theological Methodology of Stanley J. Grenz* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2010). See the trenchant reviews of Knowles's work in Jason S. Sexton, "Review of Steven Knowles, *Beyond Evangelicalism*," *Evangelical Quarterly* 83 (2011): 84-88; John R. Franke, *Religious Studies Review* 37 (2011): 194; and Justin Holcomb, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (forthcoming).

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.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.

Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism, ed. Andrew David Naselli and Collin Hansen (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).

²⁰ Stephen R. Holmes, “British (and European) Evangelical Theologies,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, ed. Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 255-56.

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*

²¹ See the following early works which each displayed keen interest in the personal spiritual life of the believer and the church: Stanley J. Grenz, *Isaac Backus—Puritan and Baptist*, NABPR Dissertation Series 4 (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983); Stanley J. Grenz, *The Baptist Congregation* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1985; reprint, Vancouver, BC: Regent College, 2002); Stanley J. Grenz, *Sexual Ethics: A Biblical Perspective* (Dallas: Word, 1990); Stanley J. Grenz, *Prayer: The Cry for the Kingdom* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988); and Stanley J. Grenz and Wendell Hoffman, *AIDS: Ministry in the Midst of an Epidemic* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990).

²² Stanley J. Grenz, *Reason for Hope: The Systematic Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990; 2d ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) (hereafter *RFH1* and *RFH2*, respectively). Incidentally, Pannenberg himself earlier referred to Grenz's systematic overview as "a correct picture" of the synthesis of his overall theology (Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Foreword," in *RFH1*, ix).

²³ Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *Twentieth Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992); and Stanley J. Grenz, *The Millennial Maze: Sorting Out Evangelical Options* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992).

²⁴ See the account given in *TCG1*, x.

²⁵ *RET*, 11.

setting” in which evangelicals are located.²⁶ Therein he sought to establish the key “sources” from which to draw for his constructive theology.²⁷

1.4.1. Theology’s Sources: The Grenz Triologue

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.²⁸

1.4.1.1. Scripture

Deemed the “primary norm”²⁹ or “norming norm”³⁰ 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.³¹ 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.³²

As a “crucial presupposition” Grenz maintained that “[t]he reading of the biblical text must always take precedence over our theological constructions.”³³ And yet this commitment was never intended to lapse into subjective individualism.³⁴ 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.

³⁰ Stanley J. Grenz, “Conversing in Christian Style: Toward a Baptist Theological Method for the Postmodern Context,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 35 (2000): 88-89. See also the significance of the coinherence of Spirit and Word in earlier baptistic theology in Malcolm B. Yarnell, III, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 82-90.

³¹ *RET*, 93. See also *RTC1*, 206-7; and *RTC2*, 214.

³² Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 65 (hereafter, *BF*).

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.”³⁵ 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.”³⁶ This leads to theology’s next source.

1.4.1.2. Tradition

According to Grenz, the church’s theological history or tradition³⁷ 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.”³⁸ 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,³⁹ and which “must be tested by the Scriptures,” receiving primary correction from the inspired text.⁴⁰ Grenz referred to all this as the “hermeneutical trajectory of the theological conversation,” which ever remains an “open” tradition,⁴¹ 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.”⁴² 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.”⁴³ This leads to Grenz’s final source for the theological endeavor.

1.4.1.3. Culture

The final voice in Grenz’s triologue 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.”⁴⁴ 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.”⁴⁵

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.

⁴³ Stanley J. Grenz, “Fideistic Revelationalism: Donald Bloesch’s Antirationalist Theological Method,” in *Evangelical Theology in Transition: Theologians in Dialogue with Donald Bloesch*, ed. Elmer M. Colyer (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 60.

⁴⁴ E.g., see the critique by Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “On the Very Idea of a Theological System: An Essay in Aid of Triangulating Scripture, Church and World,” in *Always Reforming: Explorations in Systematic Theology*, ed. A. T. B. McGowan (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 145-47.

⁴⁵ Stanley J. Grenz, “Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic,” in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 128.

Grenz was aware that culture can and does serve as a harmful, diabolical device, but also as a “playground of the Spirit.”⁴⁶ As such, the “culture” source justifies Grenz’s dependence on contemporary theologians,⁴⁷ 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.⁴⁸ This meant that he found “a host of traces of divine grace present in the midst of human brokenness.”⁴⁹ 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,”⁵⁰ and “in which the theologian seeks to work.”⁵¹ 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.⁵² 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

⁴⁶ Stanley J. Grenz, “(Pop) Culture: Playground of the Spirit or Diabolical Device?” *Cultural Encounters: A Journal for the Theology of Culture* 1 (2004): 25.

⁴⁷ For Grenz, contemporary theologians fall into two of the sources of his dialogue: 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.

⁴⁹ Grenz, “Fideistic Revelationalism,” 57.

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.

⁵¹ Stanley J. Grenz, “The Irrelevancy of Theology: Pannenberg and the Quest for Truth,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 27 (1992): 310.

⁵² *RET*, 99, 106-8 (italics in original); *BF*, 151; and Stanley J. Grenz, “What Does Hollywood Have to Do with Wheaton?” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43 (2000): 307.

delivered.’”⁵³ 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.”⁵⁴

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 Triad⁵⁵

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”⁵⁶—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.”⁵⁷

⁵³ Grenz, “Fideistic Revelationalism,” 57.

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.

⁵⁶ Stanley J. Grenz, “Postmodern Canada: Characteristics of a Nation in Transition,” *Touchstone* 18 (2000): 27; and *RET*, 11.

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.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.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.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."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.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.⁶³ Grenz therefore saw "community" as the foundation for ethical identity formation,

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*]).

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 I/2*: 878.

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 *JGRS*). Contra the assessment he received by some, Grenz was a theologian through and through, not a philosopher.

⁶¹ Stanley J. Grenz, "Ecclesiology," in *Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 268.

⁶² *RTC2*, 321.

⁶³ See Stanley J. Grenz, *Sexual Ethics: An Evangelical Perspective*, rev. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 48; Grenz, "Ecclesiology," 268; and Grenz, *The Baptist Congregation*, 18.

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.⁶⁴ 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.⁶⁵ 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

⁶⁴ Stanley J. Grenz, "Introduction to Christian Theology: Christian Doctrine for Today's World," course notes from THEO 7345, Baylor University, Waco, TX, lecture on "Living Theologically: Connecting Theology with Life," given 28 Apr. 2003 (unpublished), 6. Note Grenz's reliance on Alistair I. McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 61-63.

⁶⁵ Roger Olson, "Wolfhart Pannenberg's Doctrine of the Trinity," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 43 (1990): 175-206.

contemporary theology,⁶⁶ 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.⁶⁷ 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

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 (1):

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.⁶⁸ 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.”⁶⁹ Imprints left on Grenz’s theology by his *doktorvater* provided particular indelible marks on the constructive work of the younger theologian.⁷⁰ While many have acknowledged this point,⁷¹ 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.⁷² He chose rather to employ Pannenberg in areas that served his own construction, adapting relevant contributions and thereby utilizing

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).

⁷¹ E.g., D. A. Carson, “Domesticating the Gospel: A Review of Grenz’s *Renewing the Center*,” in *Reclaiming the Center*, ed. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjos Helseth and Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 35, 54; Harris, “Revisioning Evangelical Theology,” 51-52; and Knowles, “Postmodernism and Evangelical Theological Methodology with Particular Reference to Stanley J. Grenz,” 75, 88, 90, 94, 113, 174, 197.

⁷² This is acknowledged in Archie J. Spencer, “Culture, Community and Commitments: Stanley J. Grenz on Theological Method,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 57 (2004): 357. See also Grenz, “The Irrelevancy of Theology,” 310.

Pannenberg's work as a "source" for theology.⁷³ 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.⁷⁴ As initial aspects of Grenz's trinitarian methodological development are examined, this chapter

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.⁷⁵ As this chapter's exploration into Pannenberg's trinitarian methodology ensues, it acknowledges that his dogmatics resulted from a steadily worked-out methodology.⁷⁶ 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.⁷⁷ 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 "dialogue" 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" (Wolfgang 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: Wolfgang Pannenberg's Eschatological Doctrine of God* [Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 2002], 185).

⁷⁶ Grenz acknowledged this in RFH2, 11-53.

⁷⁷ Fred Sanders, *The Image of the Immanent Trinity: Rahner's Rule and the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 97-98. The term, "Rahner's Rule" appears to have been first coined by Ted Peters, "Trinity Talk: Part 1," *Dialog* 26 (1987): 46. It is stated explicitly: "*The 'economic' Trinity is the 'immanent' Trinity, and the 'immanent' Trinity is the 'economic' Trinity*" (Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel [London: Herder and Herder, 1970], 22) (italics in original).

which their theologies are articulated.⁷⁸ 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,"⁷⁹ Pannenberg was much more so,⁸⁰ 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,"⁸¹ while Grenz unfortunately did not.⁸² The German theologian also enjoys chronological precedence, and finally, as a practical matter, Grenz is an established interpreter of his former teacher.⁸³ It is therefore a very natural practice for him to interpret Pannenberg and

⁷⁸ Roger Olson, "Wolfhart Pannenberg's Doctrine of the Trinity," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 43 (1990): 178-86. His earlier methodological works include these: Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968 [German, 1964]); Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, trans. Francis McDonagh (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1976 [German, 1973]), and Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985 [German, 1983]).

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).

⁷⁹ Andreas J. Köstenberger, "Editorial," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48 (2005): 4; D. A. Carson, "Domesticating the Gospel: A Review of Stanley J. Grenz's *Renewing the Center*," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 6 (2002): 97; and *The Christian Century* 122 (5 Apr. 2005): 17.

⁸⁰ See his recent comprehensive bibliography: "Bibliographie der Veröffentlichungen von Wolfhart Pannenberg 1953–2008," *Kerygma und Dogma* 54 (2008): 159-236.

⁸¹ Pannenberg, "God's Presence in History," 263. The work was *Systematische Theologie, 1-3* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988–93); *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991-98) (ET hereafter *ST*).

⁸² 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).

⁸³ 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.⁸⁴ 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.⁸⁵ 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.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.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.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.⁸⁹ For example, although taking Karl Rahner’s Rule and its implications with “complete seriousness,”⁹⁰ and while avoiding problems with Moltmann⁹¹ and those earlier in Hegel, for Pannenberg, “God and history are... linked but not fused.”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

⁸⁶ *ST*, 1:56.

⁸⁷ *RFH2*, 4, 19, 43, 55; and *RTG*, 91.

⁸⁸ *ST*, 1:343.

⁸⁹ Note Paul D. Molnar’s critique of Pannenberg’s ambiguity when interacting with Jesus’ eternal sonship in *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2002), 36-37. A similar assessment about his conceptual vagueness is made in Sanders, *The Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 102-6.

⁹⁰ See the discussion of Pannenberg’s rigorous application of this axiom in Sanders, *The Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 97-107.

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.

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,”⁹³ which is not provisional or forthcoming, but genuinely given—a divine revelation whose truth content “has been objectively disclosed.”⁹⁴ As theology’s “norming norm,” the Bible is the “supreme authority for theological reflection,”⁹⁵ thus resourcing the temporary “second-order” theological formulations that humans generate in the present.⁹⁶ 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.”⁹⁷ 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.⁹⁸ Evidence of this is in his employment of terms like “connection” when referring to present-

⁹³ Stanley J. Grenz, *The Named God and the Question of Being: A Trinitarian Theo-ontology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 326-27, 352-53 (hereafter, *NGQB*). By “revelation” Grenz refers not just to inscripturated revelation but also the speaking of creation, and ultimately the speaking of Jesus Christ.

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.⁹⁹ 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.¹⁰⁰ What follows after this is the task of theological engagement, the process of moving toward and being allowed to see “more clearly.”¹⁰¹

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.¹⁰² In light of the “already–not yet character” of the relationship between the new humanity and the *imago Dei*, and its correspondence being both “an eschatological goal and a present reality,”¹⁰³ Grenz was unable to hold to Pannenberg’s “provisionality of the present,” with the future giving meaning to the present.¹⁰⁴ Perhaps even more than Pannenberg, Grenz saw the present itself as deeply meaningful,¹⁰⁵ and yet believed that it could not be divorced from the eschatological *orientation* inherent to and indicated by the

⁹⁹ *SGRS*, 224. See also Stanley J. Grenz, “What Does it Mean to be Trinitarians? The Role of the Doctrine of the Trinity in Christian Teaching and Life,” discussion paper for Allelon, 22-24 Mar. 2004 (<http://archives.allelon.org/articles/article.cfm?id=57> [accessed 27 Mar. 2009]); and Stanley J. Grenz, “What Does it Mean to be Trinitarians? The Role of the Doctrine of the Trinity in Christian Teaching and Practice,” paper presented at the 2004 Baptist World Alliance Meeting, Seoul, South Korea, n.d. (unpublished), 4-5.

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 see 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.”¹⁰⁶ For Grenz, then, revelation (including the inscripturated 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,”¹⁰⁷ and yet similarly begins with a strong opposition to theology’s privatization.¹⁰⁸ 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.

¹⁰⁷ By “public theology” Pannenberg does not have in mind the various definitions offered in recent theology often beginning with either political or societal agendas: e.g., Max L. Stackhouse, *Public Theology and Political Economy: Christian Stewardship in Modern Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), xi, 17-35; Ronald F. Thiemann, *Constructing a Public Theology: The Church in a Pluralistic Culture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 19-25; Mary Doak, *Reclaiming Narrative for Public Theology* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), 7-12; *Public Theology for the 21st Century*, ed. William F. Storrar and Andrew R. Morton (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 1-21; and see also the description of Stackhouse and Thiemann alongside Kuypers in Vincent E. Bacote, *The Spirit in Public Theology: Appropriating the Legacy of Abraham Kuypers* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 40-53. See also the different notion of “public theology” as a “thoroughly theological and biblical analysis,” in *Public Theology in Cultural Engagement*, ed. Stephen R. Holmes (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2008), x.

¹⁰⁸ *ST*, 1:16; 2:xii; 3:482-83; and *passim*. See also Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity: Global Perspectives* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 123-24. Grenz called public theology the “core of Pannenberg’s theological agenda” (Grenz, “Why Do Theologians Need to be Scientists?” 343). See also *RFH2*, 290.

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.

¹⁰⁹ *ST*, 1:50-51. Kärkkäinen notes Pannenberg as laying groundwork calling for Christian theology to affirm the concept of the God in philosophical theology, and also not shy away from metaphysical God-talk (*Trinity and Religious Pluralism* [Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2004], 86-87). For Pannenberg, this God is none other than “the God conceived in trinitarian terms,” both world-transcendent and immanent and thus conceivable in a consistently monotheistic manner (Ted Peters, “Trinity Talk: Part 2,” *Dialog* 26 [1987]: 137).

¹¹⁰ Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Religious Pluralism and Conflicting Truth Claims: The Problem of a Theology of the World Religions,” in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*, ed. Gavin D’Costa (Marynoll, NY: Orbis, 1990), 96-106. For the demarcations of the “pluralist,” “inclusivist,” and “exclusivist” positions, see Gavin D’Costa, Paul Knitter and Daniel Strange, *Only One Way? Three Christian Responses to the Uniqueness of Christ in a Religiously Pluralist World* (London: SCM Press, 2011).

¹¹¹ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, “Trinity and Religions: On the Way to a Trinitarian Theology of Religions for Evangelicals,” *Missiology* 33 (2005): 163 (italics added for emphasis).

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.”¹¹⁴

Like Pannenberg, Grenz affirmed that theology is a public discipline,¹¹⁵ 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.”¹¹⁶ 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.”¹¹⁷ 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.¹¹⁸ Theology

¹¹⁴ Stanley J. Grenz, “Commitment and Dialogue: Pannenberg on Christianity and the Religions,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 26 (1989): 208-9.

¹¹⁵ See engagement with this topic early in Stanley J. Grenz, “Reconsecrating the Naked Public Square,” *Fides et Historia* 18 (1986): 65-75.

¹¹⁶ Stanley J. Grenz, “Toward an Evangelical Theology of the Religions,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 31 (1994): 64-65. see also Stanley J. Grenz, “How Do We Know What to Believe?” in *Essentials of Christian Theology*, ed. William C. Placher (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 32.

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 *SGRJ*, 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.”¹¹⁹ 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.¹²⁰ Grenz affirmed that this bodes well with evangelicals’ openness (contra their fundamentalist forbears) to engagement with the world and other viewpoints,¹²¹ yet ultimately finding them theologically deficient in light of the universal superiority of the Jesus-story.¹²²

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.¹²³ 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.”¹²⁴ 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.

¹²¹ *RET*, 26. See his ecumenism also stated in Stanley J. Grenz, “Review of *Confessing One Faith*,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 26 (1989): 222-23; and *RTC2*, 358-59.

¹²² Grenz, “The Universality of the ‘Jesus-Story,’” 106-11.

¹²³ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Metaphysik und Gottesgedanke* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1988); *Metaphysics and the Idea of God*, trans. Philip Clayton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990).

¹²⁴ Pannenberg, “An Intellectual Pilgrimage,” 190. See Pannenberg’s accounting of how the sciences differ from philosophy in *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, 221. For an account of Pannenberg’s commitment to the “inter-disciplinary responsibility of theology,” see Mostert, *God and the Future*, 58-62.

universal truth that illumines all knowledge.¹²⁵ Since publishing *Systematic Theology*, as part of his insistence that theology's task is to give a "rational account of the truth of faith,"¹²⁶ Pannenberg has engaged significantly in the conversation of theology and science.¹²⁷ Precisely because theology is a public discipline, he sees it as "subject to the same critical canons as are the other sciences."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.¹²⁹ Instead, aware of little consensus among scientists over the ability to account for the essence of their own method,¹³⁰ Pannenberg opts for something new in the form of a coherence approach where "all truth must cohere in God."¹³¹ As Shults has shown, Pannenberg's view advocates "coherence with other beliefs as a necessary condition for justifying the truth of an assertion."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.'"¹³³ This allows him to observe the sustainability and viability

¹²⁵ See also Grenz's reading on this point in Grenz, "The Irrelevancy of Theology," 307. Cp. also Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology*, trans. George H. Kehm, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 2:1-27. I am grateful to Christiaan Mostert for helping me understand Pannenberg's view of knowledge and "science" as related closely to the Latin, *scire*, "to know."

¹²⁶ Pannenberg, *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).

¹²⁷ See Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Toward a Theology of Nature*, ed. Ted Peters (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993); and Wolfhart Pannenberg, *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," *Zygon* 36 [2001]: 800).

¹²⁸ Grenz, "Review of Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie*, Vol. 1," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 42 (1989): 401.

¹²⁹ Miller and Grenz, *Fortress Introduction*, 127-28.

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

¹³¹ Stanley J. Grenz, "'Scientific' Theology/'Theological' Science: Pannenberg and the Dialogue Between Theology and Science," *Zygon* 34 (1999): 162; and Grenz, "The Irrelevancy of Theology," 308. See also *ST*, 1:52-61.

¹³² Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task*, 115-16.

¹³³ Mostert, *God and the Future*, 78.

of particular concepts, whether in the scientific disciplines or theology, all informing cognition about God and God's world.¹³⁴

Grenz acutely observed Pannenberg's engagement with science,¹³⁵ himself reflecting some of Pannenberg's concerns about the scientific method.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.¹³⁷ Like Pannenberg, Grenz was eager to draw from findings of disciplines such as contemporary developmental psychology¹³⁸ and other academic fields that might provide assistance in listening to relevant questions that could facilitate "important biblical affirmations about God."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.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,

¹³⁴ E.g., see Pannenberg's attempt at developing the noncorporeal field theory of modern physics as related to God as spiritual mind in *ST*, 1:382-83 and then further in 2:79-108. See also Grenz, *RFH2*, 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.

¹³⁵ Grenz, "'Scientific' Theology/'Theological' Science," 159-66; and *RFH2*, 18, 39-40, 79.

¹³⁶ Stanley J. Grenz, "Nurturing the Soul, Informing the Mind: The Genesis of the Evangelical Scripture Principle," in *Evangelicals and Scripture*, ed. Vincent Bacote, Laura C. Miguez and Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 40. This is also emphasized in Grenz, "Why Do Theologians Need to be Scientists?" 339; and acknowledged by Everett Berry, "Theological vs. Methodological Post Conservatism: Stanley Grenz and Kevin Vanhoozer as Test Cases," *Westminster Theological Journal* 69 (2007): 118.

¹³⁷ Grenz, "The Irrelevancy of Theology," 310.

¹³⁸ Cp. Grenz's observations in *RFH2*, 24 with *SGRS*, 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.

¹³⁹ Cp. Grenz's observations in *RFH2*, 81 with Grenz's explorative engagement with postmodernism's questions in *The Matrix* series which both set the agenda (*SGRS*, x) and carry it out (*SGRS*, 133-36, 336).

¹⁴⁰ Grenz, "Ecclesiology," 258. See also *RTC2*, 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.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.

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.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.¹⁴³ Yet Pannenberg still maintained the full importance of personal piety for the theological enterprise,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.¹⁴⁵ And thus a Christian understanding of the self, from which basis one may identify a particular behavior as sinful, will produce the "transformative

¹⁴¹ Grenz, "Why Do Theologians Need to be Scientists?" 345-53; and Grenz, "Conversing in Christian Style," 92.

¹⁴² Miller and Grenz, *Fortress Introduction*, 127-29.

¹⁴³ *ST*, 1:50, 56.

¹⁴⁴ See his treatment on Christian spirituality and piety in Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Christian Spirituality* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), esp. pp. 13-49; and also the challenges for placing emphasis on moral reasoning for the development of Christian community ethics (Pannenberg, "Morality, Ethics, and God," 52-54). Incidentally, Grenz observed Pannenberg's greater emphasis on the rational delineation of the Christian faith for apologetics rather than for personal piety (Grenz and Olson, *Twentieth Century Theology*, 197-98).

¹⁴⁵ Pannenberg, *Christian Spirituality*, 27-30. See also Pannenberg's sketch of the Reformation faith/experience tension in *ST*, 1:65.

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

¹⁴⁶ Pannenberg, *Christian Spirituality*, 109-10.

¹⁴⁷ Pannenberg, "An Intellectual Pilgrimage," 191. See also Pannenberg's recounting 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).

¹⁴⁸ Pannenberg, "An Intellectual Pilgrimage," 191.

¹⁴⁹ Miller and Grenz, *Fortress Introduction*, 139.

¹⁵⁰ Jonathan R. Wilson notes how Grenz's heritage, drawn from German Pietism, shaped and strengthened his work with the following features: (1) a theological method making room for experience; (2) the centrality of the "community of God" for doctrine's exposition; (3) the primacy of love for a theo-ontology; and (4) a full account of the Holy Spirit in the doctrine of the Trinity ("Stanley J. Grenz: Generous Faith and Faithful Engagement," *Modern Theology* 23 [2007]: 119). See also Myles Werntz, "Stan Grenz Among the Baptists," *Princeton Theological Review* 12 (2006): 31 and Jason S. Sexton, "Stanley Grenz's Ecclesiology: Telic and Trinitarian," *Pacific Journal of Baptist Research* 6 (2010): 21-45.

¹⁵¹ Grenz, "Concerns of a Pietist with a Ph.D.," 75. See also Jay T. Smith, "A Trinitarian Epistemology: Stanley J. Grenz and the Trajectory of Convertive Piety," *Pacific Journal of Baptist Research* 6 (2010): 44-64.

interest,¹⁵² 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.¹⁵³ 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."¹⁵⁴ 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."¹⁵⁵ 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,¹⁵⁶ since "the spiritual believer balances piety with activity."¹⁵⁷ This leads to the final feature to be explored in the similar yet different trinitarian methodologies of Pannenberg and Grenz.

¹⁵² *RTC2*, 358-59.

¹⁵³ *RET*, 27-35. See also the markers Grenz gave for historic Evangelicalism with its concern for both convertive 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/lhLszC> [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 Gaggling 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).

¹⁵⁶ Incidentally, the first book Grenz wanted to write from his own initiative had to do with his deep love and concern for the church, which became *Prayer: Cry for the Kingdom* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988; rev. ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005). See this divulgence in the introduction to the lecture by Stanley J. Grenz, "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 (from video of chapel lecture delivered 19 Jan. 2005).

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).

¹⁶⁰ Mostert, *God and the Future*, 60-62. See this displayed in *ST*, 1:95-107; and Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, 332-37.

¹⁶¹ *RFH2*, 5, 16-18; Stanley J. Grenz, "Jesus as the *Imago Dei*: Image-Of-God Christology and the Non-Linear Linearity of Theology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47 (2004): 627; and *RET*, 79.

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.¹⁶³ 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 tenets¹⁶⁴ but also in his engagement with the very phenomenon.¹⁶⁵ Second, he integrated new anthropological discoveries into the interdisciplinary task of theology,¹⁶⁶ and managed to also avoid much of Pannenberg's modernistic language.¹⁶⁷ 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.¹⁶⁸ 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).

¹⁶³ 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.

¹⁶⁴ Contra Pannenberg's approach, Grenz favors "a more evident, stronger indication of concern for the situation in which the theologian seeks to work" (Grenz, "The Irrelevancy of Theology," 310). See an account of other theologians moving in this direction presented by Dan Stiver, "Theological Method," in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 170-85.

¹⁶⁵ 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.

¹⁶⁶ E.g., see *SGRS* for this anthropological emphasis.

¹⁶⁷ 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).

¹⁶⁸ 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.¹⁶⁹ 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.¹⁷⁰

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.

¹⁶⁹ BF, 43-54, 190-92; and Grenz, "Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic," 129-31.

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.

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

¹⁷⁵ Wolfhart Pannenberg, "The God of History: The Trinitarian God and the Truth of History," trans. M. B. Jackson, *Cumberland Seminarian* 19 (1981): 37, from the German of "Der Gott der Geschichte, der trinitarische Gott und die Wahrheit der Geschichte," *Grundfragen systematischer Theologie: Gesammelte Aufsätze, Band 2* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), 112-28. See also *ST*, 1:171 for the role of history in religions. See also *RFH2*, 49.

¹⁷⁶ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, trans. David Granskou and Edward Quinn (London: Sheed and Ward, 1969), 17-18. According to Grenz, Pannenberg maintained "that no inspired word must be added to events" (*RFH2*, 55).

¹⁷⁷ Pannenberg, "The God of History," 31.

¹⁷⁸ Philip Clayton, "The God of History and the Presence of the Future," *The Journal of Religion* 65 (1985): 103.

¹⁷⁹ See this translation of Pannenberg, "Der Gott der Geschichte," 7, in Clayton, "The God of History and the Presence of the Future," 103 (italics are present in Clayton's translation).

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,¹⁸¹ 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.”¹⁸² 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.¹⁸³ 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.”¹⁸⁴ 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.”¹⁸⁵

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 Schleiermachiian subjectivism and the dialectical theologians of the early twentieth century.¹⁸⁶ 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.¹⁸⁷ 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.”¹⁸⁸ 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.¹⁸⁹ 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.”¹⁹⁰ 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.¹⁹¹ 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,¹⁹² or as though the primary revelation of God in Christ took place “in some strange Word arriving from some alien place

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.

¹⁸⁹ Pannenberg, *Basic Questions*, 1:1-14.

¹⁹⁰ Pannenberg, *Basic Questions*, 1:12-13.

¹⁹¹ *RFH2*, 7. See also M. Douglas Meeks, *Origins of the Theology of Hope* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 69.

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

¹⁹³ Pannenberg, “God’s Presence in History,” 262.

¹⁹⁴ *ST*, 1:228-29.

¹⁹⁵ Stanley J. Grenz, “Pannenberg and Evangelical Theology: Sympathy and Caution,” *Christian Scholars’ Review* 20 (1990): 276-80. Grenz also differed from Pannenberg’s views about scripture’s inspiration (*RFH*2, 16-17, 41, 48).

¹⁹⁶ *RET*, 76.

¹⁹⁷ Grenz, “Pannenberg and Evangelical Theology,” 278.

disclosing the very “essence of God.”¹⁹⁸ 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,¹⁹⁹ 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.²⁰⁰ This allowed Grenz to draw deeply from the “contemporary context” situated in history as a source where God is both working and speaking.²⁰¹ 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.”²⁰² Emphasis on the historical context is consistent with the notion that God spoke prior to scripture’s actual inscription (a speaking that happened in historical-cultural contexts),²⁰³ speaks in and through

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-realist 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 history of the church's interpretation of it), and also speaks today (in the present historical-cultural context).²⁰⁴ Here is where Grenz found justification for his dependence on other theologians from church history, and those working in the present context.²⁰⁵ Indeed, contemporary theologians categorically fall into two of the sources in Grenz's theological triad—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.²⁰⁶ 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.²⁰⁷

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.²⁰⁸ 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

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.”²⁰⁹ 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.²¹⁰ 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.”²¹¹ 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.²¹²

Here, one might start to observe underlying motivating factors for Grenz’s reliance on “cultural context” as a source of theology.²¹³ Rather than assessing Grenz on the nature of this practice, making judgment about the degree to which factors in the contemporary context might have

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.²¹⁴ Specifically, theology is and must be done in *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."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 *telos*, of the divine activity in history."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 Future²¹⁷

Once described as one of the principal "theologians of hope,"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."²¹⁹ His retrieval of eschatology for the center of theology has been called "unmatched in contemporary theology," and "nothing if not comprehensive."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

²¹⁴ See Grenz's understanding of theology's "culture" motif in §1.4.1.3. of this thesis.

²¹⁵ *BF*, 159.

²¹⁶ *RET*, 115; and *NGQB*, 218.

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).

²¹⁸ Grenz and Olson, *Twentieth Century Theology*, 170-72.

²¹⁹ *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 *Basic Questions*, 1:81-95 (Grenz, "Pannenberg and Evangelical Theology," 280).

²²⁰ Mostert, *God and the Future*, 20.

decision concerning the being that stands at the end of the process has retroactive power.”²²¹ Clayton notices how Pannenberg avoids “skeptical” epistemological conjectures by making an ontological move,²²² and in doing so employed what to him was a “new systematic category” known as “prolepsis.”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.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.²²⁵ This move landed Pannenberg closer to Aquinas’s expression of the divine being’s actuality, *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.”²²⁶ In this way, the future does not occur to his present, but rather “God’s future constitutes his present.”²²⁷

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

²²¹ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Metaphysics and the Idea of God*, trans. Philip Clayton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 105.

²²² Clayton, “The God of History and the Presence of the Future,” 99.

²²³ Pannenberg, “God’s Presence in History,” 262.

²²⁴ Mostert, *God and the Future*, 113. See also Roger Eugene Olson, “Trinity and Eschatology: The Historical Being of God in the Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg,” (PhD thesis, Rice University, 1984), 29, who suggests that Pannenberg adopted this from Martin Heidegger’s “anticipation,” as evinced in *Basic Questions*, 1:167.

²²⁵ Mostert, *God and the Future*, 141-44.

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.

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, *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, *God and the Future*, 154-55).

²²⁸ Pannenberg, “Eternity, Time and the Trinitarian God,” 13.

²²⁹ Mostert, *God and the Future*, 136.

things with himself.²³⁰ 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."²³¹ 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.²³²

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.²³³

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.²³⁴ 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

²³⁰ Mostert, *God and the Future*, 232. See also the recent treatment by Kent Eilers, *Faithful to Save: Pannenberg on God's Reconciling Action* (London: T&T Clark, 2011).

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*.

eschatological event.”²³⁵ 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.”²³⁶

Much milder than Pannenberg, Grenz adapted the future principle into what he designated as “eschatological orientation,”²³⁷ one of the three theological motifs he saw as inherent to distinctly Christian theology.²³⁸ 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.²³⁹ “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.”²⁴⁰ According to Grenz, this ultimate “community in the highest sense”²⁴¹ is nothing short of “an outworking of God’s own eternal reality.”²⁴² 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

²³⁵ *NGQB*, 9-10.

²³⁶ *SGRS*, 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).

²⁴⁰ Grenz, “Ecclesiology,” 268.

²⁴¹ See the phrase used in *RET*, 156, 158; *TCG2*, 24, 113, 198, 647; Grenz, *Primer on Postmodernism*, 168; *RTC2*, 224, 293, 331; and Grenz, “Universality of the Jesus-Story,” 110. The phrase is modified as “community on the highest plane” in Stanley J. Grenz, *The Moral Quest: Foundations of Christian Ethics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 264 (hereafter, *MQ*). The phrase is also used earlier as “community in the fullest sense” and “widest sense” in Stanley J. Grenz, “The Community of God: A Vision of the Church in the Postmodern Age” *Cruce* 28/2 (1992): 24-25, followed by an initial description in Stanley J. Grenz, “‘Community’ as a Theological Motif for the Western Church in an Era of Globalization,” *Cruce* 28/3 (1992): 14-15.

²⁴² Grenz, “Universality of the Jesus-Story,” 110.

briefly in the next chapter,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.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."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."²⁴⁶

Grenz's eschatological realism accorded not with Pannenberg's "provisionality of the present,"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.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.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."²⁵⁰ As such, the church "is determined by what the church is to become."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

²⁴³ See p. 77-78n378 of this thesis.

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).

²⁴⁵ *TCG2*, 605. See also the exposition of Grenz's trinitarian ethic/s given in chap. 7 of this thesis.

²⁴⁶ *BF*, 273.

²⁴⁷ *RFH2*, 43, 176.

²⁴⁸ *SGRS*, 224.

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.

²⁵⁰ *TCG2*, 475.

²⁵¹ *TCG2*, 479.

is.’ We are, therefore, what we will be.’²⁵² 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.”²⁵³ Instead of finding the future *determining* the present as in Pannenberg’s ontology of the whole,²⁵⁴ 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.”²⁵⁵ 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

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 Asbury 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.²⁵⁶

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.”²⁵⁷ 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.”²⁵⁸ Pannenberg explains how this principle works:

²⁵⁶ Personal correspondence between Stan Grenz and Christopher G. Petrovich (6 Jan. 2005). See also Grenz, “Why Do Theologians Need to Be Scientists?” 352.

²⁵⁷ This maxim, “God’s deity is his rule,” was first coined by Roger Olson in “Pannenberg’s Doctrine of the Trinity,” 199.

²⁵⁸ Peters, “Trinity Talk: Part 2,” 136.

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.”²⁵⁹ So 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 (“*erwiesen*”) God’s deity.²⁶⁰ It is precisely this commitment to the completion of the kingdom that is part of each trinitarian member’s divinity.²⁶¹ 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.”²⁶²

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.”²⁶³ 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

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.

²⁶⁰ Pannenberg, “Der Gott der Geschichte,” 127.

²⁶¹ Olson, “Trinity and Eschatology,” *SJT*, 227.

²⁶² Pannenberg, “The God of History,” 39.

²⁶³ *ST*, 1:324.

reality of the presence of God Himself.”²⁶⁴ 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 (*Verberrlichung*) 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 pantheistic 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).”²⁶⁵ While some might even conclude that this formula of indissolubly linking God, the world, and history harbors a latent pantheism,²⁶⁶ Pannenberg’s major difficulty is instead with “Hegel’s ghost,” pantheism.²⁶⁷ While Pannenberg’s most generous interpreters have acknowledged this “becoming” component in Pannenberg’s doctrine of God,²⁶⁸ one interpreter insists that “the ontological principle of ‘retroactive permanence’ overrules the principle of development or becoming.”²⁶⁹ 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.”²⁷⁰

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

²⁶⁴ Pannenberg, “The God of History,” 36.

²⁶⁵ Clayton, “The God of History and the Presence of the Future,” 104-5.

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 pantheism by those aware that Pannenberg denies the charge, see Olson, “Trinity and Eschatology,” PhD thesis, 373-84, and John W. Cooper, *Pantheism—The Other God of the Philosophers: From Plato to the Present* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 278-81.

²⁶⁸ *RFH2*, 87.

²⁶⁹ Mostert, *God and the Future*, 153-58.

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.”²⁷¹ Viewing Pannenberg’s effort as “the latest and greatest attempt to construct a theology that is oriented to the theme of ‘kingdom,’”²⁷² 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.”²⁷³

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.”²⁷⁴ 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.”²⁷⁵ Meanwhile God is working in history, “effecting the consummation of the divine reign by establishing community” in a world

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.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,²⁷⁷ implications for present living remain.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.”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.”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.”²⁸¹ In rearticulating his eschatological realism, he further stated that “the new creation toward which our world is developing is experienced through anticipation.”²⁸² Grenz’s later work increasingly adapted components of his *doctorwater’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

²⁷⁶ TCG2, 651.

²⁷⁷ TCG2, 657.

²⁷⁸ TCG2, 652-59.

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*.

²⁸⁰ TCG2, 658 (italics added for emphasis).

²⁸¹ BF, 54.

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 eternity 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.

²⁸³ *SGRS*, 222, citing Thomas Hewitt, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC, ed. R. V. G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 52.

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

²⁸⁹ Sanders, *The Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 97-107.

²⁹⁰ Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology*, 203-11, 238.

²⁹¹ Ted Peters, *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 135-42.

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).

²⁹³ Taylor, *Pannenberg on the Triune God*, 43; and Mostert, *God and the Future*, 188. See F. Leron Shults's exposition of Pannenberg's "constitutive relationality of exocentric centrality," yielding both anthropological description and that of divine persons ("Constitutive Relationality in Anthropology and Trinity: The Shaping of the 'Imago Dei' Doctrine in Barth and Pannenberg," *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 39 [1997], 316-21). See also *ST*, 1:319.

²⁹⁴ See Olson, "Trinity and Eschatology," *SJT*, 226-27; Olson, "Pannenberg's Doctrine of the Trinity," 200; and Clayton, "The God of History and the Presence of the Future," 100, 104-5.

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).

²⁹⁷ Clayton, "The God of History and the Presence of the Future," 99.

commonly referred to as the “relational turn” in theistic conceptualizations.²⁹⁸ 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.²⁹⁹ 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.³⁰⁰ 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.”³⁰¹

Beyond the trinitarian expositions of love given by Augustine or the medieval theologian Richard of St. Victor,³⁰² 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.

²⁹⁸ See Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 112-24.

²⁹⁹ Miller and Grenz, *Fortress Introduction*, 133.

³⁰⁰ Pannenberg, “Problems of a Trinitarian Doctrine of God,” 256. See also *ST*, 1:422-48 (esp. pp. 427-28, 441).

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,”³⁰³ 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.³⁰⁴ 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.³⁰⁵ 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.³⁰⁶ It is unclear whether this self-reciprocal identity necessitates the Hegelian self-actualization that some have found so unhelpful.³⁰⁷ 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.”³⁰⁸

While Pannenberg’s status as a social trinitarian has been recently contested,³⁰⁹ 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*,³¹⁰ 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

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).

³⁰⁷ E.g., Clayton, “The God of History and the Presence of the Future,” 100; and Sanders, *The Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 102-3.

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 (☩) 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.³¹¹ 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."³¹²

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.³¹³ And yet while treating Rahner's Rule earnestly, Pannenberg's reconceptualization of the Trinity remains fraught with "serious ambiguity."³¹⁴ 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,³¹⁵ 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).

³¹⁴ Sanders, *The Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 107.

³¹⁵ Olson, "Trinity and Eschatology," *SJT*, 227.

somehow supposed to be grounded in the other.³¹⁶ 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,³¹⁷ 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.³¹⁸ As a general summary of something he elsewhere called “the triumph of relationality,”³¹⁹ 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.”³²⁰ 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.³²¹ 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.

³¹⁷ See some of Grenz’s own confusion over Pannenberg’s conceptualization of the Trinity in “The Irrelevancy of Theology,” 310, along with Grenz’s survey of other critiques of Pannenberg’s doctrine of God in Stanley J. Grenz, “The Appraisal of Pannenberg: A Survey of the Literature,” in *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg: Twelve American Critiques*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Philip Clayton (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 36-45.

³¹⁸ Grenz, “The Irrelevancy of Theology,” 311.

³¹⁹ *RTG*, 117-62.

³²⁰ *BF*, 191.

³²¹ *RTG*, 117-19.

of the one and the many within interrelational dynamics.³²² By the early twenty-first century, he saw this idea holding major promise for his own work.³²³

This relational ontology Grenz began working with was referred to as something also said to be building on Zizioulas's communion ontology.³²⁴ The ensuing social or relational ontology for Grenz also had import for God, who is spoken of as essentially other-oriented.³²⁵ 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.³²⁶ 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.³²⁷

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.³²⁸ 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.³²⁹ 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.³³⁰ 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*.³³¹

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

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.

³³¹ Grenz, “Ecclesiology,” 268 (italics added for emphasis).

grounds!³³² 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.³³³ 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.³³⁴ 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."³³⁵ 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.³³⁶ 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."³³⁷ As such, and as the "divine love" given by Father to Son and then back to Father from Son, the Spirit is "shared

³³² Stanley J. Grenz and Denise Muir Kjesbo, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 151-56. See also *TCG2*, 68-69; Stephen D. Kovach and Peter R. Schemm Jr., "A Defense of the Doctrine of the Eternal Subordination of the Son," *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 42 (1999): 461-76; Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005); and Millard J. Erickson's desire for further elaboration in *Who's Tampering with the Trinity? An Assessment of the Subordination Debate* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009), 72-74.

³³³ *RET*, 185-86; *TCG2*, 71-72; and 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, 18 Jan. 2005 (unpublished), 2.

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.³³⁸ 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.”³³⁹ 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.³⁴⁰ 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

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.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.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.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.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

³⁴¹ *JGRS*, 335. For a more detailed explanation of how this works in Grenz’s ecclesiology, see Sexton, “Stanley Grenz’s Ecclesiology,” 31-33, 40-44.

³⁴² For more on this, see Sexton, “The *Imago Dei* Once Again,” 187-206, esp. pp. 192-96 for how various analogies worked in his anthropology and theology proper.

³⁴³ See Wolfhart Pannenberg’s comments cited in Leafblad, “Prolegomena: In Dedication to Professor Stanley Grenz,” 1.

³⁴⁴ Grenz, “The Irrelevancy of Theology,” 310-11.

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.

³⁴⁶ Clayton, "The God of History and the Presence of the Future," 108; and Taylor, *Pannenberg on the Triune God*, 187.

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 trinitarian³⁴⁸ 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,³⁴⁹ 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

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.³⁵⁰ 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.

³⁵⁰ 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."³⁵¹ 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.³⁵² 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.³⁵³ 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.³⁵⁴ Their

³⁵¹ *RTG*, ix-x.

³⁵² 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).

³⁵³ See *SGRS*, 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).

³⁵⁴ 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*

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.³⁵⁵ 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.³⁵⁶ 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 *RTC*2, 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).

³⁵⁶ For Grenz's account of this turn in trinitarian thought, see *RTG*, 117-62. Grenz's 2001 *Matrix* volume was also hailed as "what may be the most ambitious project in the current revival of trinitarian theology" (Roderick T. Luepp, "Review of *The Social God and Relational Self*," *Christian Century* 119 [6-19 Nov. 2002]: 41). See also Jason S. Sexton, "The State of the Evangelical Trinitarian Resurgence," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54 (2011): 787-805.

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

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.

³⁶¹ Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 1:109.

³⁶² Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 1:271 (*italics added for emphasis*), 279.

centers of consciousness in the divine Being.³⁶³ 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."³⁶⁴ 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.³⁶⁵ 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.³⁶⁶

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

³⁶³ Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 1:258, 272-75.

³⁶⁴ Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 1:284.

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.³⁶⁷ Backus held a distinct form of divine simplicity, stressing God's transcendence and incomprehensibility 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 outwith himself.³⁶⁸

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.³⁶⁹ 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.³⁷⁰ This eschatological note was set to a tune in a more developed 1985 essay sketching a theology for a complex world in transition.³⁷¹ Summarizing the essay's main argument, Grenz deemed that "a theology for the future *must be oriented to the future.*"³⁷² The following year, reviewing six books related to the issue of Christian proclamation in the public

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).

³⁷¹ Grenz, "A Theology for the Future," 257-67.

³⁷² Grenz, "A Theology for the Future," 266 (italics in original).

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."³⁷³

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."³⁷⁴ Accordingly, prayer is an "eschatological activity" directed to "a transcendent God."³⁷⁵ Drawing these thoughts together, it appears that this steady emphasis on eschatology, evolving further into Grenz's ontological priority of the future,³⁷⁶ 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]."³⁷⁷ 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.³⁷⁸

³⁷³ Stanley J. Grenz, "Reconsecrating the Naked Public Square," *Fides et Historia* 18 (1986): 75.

³⁷⁴ Grenz, *Prayer*, 18-19.

³⁷⁵ Grenz, *Prayer*, 39-41.

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.’”³⁷⁹ 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.”³⁸⁰ 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.”³⁸¹ 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.

Bruce McCormack, “Participation in God, Yes, Deification, No: Two Modern Protestant Responses to an Ancient Question,” in *Denkwürdiges Geheimnis: Beiträge zur Gotteslehre: Festschrift für Eberhard Jüngel zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Ingolf U. Dalferth, Johannes Fischer, and Hans-Peter Gross [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004], 371). Drawing from his methodological surplus, Grenz’s provision for this problem drew from the “tradition” source for theology, specifically the patristic concept of *theosis* (Stanley J. Grenz, “Celebrating Eternity: Christian Worship as a Foretaste of Participation in the Triune God,” in *Semper Reformandum: Studies in Honour of Clark H. Pinnock*, ed. Anthony R. Cross and Stanley E. Porter [Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2003], 383-86). See also the discussion of God’s essence in §5.1.4.3. of the next chapter, and a discussion of Grenz’s use of *theosis* in Mark S. Medley, “Participation in God: The Appropriation of Theosis by Contemporary Baptist Theologians,” in *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, vol. 2, ed. Vladimir Kharlamov (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 212-16.

³⁷⁹ Stanley J. Grenz, “Pannenberg on Marxism,” *Christian Century* 104 (1987): 824.

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.”

³⁸¹ Grenz, “The Community of God,” 25.

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,³⁸² 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.³⁸³ 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."³⁸⁴ In this very important and revealing statement, Grenz anticipated both his own 1993 programmatic work (*Revisoning 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

³⁸² Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vols. 1-3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991-1998).

³⁸³ While having not attempted to show its direct relevance for his own scholarship by the early 1990s, Grenz was already on record sketching Pannenberg's thought in a number of places: Stanley J. Grenz, "Wolfhart Pannenberg's Quest for Ultimate Truth," *Christian Century* 105 (14 Sept. 1988): 795-98; Stanley J. Grenz, "Commitment and Dialogue: Pannenberg on Christianity and the Religions," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 26 (1989): 196-210; Stanley J. Grenz, *Reason for Hope: The Systematic Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Stanley J. Grenz, "Sacramental Spirituality, Ecumenism, and Mission to the World: Foundational Motifs of Pannenberg's Ecclesiology," *Mid-Stream* 30 (1991): 20-34; and Stanley J. Grenz, "Wolfhart Pannenberg: Reason, Hope and Transcendence," *The Asbury Theological Journal* 46 (1991): 73-90. Grenz also made assessment of Pannenberg's interlocutors in Grenz, "The Appraisal of Pannenberg," 19-52, and his own assessment of Pannenberg's work itself in Stanley J. Grenz, "Pannenberg and Evangelical Theology: Sympathy and Caution," *Christian Scholars' Review* 20 (1991): 272-85.

³⁸⁴ Grenz, "The Irrelevancy of Theology," 311.

from Lewis and Demarest, joined with the initial and later work under Professor Pannenberg³⁸⁵ 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 Trinity³⁸⁶ 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.³⁸⁷ 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."³⁸⁸ In saying as much, Grenz displayed that the doctrine of the Trinity was still at the center of his work.³⁸⁹ 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?

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], 260), 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, *Remythologizing 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,³⁹⁰ 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,”³⁹¹ both drawing on while seeking to advance Pannenberg’s work.³⁹² 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,³⁹³ 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.”³⁹⁴

³⁹⁰ See *TCG2*, 72, 76, 78, 80, 101, 112, 187, 305, 350, 483, 489, 501.

³⁹¹ Grenz, *Sexual Ethics*, rev. ed., 48.

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’s 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."³⁹⁵ 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.³⁹⁶

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."³⁹⁷ 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.”³⁹⁸ 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.”³⁹⁹ 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.⁴⁰⁰

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.⁴⁰¹ 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.⁴⁰² Ultimately, then, for Grenz every description of God’s attributes an attempt at describing his fundamental character as love—i.e., God in relationship.⁴⁰³

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

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.

⁴⁰⁹ TCG2, 99-101. See a similar position recently taken by John Webster, following Aquinas and Augustine, in "Trinity and Creation," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 12 (2010): 13-15, and also in the exposition of Augustine by Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, 258-59.

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).⁴¹²

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.⁴¹³ This theme increasingly became the most important premise for Grenz's entire constructive program,⁴¹⁴ 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."⁴¹⁵ 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

InterVarsity Press, 1996), 117. Significant components of Grenz's social Trinity are evinced in Stanley J. Grenz and Roy D. Bell, *Betrayal of Trust: Confronting and Preventing Clergy Sexual Misconduct* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995; 2d ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 71, 106-7; Stanley J. Grenz, *Welcoming But Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 106; and *RTC2*, 330.

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.).

⁴¹⁴ See Sexton, "The *Imago Dei* Once Again," 187-206, and the argument from Grenz, "Jesus as the *Imago Dei*," 617-28.

⁴¹⁵ Peters, *God as Trinity*, 37, cited in *SGRS*, 5.

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.”⁴¹⁶

4.3.2. Enduring “Western”⁴¹⁷ Emphasis

While it might be fair to say that no two relational models of the Trinity are the same,⁴¹⁸ 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,⁴¹⁹ or whether the personal Holy Spirit is the love existing between the Father and Son.⁴²⁰ 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).”⁴²¹

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

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.⁴²² 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),⁴²³ where God is three centers of consciousness,⁴²⁴ or three centers of consciousness with Son and Spirit each unilaterally dependent on the Father,⁴²⁵ or where persons *are* relations.⁴²⁶ 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

⁴²² At the conclusion of a presentation of my essay, “Stanley Grenz’s Ecclesiology: Telic and Trinitarian,” presented at the Thirteenth Conference in Christian Dogmatics, Rutherford House, Edinburgh, Scotland, 25 Aug. 2009, John Franke raised a question suggesting that with the work done in *The Social God and the Relational Self* (2001), the grip of the “Augustinian Trinity” began to loosen its hold on Grenz’s model of the Trinity. The present thesis, however, and Grenz’s work subsequent to 2001 argue to the contrary.

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 *passiones 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, *Imago Trinitatis: 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? Whose Monothelism: 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.⁴²⁷ 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."⁴²⁸ 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."⁴²⁹

Grenz understood God's self-disclosure to be revealing the divine being as "God-in-relation."⁴³⁰ 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."⁴³¹ 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."⁴³² 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.⁴³³ Whereas some statements may suggest the contrary when Grenz emphasized God's active engagement with the world,⁴³⁴ he

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.”⁴³⁵ 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.⁴³⁶ With God willing God’s own being, Grenz found no dichotomy between God’s being and will.⁴³⁷ He also emphasised divine freedom⁴³⁸ 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).⁴³⁹ Over and against Moltmann and Pannenberg, Grenz stressed the importance of the *filioque*,⁴⁴⁰ and maintained trenchant dependence on Augustine, as this chapter has already begun to show.⁴⁴¹ Grenz’s relational model of the Trinity, then, came from the West, from Augustine, and not Zizioulas or the stream often identified with Zizioulas.⁴⁴² 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.

⁴³⁵ TCG2, 99-101 (see also Grenz’s dependence on CD III/1: 330-4, 344; III/3: 289-368), which ref. is also cited in SGRS, 319n82. Although speaking with reference to the initial act of creation here, it is evidenced elsewhere in Grenz’s corpus that this also applies to the course of world history, wherein God is “at work bringing creation to its divinely intended goal” (Grenz, “Ecclesiology,” 262; and Stanley J. Grenz, “The Holy Spirit: Divine Love Guiding Us Home,” *Ex auditu* 12 [1996]: 8).

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 SGRS (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

doctrine of the Trinity might initially have seemed “more useful” for Grenz's methodological and systematic emphases on relation and community, and seems confused over why Grenz followed Augustine and not Pannenberg to avoid “Augustinian pneumatological subordinationism.”

⁴⁴³ E.g., John Zizioulas, Robert W. Jenson, and Colin Gunton. See Jenson's admission of recent Augustine-bashing in “A Decision Tree of Colin Gunton's Thinking,” in *The Theology of Colin Gunton*, 11. For a discussion of Gunton (and Zizioulas) on this point, see Brad Green, “The Protomodern Augustine? Colin Gunton and the Failure of Augustine,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9 (2007): 328-41. See also the book-length defense of Augustine's trinitarian theology in Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, which effectively refutes the negative notion that Augustine initiated disastrous trends in Western Christian thought.

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 Kjos 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 Lints “have criticized my Christian theology [*vi*] 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).

⁴⁴⁷ Grenz, “The Irrelevancy of Theology,” 310.

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.

of the postmodern problematic involving the loss of, yet quest for, transcendence.⁴⁵⁰

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.”⁴⁵¹ 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.⁴⁵² 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.

⁴⁵⁰ Stanley J. Grenz, “Series Proposal: Toward a Matrix of Trinitarian, Communitarian, Eschatological Theology,” 3 Dec. 1998 (unpublished), 2.

⁴⁵¹ *NGQB*, 7.

⁴⁵² The *OED* defines “prequel” as “A book, film, etc., narrating events which precede those of an already existing work” *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3d ed., online version, Nov. 2010, <http://www.oed.com:80/Entry/150546> (accessed 13 Feb. 2011).

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."⁴⁵³ 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.⁴⁵⁴ 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.⁴⁵⁵ 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."⁴⁵⁶ 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.⁴⁵⁷ 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

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 exterioribus ad interiora*, 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.⁴⁵⁸ 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,"⁴⁵⁹ which in turn was said to provide interpretive and explanatory use for the whole of theology.⁴⁶⁰ And yet while notwithstanding Barth's remarkable contribution to theology, and Grenz's self-awareness of its influence on his own work,⁴⁶¹ 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*,"⁴⁶² Grenz continued searching for something much more eschatological "for the key to unlocking the theological treasure chest."⁴⁶³ In other words, Barth's theology is

⁴⁵⁸ RTG, 41, 45, 47, 55.

⁴⁵⁹ RTG, 51.

⁴⁶⁰ RTG, 54, favorably citing the description of Barth's "lasting contribution" given by Robert W. Jenson, "Karl Barth," in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, ed. David F. Ford, 2 vols. (New York: Blackwell, 1989), 1:42.

⁴⁶¹ Grenz, "The Virtue of Ambiguity," 364.

⁴⁶² RTG, 55. In the context of this statement Grenz quotes Alan Torrance, "The Trinity," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 79, without noting the reference. This article by Torrance further references his Alan J. Torrance, *Persons in Communion: An Essay on Trinitarian Description and Human Participation* (Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 1996).

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,⁴⁶⁴ 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."⁴⁶⁵ 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,⁴⁶⁶ neither this nor any other historical event in any way constitutes God's being in Grenz's

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.⁴⁷⁰ 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

⁴⁷⁰ Stanley J. Grenz, “The Divine Fugue: Robert Jenson’s Renewed Trinitarianism,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 30 (2003): 215.

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.

⁴⁷³ *RTG*, 122-23, 127-31.

⁴⁷⁴ *RTG*, 126-27.

versa' of Rahner's Rule."⁴⁷⁵ 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 *imago Dei*, as will be explored more fully in the next two chapters of this thesis.⁴⁷⁶ Grenz's earlier rejection of Moltmann⁴⁷⁷ was ultimately not on dissimilar grounds to his rejection of Boff (and Volf, presumably).⁴⁷⁸ For while Boff developed Moltmann's elevated concept of *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,"⁴⁷⁹ he was insufficiently trinitarian because he was "less interested in offering a distinctly trinitarian proposal than in speaking to a social context...."⁴⁸⁰

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 *hypostasis* and *ekstasis*."⁴⁸¹ 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

⁴⁷⁵ *RTG*, 131.

⁴⁷⁶ On the need of social trinitarian models to have a mediating rubric see Sexton, "The State of the Evangelical Trinitarian Resurgence," 793.

⁴⁷⁷ 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).

⁴⁷⁸ Miroslav Volf, "The Trinity is Our Social Program: The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement," *Modern Theology* 14 (1998): 403-23.

⁴⁷⁹ *RTG*, 119. Incidentally, Grenz worked from a somewhat similar approach as late as 2001 (see *SGRS*, 251, and earlier with *MQ*, 261-75), but nuanced this significantly by his 2005 Assemblies of God lecture and moved toward identifying its location completely in the *Imago Dei* concept, which had already begun to be the focus of both the ideal for human community (*MQ*, 267-68) and for the ascertainment of insight into the ineffable mystery of God. See these developments in chs. 6 and 7 of this thesis.

⁴⁸⁰ *RTG*, 219.

⁴⁸¹ *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," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 28 (2010): 64-66.

this may yield a larger problem, with the inter-divine communion existing as a primordial concept for Zizioulas, both ontologically primitive and original.⁴⁸² 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.⁴⁸³ 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.⁴⁸⁴

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."⁴⁸⁵ 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."⁴⁸⁶ 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, *Imago Trinitatis*, 40.

⁴⁸⁶ RTG, 220.

presence of “variations on the theme of divine relationality.”⁴⁸⁷ 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.”⁴⁸⁸ 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*.”⁴⁸⁹ 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.⁴⁹⁰ Furthering his journey through the most recent major developments in

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,⁴⁹¹ Grenz moved on to explore three important thinkers whose work indicated a move in trinitarian scholarship marking “The Return of the Immanent Trinity.”⁴⁹²

The return to the immanent Trinity was first spotted in the work of the Roman Catholic feminist theologian Elizabeth Johnson.⁴⁹³ 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.”⁴⁹⁴ 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.⁴⁹⁵

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.

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 you 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” (*SGRS*, 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*.

⁴⁹³ Note also recent charges made by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops against what is written in Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (New York: Continuum, 2007), asserting that it distorts the Catholic conception of God, rejects divine revelation as the standard for Catholic theology, and differs from authentic Catholic teaching on essential points (see the official press release, “Bishops’ Doctrine Committee Faults Book by Fordham Professor,” 30 Mar. 2011, <http://nccbuscc.org/comm/archives/2011/11-063.shtml> [accessed 5 Sept. 2011]).

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—*deus dixit*.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.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 *missio* and *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.”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.⁴⁹⁹ And while others have offered hopeful modifications of Barth’s

⁴⁹⁶ *RTG*, 183.

⁴⁹⁷ *RTG*, 192-93.

⁴⁹⁸ *RTG*, 196.

⁴⁹⁹ On this point, Grenz followed the lead of Paul Molnar (*RTG*, 200-201).

work,⁵⁰⁰ the most influential Barth-oriented theologian for Grenz was Thomas Torrance,⁵⁰¹ not least for how the *analogia entis* gives way to the *analogia relationis* in Grenz's work.⁵⁰² 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..."⁵⁰³ 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.⁵⁰⁴

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

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.

⁵⁰³ RTG, 206, citing Thomas F. Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology* (Belfast, UK: Christian Journals Limited, 1980), 158-59 (italics in original).

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.”⁵⁰⁵ Accordingly, each member of the Trinity functions as the onto-relational source of qualities characterizing the one God.⁵⁰⁶ 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.⁵⁰⁷

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.⁵⁰⁸ 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.⁵⁰⁹ 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

⁵⁰⁵ RTG, 208-9, citing Thomas F. Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), 42-43. For a thorough exposition of the onto-relational framework of Torrance’s theology see Gary Deddo, “The Realist and Onto-relational Frame of T. F. Torrance’s Incarnational and Trinitarian Theology,” *Theology in Scotland* 15 (2011): 121-32.

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).

⁵⁰⁸ RTG, 211. On this point, Grenz cited Thomas F. Torrance, *Christian Doctrine of God: One Being, Three Persons* (Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 1996), 133.

⁵⁰⁹ RTG, 211-12, 221. Grenz noted that this is especially developed in Thomas F. Torrance, *Reality and Scientific Theology* (Edinburgh, UK: Scottish Academic Press, 1985).

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."⁵¹⁰

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.⁵¹¹

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.⁵¹² 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.⁵¹³ 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

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.”⁵¹⁸ As late as 2003 he displayed ambiguity when using “relationality” and “community” synonymously regarding the triune God.⁵¹⁹ 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.⁵²⁰ 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.⁵²¹

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 pantheistic ideas...” (Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, 19). Grenz acknowledged this catalyst as the beginning of the “changing focus” away from a substantialist 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 Trinity: Luxuriant Meadow or Theological Terminus?” *Cruce* 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,⁵²² but with different emphases than what drove the range of previous advocates of divine relationality.⁵²³

Although Grenz continued to speak of God as "the divine community characterized by love,"⁵²⁴ 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 *imago Dei* epistemology of theology, which reflects what might have been his own uneasiness of combining his earlier prioritization of the historic Jesus of Nazareth⁵²⁵ 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."

⁵²² *RTG*, 220-21.

⁵²³ See Grenz's discussion on this in *RTG*, 132-33.

⁵²⁴ See Stanley J. Grenz, "Church," Session 3 of "Getting Back to Basics: Truth, Humanity, Church and Scripture," Critical Concerns Course, Emergent Conference, San Diego, CA, 1 Feb. 2005 (unpublished), 3, and earlier in 2003 where God, the fellowship of Father, Son and Spirit united together in perfect love, is spoken of as "community" (Grenz, "The Doctrine of the Trinity," 17).

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.⁵²⁶ 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.⁵²⁷ 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."⁵²⁸ 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

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 *TCG2*, 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.”⁵²⁹ 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.⁵³⁰ 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.⁵³¹

Grenz thought this yielded a trajectory positing a thoroughgoing relational ontology where love is seen as the primary ontological predicate.⁵³² 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.”⁵³³ 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

⁵²⁹ *SGRS*, 314-15.

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 *JGRS*, 321.

⁵³⁵ *NGQB*, 288.

⁵³⁶ *NGQB*, 290.

narrative of the person denoted by the name, so also names and naming are equally eschatological.⁵³⁷ 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 11:27,⁵³⁸ 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.”⁵³⁹

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.⁵⁴⁰ 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-

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*; *SGRS*, 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 (*SGRS*, 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” (*SGRS*, 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” (*NPNI*¹ 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

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-alooof. 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 *NGQB*, 372-73.

⁵⁴⁷ Grenz, “What Does it Mean to be Trinitarian in Prayer?” 2.

⁵⁴⁸ Stanley J. Grenz, “Restoring a Trinitarian Understanding of the Church in Practice,” in *Evangelicalism and the Stone-Campbell Movement*, ed. William R. Baker (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 233.

⁵⁴⁹ Stanley J. Grenz, “Being There for Each Other: The Church as Genuine Community?” *Enrichment: A Journal for Pentecostal Ministry* 10 (2005): 125-26.

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.⁵⁵³ 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 *telos* of human existence as "community in the highest sense,"⁵⁵⁴ 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.⁵⁵⁵ 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.⁵⁵⁶

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,⁵⁵⁷ Grenz himself also referred to God as "Person." In his exposition of

⁵⁵³ 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."

⁵⁵⁴ See p. 49n241 in §3.1.3 of this thesis.

⁵⁵⁵ E.g., Thomas Torrance is said to have rejected the notion of the believer's *direct* participation in the *essence* of God (Myk Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance* [Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2009], 157). See also Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 266-67n13.

⁵⁵⁶ 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.

⁵⁵⁷ Grenz, "The Divine Fugue," 215.

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 5:14-15,⁵⁵⁸ 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.).”⁵⁵⁹ 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.⁵⁶⁰ Grenz acknowledged the earlier ideas surrounding the notion of “Person” and its relationship to the divine Being, from Walter Richmond to Karl Barth,⁵⁶¹ 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.”⁵⁶²

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

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).

⁵⁵⁹ Grenz, “What Does it Mean to be Trinitarian in Prayer?” 5-6. See also Grenz, *Prayer*, rev. ed., 12.

⁵⁶⁰ Grenz, *Prayer*, rev. ed., 115.

⁵⁶¹ *SGRS*, 32-37.

⁵⁶² Grenz, “Jesus as the *Imago Dei*,” 627.

who confronts us.”⁵⁶³ 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.”⁵⁶⁴

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.⁵⁶⁵ 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.⁵⁶⁶ On this point Grenz was aware of the concerns of deconstructionist philosopher Jacques Derrida

⁵⁶³ *TCG2*, 83-87. Grenz never made much significance of the Latin term *persona*, perhaps similar to Augustine’s usage (see Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, 217-20), and the statement by the trinitarian Pentecostals, who in dialogue with the Oneness Pentecostals affirmed that the language of “persons” is not sacred in Trinitarian theology” (“Oneness-Trinitarian Pentecostal Final Report, 2002–2007,” *Pneuma* 30 [2008]: 217-18).

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.⁵⁶⁷ 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 this own theo-ontology.

As Grenz carried out his theo-ontological exposition of God’s being in the second *Matrix* volume,⁵⁶⁸ 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.”⁵⁶⁹ 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.⁵⁷⁰ 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.⁵⁷¹

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.”⁵⁷² This flows out further into the willingness to share the name with others, showing forth the

⁵⁶⁷ *NGQB*, 120-30.

⁵⁶⁸ *NGQB*, 249-373.

⁵⁶⁹ Grenz, “‘Community’ as a Theological Motif,” 15.

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,⁵⁷⁶ 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 Christocentrism⁵⁷⁷ and also how God's self-disclosure in Jesus Christ reveals a God who is inherently relational.⁵⁷⁸

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

Grenz was on the way toward developing a new ontology⁵⁷⁹ and an epistemology that would give precedence to the shape of Christian theology. He was not attempting a new trinitarian ontology as such,⁵⁸⁰ 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 thoroughgoing Trinitarian perspective," which meant determining implications of the Christian conception of God as triune for the questions raised by ontology.⁵⁸¹ 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!"⁵⁸² 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

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.

⁵⁸⁵ Grenz, “Jesus as the *Imago Dei*,” 617-28. See also Grenz, “What Does it Mean to be Trinitarian in Doctrine?” 8; and Grenz, “Church,” Session 3 of “Getting Back to Basics,” 3.

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.

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.⁵⁸⁸

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."⁵⁸⁹ 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

⁵⁸⁸ *NGQB*, 327.

⁵⁸⁹ *TCG2*, 304-5.

creation.”⁵⁹⁰ 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’ supracreaturely dignity before God, and whose sonship is understood as mediated in his self-humbling.⁵⁹¹ 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.⁵⁹² 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.⁵⁹³

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.”⁵⁹⁴ 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.⁵⁹⁵ 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

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.⁵⁹⁶ 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."⁵⁹⁷ 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.⁵⁹⁸ Indeed, he affirmed that, "relationality... emerges from the divine triune self-disclosure."⁵⁹⁹ And while this feature displayed itself in the trinitarian activity of divine self-naming in the trinitarian "history of relationships,"⁶⁰⁰ 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."

⁵⁹⁷ Grenz, "The Virtue of Ambiguity," 364.

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.”⁶⁰¹

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.⁶⁰² 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.⁶⁰³ 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.

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 (*SGRS*, 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.⁶⁰⁴ 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.⁶⁰⁵

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.

⁶⁰⁵ Most notably, perhaps, see William J. Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology: From the Fathers to Feminism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 466-80; and William J. Abraham, "Canonical Theism and the Future of Systematic Theology," in *Canonical Theism: A Proposal for Theology and the Church*, William J. Abraham, Jason E. Vickers, and Natalie B. Van Kirk (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 287-302.

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.⁶⁰⁶

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.⁶⁰⁷ 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

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.⁶⁰⁸ 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

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

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.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.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.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

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.

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).

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.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.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... [a]nd 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.”⁶¹⁷

Grenz suggested that theology serves the hermeneutic end⁶¹⁸ 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.”⁶¹⁹ Here Grenz employed features of narrative theology, suggesting that “the world we are to inhabit is... shaped by the world

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,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54 (2011): 589-606.

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 *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 *Imago Dei* Once Again,” 187-206.

⁶¹⁷ BF, 89-90.

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,” *Theology Today* 57 (2000): 362.

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.

⁶²¹ Grenz, “The Spirit and the Word,” 362.

⁶²² Grenz, “Jesus as the *Imago Dei*,” 624-26.

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,⁶²⁵ but later presented a merging of the structural, relational, and dynamic views, all seen as valid historical options for interpreting the concept.⁶²⁶

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).⁶²⁷ 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

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*).

⁶²⁶ *TCG2*, 169-73. Incidentally, a relational and communal view was advocated in Grenz and Kjesbo, *Women in the Church*, 169-72. Grenz elsewhere articulated the significance of the creation account for relationship, community, and bonding (Grenz, *Sexual Ethics*, 32-36).

⁶²⁷ *TCG2*, 173-80.

theological *loci* informed it, which, in turn, were informed by close readings of the biblical text.⁶²⁸ For his constructive approach to theology, as noted earlier, he consciously drew from three sources—scripture, tradition, and culture,⁶²⁹ 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.⁶³⁰ 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.⁶³¹

In light of the triad of sources that were crucial for his theological construct, “sound exegesis of the biblical texts” was a (the most?) 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.⁶³² 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.”⁶³³ 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

⁶²⁸ See some of this exegetical work in, e.g., *JGRS*, 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. Anthropology⁶³⁴

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.⁶³⁵ 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 [D]ei*" rediscovered in the Reformation that "launches us on the road toward an understanding that can speak into the postmodern context."⁶³⁶ 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."⁶³⁷

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.⁶³⁸ 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,

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.

⁶³⁵ *NGQB*, 361. For another recent version of this see Richard S. Briggs, "Humans in the Image of God—and Other Things Genesis Doesn't Make Clear," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 4 (2010): 111-26.

⁶³⁶ *SGRS*, 142-82; and Stanley J. Grenz, "The Imago Dei and the Dissipation of the Self," *Dialog* 38 (1999): 183-84.

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

⁶³⁸ Stanley J. Grenz, "The Social God and the Relational Self: Toward a Theology of the *Imago Dei* in the Postmodern Context," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 24 (2002): 42; and *SGRS*, 280.

from Genesis 1:27 the image is said to dynamically point or mirror.⁶³⁹ 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.”⁶⁴⁰ He saw the image as vocational, then, mediating the Creator’s immanence in the world.⁶⁴¹ The manner in which humans are to fulfill this vocation leads back to an account that includes the “full sweep of the biblical narrative,”⁶⁴² ultimately finding the vocational mandate fulfilled by loving.⁶⁴³ 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,⁶⁴⁴ 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.”⁶⁴⁵

Representing divine relationality, according to Grenz humanity as male and female suggests that the goal of human sexuality is relational bonding,⁶⁴⁶ with marriage being a primary picture of the relationship God desires to have with his people.⁶⁴⁷ Grenz saw the divine image

⁶³⁹ *SGRS*, 162, 166-70; and Grenz, “The Universality of the ‘Jesus-Story,’” 109.

⁶⁴⁰ *TCG2*, 174-75. See Phyllis A. Bird, “‘Male and Female He Created Them’: Gen 1:27b in the Context of the Priestly Account of Creation,” *Harvard Theological Review* 74 (1981): 129-59

⁶⁴¹ *NGQB*, 361.

⁶⁴² Grenz, “The Social God,” *HBT*, 43-44.

⁶⁴³ *SGRS*, 320. “Comprehensive love” is the all-inclusive theme of Grenz’s ethical work, *MQ*, 276-302. Elsewhere he asserted, “At the heart of the revealed character of God is love” (*NGQB*, 203).

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 ‘thisness’) of God’s masterpiece of creation applies to אָדָם [necessarily a concrete being] understood both as a singular and as a collective” (Paul Niskanen, “The Poetics of Adam: The Creation of אָדָם in the Image of אֱלֹהִים,” *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.⁶⁴⁸ He did not ground sexuality in any sort of incarnational theology, or directly in the divine being necessarily,⁶⁴⁹ 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.⁶⁵⁰

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."⁶⁵¹ While beginning early with anthropology, humanity and creation were nevertheless designed not to be anthropocentric, but to be theocentric and Christocentric.⁶⁵² 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.⁶⁵³ 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

even the most significant picture describing the relationship between God and his people (Grenz, "Is God Sexual?" 40-41).

⁶⁴⁸ Grenz, "The Social God," *HBT*, 43; and *SGRS*, 303.

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?⁶⁵⁴ 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 *loci*, 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.”⁶⁵⁵ 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.⁶⁵⁶

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,”

⁶⁵⁴ Paul Helm, “Cautious Trinitarianism,” *Cruce* 39 (2003): 23.

⁶⁵⁵ *NGQB*, 339-40.

⁶⁵⁶ *SGRS*, 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 “presum[ing] 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.⁶⁵⁷ 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.”⁶⁵⁸ 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.⁶⁵⁹

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 benos*—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.”⁶⁶⁰ 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.⁶⁶¹ 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

⁶⁵⁷ *NGQB*, 6.

⁶⁵⁸ *NGQB*, 292, 340.

⁶⁵⁹ *NGQB*, 250, 283, 292.

⁶⁶⁰ *NGQB*, 358.

⁶⁶¹ Grenz, “What Does it Mean to be Trinitarian in Doctrine?” 3.

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.”⁶⁶²

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.”⁶⁶³ From this he emphasized the Son’s cosmic role as “the principle of creation.”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.⁶⁶⁵ As the one who “fully reveals God,” Grenz thereby declared Jesus as “the *imago dei* in fulfillment of Gen 1:26-27 as he redeems humankind.”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 *eikon* of God.”⁶⁶⁷ As the one who fully manifests the deity of his Father, Grenz declared that “Jesus alone is the image of God.”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 *locus*” that Grenz understood Christology as intending to yield. He asserted nothing less than that “Jesus came to fulfil our

⁶⁶² *SGRS*, 280; *NGQB*, 364-67.

⁶⁶³ *SGRS*, 202-3; and Stanley J. Grenz, “The Social God and the Relational Self: Toward a Trinitarian Theology of the *Imago Dei*,” in *Trinitarian Soundings in Systematic Theology*, ed. Paul Louis Metzger (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 89.

⁶⁶⁴ *TCG2*, 100, 103.

⁶⁶⁵ Grenz, “Universality of the ‘Jesus-Story,’” 109.

⁶⁶⁶ *SGRS*, 18.

⁶⁶⁷ *NGQB*, 362.

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

⁶⁶⁹ Grenz, “Jesus as the *Imago Dei*,” 628.

⁶⁷⁰ Grenz, “The Social God,” *HBT*, 42.

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.

⁶⁷² Grenz, “The Holy Spirit,” 4, 10.

“in God,” or into the dynamic of the divine life.⁶⁷³ 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.⁶⁷⁴ 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.⁶⁷⁵

Grenz refused to localize “feminine features” to the Spirit, as has often been done by some.⁶⁷⁶ 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.”⁶⁷⁷ The Spirit is the “key Person” effecting the ministry of a resultant christologically defined anthropology.⁶⁷⁸ 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.⁶⁷⁹ 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’.*”⁶⁸⁰ Therein the Spirit is given with a ministry that imparts

⁶⁷³ Grenz, “The Social God,” in *Trinitarian Soundings*, 98; and *NGQB*, 360-61.

⁶⁷⁴ Grenz, “The Social God,” in *Trinitarian Soundings*, 98 (italics in original). See similar language and concepts in Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 2d rev. ed. (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 195-96; and see also Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 1996), 17.

⁶⁷⁵ I.e., the participation of baptismal identification, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit (*NGQB*, 283).

⁶⁷⁶ Grenz, “Is God Sexual?” 33-36.

⁶⁷⁷ Grenz, “The Holy Spirit,” 8.

⁶⁷⁸ *JGRS*, 251.

⁶⁷⁹ Grenz, “Universality of the ‘Jesus Story,’” 107-11.

⁶⁸⁰ Grenz, “Spirit and the Word,” 36 (italics in original).

a telic orientation,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.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.”⁶⁸³ The Spirit’s present work, then, is in effectually transforming relational beings into “ecclesial” beings,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.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.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.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.”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

⁶⁸¹ *NGQB*, 366-7, 371. By telic, Grenz uses the word generally as an adjective of its cognate “telos.”

⁶⁸² Grenz, “The Holy Spirit,” 11.

⁶⁸³ *NGQB*, 341.

⁶⁸⁴ Grenz, “The Social God,” in *Trinitarian Soundings*, 98.

⁶⁸⁵ Grenz, “Is God Sexual?” 39-41.

⁶⁸⁶ *JGRS*, 312. For a more detailed account of Grenz’s ecclesiology, see Sexton, “Stanley Grenz’s Ecclesiology,” 21-45.

⁶⁸⁷ Grenz, “Ecclesiology,” 253.

⁶⁸⁸ Grenz, “Ecclesiology,” 267.

goal.”⁶⁸⁹ According to Grenz, the relational self is to be understood as the ecclesial self.⁶⁹⁰ 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.⁶⁹¹

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,⁶⁹² 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.⁶⁹³ 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.⁶⁹⁴ Therefore the church is to be the

⁶⁸⁹ Grenz, “Ecclesiology,” 262.

⁶⁹⁰ *JGRS*, 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 *JGRS*, 312-31.

⁶⁹² Grenz, “The Holy Spirit,” 7; and *NGQB*, 367-73.

⁶⁹³ *NGQB*, 362-63.

⁶⁹⁴ *JGRS*, 247-50, 322.

“harbinger” of the divine image and “the prolepsis of the new humanity,”⁶⁹⁵ being presently on mission in the world, actively replicating Christ’s image which is part of “Christ’s destiny.”⁶⁹⁶ Following Guder, Grenz saw the missional church as a “proclaiming, reconciling, sanctifying and unifying” community.⁶⁹⁷ 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.”⁶⁹⁸

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.⁶⁹⁹ From the start, God’s plan was to establish community between himself and his creation, which itself “finds completion in the eschatological vision.”⁷⁰⁰ 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.”⁷⁰¹

⁶⁹⁵ *SGRS*, 281, 303, 331-36.

⁶⁹⁶ Grenz, “Jesus as the *Imago Dei*,” 622.

⁶⁹⁷ Grenz, “Ecclesiology,” 264-65.

⁶⁹⁸ *NGQB*, 362-63.

⁶⁹⁹ *SGRS*, 240; and *NGQB*, 366.

⁷⁰⁰ 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).

⁷⁰¹ *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*.⁷⁰² This was (and still is) a witness to what God is bringing about eschatologically—community in its highest, fullest sense.⁷⁰³ The Spirit performs this eschatological task as “God at work bringing history to its goal,”⁷⁰⁴ 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.”⁷⁰⁵

With his resurrected body as “the paradigm” for those who will share his image, Jesus’ own resurrection is the prolepsis of the final resurrection.⁷⁰⁶ 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.⁷⁰⁷ 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.⁷⁰⁸

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,⁷⁰⁹ receiving both its unique character and instruction from the biblical witness.

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).

⁷⁰⁴ Grenz, “The Holy Spirit,” 8.

⁷⁰⁵ Grenz, “Jesus as the *Imago Dei*,” 623.

⁷⁰⁶ *SGRS*, 235-36.

⁷⁰⁷ Grenz, “The Social God,” in *Trinitarian Soundings*, 95.

⁷⁰⁸ Grenz, “Ecclesiology,” 256.

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,⁷¹⁰ 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,⁷¹¹ 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,

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 systematicians 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 exegete 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 8:29⁷¹⁷ 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.

⁷¹⁹ Grenz, "The Social God," in *Trinitarian Soundings*, 91.

⁷²⁰ Grenz, "Jesus as the *Imago Dei*," 622; and Grenz, "The Social God," in *Trinitarian Soundings*, 92.

equally displayed the characteristically baptistic feature of prioritizing Christ at the center of both his hermeneutic for scripture and theology.⁷²¹ 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.

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

⁷²² Recent exceptions to this are Evan C. Lenow, "Community in Ethics: A Comparative Analysis of the Work of Thomas Aquinas and Stanley J. Grenz" (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010); Brian S. Harris, *The Theological Method of Stanley J. Grenz: Constructing Evangelical Theology from Scripture, Tradition, and Culture* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2011); and Megan K. DeFranza, "Intersex and the *Imago*: Sex, Gender, and Sexuality in Postmodern Theological Anthropology" (PhD diss., Marquette University, 2011).

Stanley J. Grenz's distinctly ethical books include the following: *Sexual Ethics: An Evangelical Perspective* (orig. published as *Sexual Ethics: A Biblical Perspective*, Dallas: Word, 1990; rev. ed., Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997); *AIDS: Ministry in the Midst of an Epidemic*, coauthored with Wendell Hoffman (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990); *Betrayal of Trust: Confronting and Preventing Clergy Sexual Misconduct*, coauthored with Roy D. Bell (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995; 2d ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001); *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry*, coauthored with Denise Muir Kjesbo (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995); *Moral Quest: Foundations of Christian Ethics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997); and *Welcoming But Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998).

⁷²³ A brief recounting of the story can be found in the "Preface" to *MQ*, 9-11.

⁷²⁴ Stanley J. Grenz, *Reason for Hope: The Systematic Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990; rev. ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

enabled his ethical engagement to begin flourishing, with a working constructive theology to substantiate it.⁷²⁵ And while consistently affirming that ethics logically flow from one's theology,⁷²⁶ with Grenz it is difficult to observe where theology ends and ethics begins,⁷²⁷ especially since he paradigmatically concluded, "*Ethics is theology in action.*"⁷²⁸ His program therefore evinced immense organic continuity, even while developing over the years in light of various discoveries.⁷²⁹

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?⁷³⁰ Did he locate ethics anywhere *in* his theological or ethical methodology?⁷³¹ 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

⁷²⁵ 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.

⁷²⁶ *RET*, 19; *TCG2*, 76; *SGRS*, 251-52; and *NGQB*, 338, 372.

⁷²⁷ E.g., see how Grenz integrated belief expressions and practices within personal and community life (*RET*, 64).

⁷²⁸ *MQ*, 19 (italics in original); see also pp. 255-57.

⁷²⁹ E.g., one of these discoveries is seen as late as 2004 in Stanley J. Grenz, "Jesus as the *Imago 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.

⁷³⁰ 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.

⁷³¹ E.g., as informed by scripture, tradition, culture, or perhaps structured *trinitarianly*, integrated *communally*, and oriented *eschatologically*? See also §1.4. of this thesis.

agenda to engage any isolated ethical topics beyond the works forthcoming at his death.⁷³² And yet he clearly affirmed theology's incompleteness apart from ethics.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.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."⁷³⁵ Quite the opposite, Grenz saw ethics both based in and flowing

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, *God and the Experience of Suffering*; and a collaborative project to be co-edited with Ronald T. Michener tentatively titled, *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, *Mapping the Christian Life*, outline last updated 12 July 2004 (unpublished), 1.

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).

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., *Created for Community, Betrayal of Trust*, and *Theology for the Community of God* went through new editions with different publishers while being identical with the first editions. *Sexual Ethics* went through a slight revision whereas *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 *The Baptist Congregation* was also due to be revised by 31 Dec. 2005, as was his *Theology for the Community of God* in 2012 once Grenz finished the explorative six-volume *Matrix* series in preparation for a larger three-volume *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.

⁷³⁵ Mark S. Medley, "An Evangelical Theology for a Postmodern Age: Stanley J. Grenz's Current Theological Project," *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.⁷³⁶ He affirmed: “To [doctrinal] construction, we *must* add application,” for “Christian ethics... is an extension of the theological discipline.”⁷³⁷

Before constructing his own theological ethic, Grenz customarily surveyed the biblical documents,⁷³⁸ 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”;⁷³⁹ (2) that Jesus stressed “the theological foundation for the ethical life”;⁷⁴⁰ and (3) that Paul also “indissolubly linked” the “great indicative” as providing “the basis for the ‘imperative.’”⁷⁴¹ He again asserted that “the ethical life is integrally linked to... a *theology*.”⁷⁴² 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.⁷⁴³ Nothing indicates that he found it

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).

⁷³⁶ *RET*, 19; *SGRS*, 251-52; *TCG2*, 25, 76; and *MQ*, *passim*. For this conclusion, see also Harris, “Revisioning Evangelical Theology,” 78.

⁷³⁷ *TCG2*, 25 (italics added for emphasis).

⁷³⁸ See this methodological commitment articulated in *RET*, 93-96; and worked out more thoroughly in the expanded *BF*, 57-92.

⁷³⁹ *MQ*, 101.

⁷⁴⁰ *MQ*, 109.

⁷⁴¹ *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).

⁷⁴² *MQ*, 230 (emphasis in original).

⁷⁴³ 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.”⁷⁴⁴ As such, its reach includes and aims for the ethical idea of transformation,⁷⁴⁵ which is not merely ethical, but also ecclesial, theo-ontological and eschatologically-realist.⁷⁴⁶ 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.⁷⁴⁷ 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.”⁷⁴⁸

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

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.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, *The Baptist Congregation*,⁷⁵⁰ already defining the Trinity as “community” and also more specifically as the “divine community.”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.⁷⁵² The same year, “community” became a major theme for his work in the book *Sexual Ethics*, further preparing the way for his work in *Theology for the Community of God* (1994) and its methodological forerunner, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* (1993) where the “community” concept was summoned as theology’s “integrative motif.”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.⁷⁵⁴ The theme also became significant in *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*,

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

⁷⁵⁰ Grenz, *The Baptist Congregation*, 16, 18, 47-50.

⁷⁵¹ Grenz, *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 *TCG* and then quite liberally thereafter. See also *RET* 186-88, and *Sexual Ethics*, 48, and *passim*, along with the narrative account of Grenz’s usage of the “social Trinity” in §4.3.1. of this thesis.

⁷⁵² Grenz, *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.

⁷⁵³ *RET*, 147-62; and *TCG2*, 23-24.

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 (*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).

⁷⁵⁶ *TCG2*, 452-53, 472, 475, 478-79.

⁷⁵⁷ Grenz, *The Baptist Congregation*, 17-18.

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,⁷⁶³ 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.⁷⁶⁴ 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.⁷⁶⁵ 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,"⁷⁶⁶ 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*.⁷⁶⁷ 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 narrational 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.

⁷⁶³ Cp. *TCG2*, 619 with p. 570. See also *Sexual Ethics*, 49, and Sexton, "Stanley Grenz's Ecclesiology," 30n61.

⁷⁶⁴ Stanley J. Grenz, *Prayer: The Cry for the Kingdom* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988; rev. ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

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

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 Ethic⁷⁷³

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.⁷⁷⁴

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.⁷⁷⁵ 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."⁷⁷⁶ 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.⁷⁷⁷ 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.⁷⁷⁸ He understood "oughtness" (i.e., morality) to be a universal feature of humanness,⁷⁷⁹ and yet deemed every model of general ethics standing disconnected from divine revelation to be "untrustworthy."⁷⁸⁰ 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.⁷⁸¹ 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

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 Ethics*, 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.⁷⁸² 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*,⁷⁸³ which “can only be *expressed* in human relationships.”⁷⁸⁴ 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.⁷⁸⁵ 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

⁷⁸² *MQ*, 237-39, 285.

⁷⁸³ *MQ*, 253, 256, 275, 277.

⁷⁸⁴ Grenz, “The Doctrine of the Trinity,” 17-18 (italics added for emphasis).

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.”⁷⁸⁶

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.”⁷⁸⁷ 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.⁷⁸⁸ 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.⁷⁸⁹ 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.”⁷⁹⁰ 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.”⁷⁹¹ 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

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), 1:81. 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.”⁸⁰² 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.”⁸⁰³ 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

⁸⁰² Dockery, “First Person: When Piety is Not Enough,” *Baptist Press*, 14 Mar. 2005, <http://www.bpnews.net/bpcolumn.asp?ID=1763> (accessed 5 Sept. 2011). However, see Grenz’s deft awareness of critiques of other positions that have run into this difficulty in *RTG*, 53, 114.

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 *existing* 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 (antithesis) 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.⁸¹⁰ 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.⁸¹¹ But he seemed to be moving in a direction that was not quite satisfied with this. His work was evolving⁸¹² 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.⁸¹³ 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*.⁸¹⁴ But he did not think it possible to "know what it means to be human without looking to Jesus, who

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.”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*.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*,”⁸¹⁷ which is part of his eschatological realism.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.”⁸¹⁹ In other words, it is precisely “those who are destined to be the new humanity and as such to reflect the divine image, and therefore are already in the process of being transformed into that image, [who] carry the ethical responsibility to live out that reality in the present.”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

⁸¹⁵ Grenz, “Jesus as the *Imago Dei*,” 627.

⁸¹⁶ Grenz, “The Social God,” in *Trinitarian Soundings*, 91.

⁸¹⁷ See §6.3.5. of this thesis, and also Sexton, “Stanley Grenz’s Ecclesiology,” 43.

⁸¹⁸ *JGRS*, 15, 232. See also §3.1.3. of this thesis.

⁸¹⁹ *JGRS*, 224.

⁸²⁰ *JGRS*, 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."⁸²¹

Contrary to a postmodern relativism Grenz was occasionally accused of,⁸²² 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."⁸²³ 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."⁸²⁴ 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

⁸²¹ Maximus the Confessor, *To Thalassios: On Various Questions* 63, cited in *SGRS*, 324.

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.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.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,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.

⁸²⁵ *NGQB*, 338.

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).

⁸²⁷ These could range from exploring legislation's role in true religion (Stanley J. Grenz, "Isaac Backus: Eighteenth Century Light on the Contemporary School Prayer Issue," *Fides et Historia* 18 [1986]: 5-14; and Stanley J. Grenz, "The Sanctuary Trial and Religious Liberty," *Pacific Theological Review* 20 [1987]: 21-31), American civil religion (Stanley J. Grenz, "Secular Saints: Civil Religion in America," *Baptist Quarterly* 33 [1990]: 238-43), medical ethics and care-giving (Stanley J. Grenz, "Toward a Comprehensive Christian Ethic of Love," in *Christian Character, Virtue and Bioethics*, ed. Edwin C. Hui [Vancouver, BC: Regent College, 1996]: 193-96; and *MQ*, 291-93), pastoral ethics and theology (Stanley J. Grenz and Roy D. Bell, *Betrayal of Trust: Confronting and Preventing Clergy Sexual Misconduct*, [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995; 2d ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001]; Stanley J. Grenz, "Where Judgment Begins: Sorting the Tangled Elements of Ethics and Integrity," *Leadership* 24 [2003]: 26-31, 35, 41, 51; and Stanley J. Grenz, "The Hopeful Pessimist: Christian Pastoral Theology in a Pessimistic Context," *Journal of Pastoral Care* 54 [2000]: 297-311), the value of human life (Stanley J. Grenz, "The Purpose and Value of Human Life," paper last saved electronically 24 Nov. 1999 [unpublished], 1-7), and many other categories addresses in his vols. on ethics, esp. sexual ethics. Notable work also includes his critique of non God-centered ethical systems (Stanley J. Grenz, "The Flight from God: Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* and Universal Ethical Systems," in *Christian Freedom: Essays in Honor of Vernon Grounds*, ed. Kenneth W. M. Wozniak and Stanley J. Grenz [Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986], 69-85) and his various writings on prayer (Grenz, *Prayer: The Cry for the Kingdom*) and worship (Grenz, "Celebrating Eternity," 378-91), especially because he saw prayer and worship as essential aspects of Christian living. This is seen in his choice of lecture topics for the 2005 lecture series, "What Does it Mean to be Trinitarians?" at the Assemblies of God seminary. The three lectures addressed what it means to be trinitarian in (1) doctrine, (2) prayer, and (3) worship. His thesis was this: "The Trinity is not merely a doctrine to be affirmed and then forgotten... but rather it stands at the very heart and center of our faith as Christians, and as such has implications for the way we think (that is, what we believe) and the way we live (that is, how we pray and how we worship)" (Grenz, "What Does it Mean to be Trinitarian in Doctrine?" from video of chapel lecture delivered 18 Jan. 2005).

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.”⁸²⁸ Grenz explored this connection while seeking to show how God is “the transcendent foundation for our experience of being sexual creatures.”⁸²⁹

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.”⁸³⁰ 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.⁸³¹

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

⁸²⁸ Grenz, “Is God Sexual?” 24-25 (emphasis in original).

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).

⁸³⁰ Stanley J. Grenz, “Theological Foundations for Male-Female Relationships,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41 (1998): 620. See the alternate contrasting position suggesting that there is no reference to sexuality in the *imago Dei* in Gn 1:27 (Bird, “Male and Female He Created Them,” 147-55; see also the discussion in *SGRS*, 272-73).

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.⁸³² Sexuality, as defined by Grenz, is therefore described as “the primary force” that gives humans the drive towards bonding.⁸³³ 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 *imago 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.⁸³⁴

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

⁸³² 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).

⁸³³ Stanley J. Grenz, “The Purpose of Sex: Toward a Theological Understanding of Human Sexuality,” *Cruce* 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).

⁸³⁴ 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).

that Jesus' embodiment necessitates his sexuality.⁸³⁵ This might indicate one significant reason why Grenz was so critical of Chalcedonian Christology.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."⁸³⁷ Otherwise, contra the *opera inseparabilis*, 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.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.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:

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.⁸⁴⁰

⁸³⁵ Stanley J. Grenz, "Biblical Priesthood and Women in Ministry," in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, ed. Ronald W. Pierce, Rebecca Merrill Groothuis and Gordon D. Fee (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 282.

⁸³⁶ *TCG2*, 308-9.

⁸³⁷ Grenz, "Is God Sexual?" 35-36.

⁸³⁸ Grenz, "Is God Sexual?" 30, 37-41.

⁸³⁹ Grenz, "Biblical Priesthood and Women in Ministry," 282.

⁸⁴⁰ Grenz, "What Does it Mean to be Trinitarian in Doctrine?" from video of chapel lecture delivered 18 Jan. 2005. See a lengthier explanation of this in Grenz, *Sexual Ethics*, 45-52.

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

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).

⁸⁴² Grenz, *Welcoming But Not Affirming*, 114. Indeed, Grenz referred to sexual intercourse as a sacrament of marriage, as well as an expression of mutual submission and profound openness (Grenz, *Sexual Ethics*, 81-97).

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.⁸⁴⁴ 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.⁸⁴⁵

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.”⁸⁴⁶

Since not everyone is married, or will marry, singleness is also an equally alternate lifestyle choice and a healthy means of expressing oneself sexually.⁸⁴⁷ 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 Infertility: Reflections on Genesis,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 4 [2000]: 39). For a completely opposite 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.

⁸⁴⁵ Grenz, “Theological Foundations for Male-Female Relationships,” 623.

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.”⁸⁴⁸ 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.⁸⁴⁹

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.”⁸⁵⁰ This malformation results from any kind of genital sexual activity based purely on physical attraction, selfish intentions, or in any nonmarital union.⁸⁵¹ This also includes the

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 *Imago*,” 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.

⁸⁴⁹ Grenz, “Theological Foundations for Male-Female Relationships,” 623-24.

⁸⁵⁰ Grenz and Bell, *Betrayal of Trust*, 2d ed., 107.

⁸⁵¹ He referred to this as the essence of adultery, indeed “the triumph of *eros* over *agapē*” (Grenz, *Sexual Ethics*, 111). “Whenever *eros* triumphs over *agapē*,” 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.⁸⁵² 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.”⁸⁵³ 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.”⁸⁵⁴

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

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 transsexuality⁸⁵⁸ (or

⁸⁵⁵ Grenz, *Welcoming But Not Affirming*, 111-15.

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 Wannewetsch, “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. Wannewetsch 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 Wannewetsch 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 *imago 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 Wannewetsch, “Old Docetism—New Moralism?” 364) as having relegated human sexuality to the periphery of humanness (see Grenz, “Is God Sexual?” 30).

⁸⁵⁷ DeFranza, “Intersex and the *Imago*,” 182-272.

⁸⁵⁸ The adjective “transsexual” is defined thus: “1. Of or pertaining to transsexualism; 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)⁸⁵⁹ and intersex⁸⁶⁰ 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,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."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."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]."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.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,

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]).

⁸⁶⁰ Defined as "the abnormal condition of being intermediate between male and female; hermaphroditism" (*Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 11th ed., s.v., "intersex").

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).

⁸⁶² Grenz, *Sexual Ethics*, 24 (italics added for emphasis).

⁸⁶³ Grenz, "Is God Sexual?" 25 (italics added for emphasis).

⁸⁶⁴ DeFranza, "Intersex and the *Imago*," 193.

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.”⁸⁶⁶

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.

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.

7.3.5. *Women in Ministry*⁸⁶⁸

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.⁸⁶⁹ While unfortunately failing to acknowledge the gift-office fallacy,⁸⁷⁰ 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.⁸⁷¹ 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

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.

⁸⁶⁹ Grenz and Kjesbo, *Women in the Church*, 179.

⁸⁷⁰ See the case made against the gift-office fallacy in Harold W. Hoehner, “Can a Woman Be a Pastor-Teacher?” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50 (2007): 759-71.

⁸⁷¹ Stanley J. Grenz, “Anticipating God’s New Community: Theological Foundations For Women In Ministry,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38 (1995): 595-611; Grenz, “Theological Foundations for Male-Female Relationships,” 615-30.

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

The basis for this vision may have changed slightly on the eve of Grenz's movement away from the *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,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.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

⁸⁷² Grenz, "Anticipating God's New Community," 601-2.

⁸⁷³ E.g., Kevin Giles, *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," *Trinity Journal* 29 NS [2008]: 82).

⁸⁷⁴ This thesis makes no attempt to place Grenz in conversation with recent debates amongst complementarian and egalitarian exegetes, e.g., *Women in the Church: An Analysis and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Andreas J. Köstenberger, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005); Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women, and Wives: Marriage and Women's Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992); and William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

consisting of persons from various races, from all social classes, and from both genders.”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.”⁸⁷⁶

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’.”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.”⁸⁷⁸

⁸⁷⁵ Grenz, “Biblical Priesthood and Women in Ministry,” 282.

⁸⁷⁶ Grenz, “Biblical Priesthood and Women in Ministry,” 282-83.

⁸⁷⁷ Stanley J. Grenz, “God’s Business: A Foundation for Christian Mission in the Marketplace,” *Cmxc* 35 (1999): 20-23.

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.”⁸⁷⁹

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

⁸⁷⁹ Grenz, “God’s Business,” 23-24. See also his exposition of success as a sense of “calling” in Stanley J. Grenz, “Seeing Successfully: The ‘Lens’ Dimension of the Anatomy of Success,” for “The ‘Anatomy of Success’ Seminar,” 8 Nov. 2003 (unpublished), 8.

accomplishment.⁸⁸⁰ The deeper implication Grenz found for this can be summed up in lives that exude worship, as he affirmed that “[i]n 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.”⁸⁸¹

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.

⁸⁸⁰ Grenz, “Seeing Successfully: The ‘Lens’ Dimension of the Anatomy of Success,” 9. Note also the role that the “gift” concept began to play as part of Grenz’s theo-ontology, with the inherent pneumatological and anthropological features in *NGQB*, 340-43, 353-57, 367-73.

⁸⁸¹ Grenz, “Seeing Successfully: The ‘Lens’ Dimension of the Anatomy of Success,” 9. Cp. this with his understanding of worship as grounded in participation in God, coupled with anticipating eternity and experiencing a foretaste of *theosis* in Grenz, “Celebrating Eternity,” 383-91.

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.⁸⁸² 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.”⁸⁸³ 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 theo-ontology 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.

⁸⁸² 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).

⁸⁸³ Grenz, “What Does it Mean to be Trinitarian in Doctrine?” 8

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.⁸⁸⁴ 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

⁸⁸⁴ Justin Taylor, “An Introduction to Postconservatism 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,⁸⁸⁵ in the face of stringent criticism Grenz saw himself as “hopelessly conservative” in his approach to the evangelical tradition.⁸⁸⁶ One of the most frequent areas he was critiqued for, his doctrine of scripture,⁸⁸⁷ has received much more generous readings from more even-handed scholarship,⁸⁸⁸ 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 culture⁸⁸⁹ 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

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).

⁸⁸⁷ Following Carson, *The Gagging of God*, 48, see Stephen J. Wellum, “Postconservatism, Biblical Authority, and Recent Proposals for Re-Doing Evangelical Theology: A Critical Analysis,” in *Reclaiming the Center*, ed. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 189-93; Norman L. Geisler and Thomas Howe, “A Postmodern View of Scripture,” in *Evangelicals Engaging Emergent: A Discussion of the Emergent Church Movement*, ed. William D. Henard and Adam W. Greenway (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2009), 92-108; and see the charge of hermeneutical Pelagianism in Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 170-72.

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.

gospel.⁸⁹⁰ In order to do this, the practice of listening intently to culture must be cultivated so as to generate constructions and articulations of the gospel—a theology—that will serve the church “in formulating its message in a 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.⁸⁹¹ 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.’”⁸⁹² 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.”⁸⁹³

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.”⁸⁹⁴ Ever aware of the possibility of over or under-adapting to culture, Keller defines contextualization as “not giving people what they

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.

⁸⁹² Grenz, “Fideistic Revelationalism,” 57.

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."⁸⁹⁵

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,⁸⁹⁶ 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.”⁸⁹⁷ Some of this was seen earlier in what could have been Grenz’s direct response to

⁸⁹⁵ Tim Keller, “Being the Church in Our Culture,” address delivered at the Reform and Resurge Conference, Seattle, WA, May 2006, <http://theresurgence.com/2006/07/04/being-the-church-in-our-culture-audio> (accessed 18 Oct. 2011).

⁸⁹⁶ 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).

⁸⁹⁷ Vanhoozer, “On the Very Idea of a Theological System,” 182.

the critique of Pannenberg made by Shults.⁸⁹⁸ 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.⁸⁹⁹

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."⁹⁰⁰ 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.⁹⁰¹ In *The Matrix* proposal, Grenz stated his position: "Basically, we

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 postfoundationalist 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

⁹⁰² Grenz, “Series Proposal: Toward a Matrix of Trinitarian, Communitarian, Eschatological Theology,” 2 (italics added for emphasis).

⁹⁰³ See the discussion documented on Justin Taylor, “On the Gospel and Cultural Engagement,” Between Two Worlds blog, <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2010/04/19/on-the-gospel-and-cultural-engagement/>, 19 Apr. 2010 (accessed 19 Oct. 2011).

better than it has been by Kevin Vanhoozer when he stated that “Grenz is not so much capitulating to as correlating with postmodern sensibilities.”⁹⁰⁴ 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.⁹⁰⁵ However contestable this claim might be,⁹⁰⁶ 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.”⁹⁰⁷ 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;⁹⁰⁸ 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.

⁹⁰⁵ Fred Sanders, “The State of the Doctrine of the Trinity in Evangelical Theology,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 47 (2005): 153-54.

⁹⁰⁶ See Sexton, “The State of the Evangelical Trinitarian Resurgence,” 787n2.

⁹⁰⁷ Sanders, “The State of the Doctrine of the Trinity,” 154nn3-4.

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'."⁹⁰⁹ 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."⁹¹⁰ 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."⁹¹¹ 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."⁹¹² But *that* the Trinity was central to Grenz's program did not explain *why* it was. Olson suggested that this

⁹⁰⁹ David H. Kelsey, "The Human Creature," in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, ed. John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007), 130 (italics in original).

⁹¹⁰ Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1950), 206, cited often by Grenz, e.g., *TCG2*, 53.

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."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 *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

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,⁹¹⁴ 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.”⁹¹⁵

With Grenz’s robust meaning of community understood as being the church’s central motif,⁹¹⁶ with the church being centered on Christ,⁹¹⁷ the gospel, and scripture, the church is the location where “regenerative faith is present through the power of the Holy Spirit, whose

⁹¹⁴ *RTC1*, 212-13; and *RTC2*, 220-21.

⁹¹⁵ *RTC2*, 221.

⁹¹⁶ *RTC2*, 321.

⁹¹⁷ *RTC2*, 323-25.

energizing Word and sacrament leads to the transformation of the lives of those gathered to hear and participate.”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 *sine qua non* of the Christian faith,”⁹¹⁹ it follows that Grenz’s entire argument in *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.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.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.

⁹¹⁸ *RTC2*, 347.

⁹¹⁹ *RTC2*, 220.

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.

⁹²¹ Note that while present in *RTC2*, 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 *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 *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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