

# The Pacific Journal of Baptist Research

---

---

Vol.6, No. 1

April 2010

## CONTENTS

<i>Martin Sutherland</i>	3
Preface: Stanley Grenz and Baptist Thought	
<i>Brian Harris</i>	5
Beyond Individualism: Stanley Grenz's Contribution to Baptist Theology	
<i>Jason S. Sexton</i>	20
Stanley Grenz's Ecclesiology: Telic and Trinitarian	
<i>Jay T. Smith</i>	44
A Trinitarian Epistemology: Stanley J. Grenz and the Trajectory of Convertive Piety	
<i>Jonathan R. Wilson</i>	65
Do Pietists Need a Doctrine of Creation?: God's World in the Baptist Tradition and Stanley J. Grenz	

---

---



## **Preface:**

# **Stanley Grenz and Baptist Theology**

Stanley Grenz (1950-2005) was without question one of the key participants in the theological conversations of the last 25 years. His works appear on college course bibliographies the world over. Students and theological colleagues from many traditions owe him much and mourn his untimely removal from the field.<sup>1</sup> His prolific output generated contributions to theological method, ethics, historical theology and debates on the nature and impact of postmodernism. He was an incisive interpreter of theologians as diverse as Isaac Backus and Wolfhart Pannenberg. Responses ranging from profound admiration to dismissive criticism demonstrate his importance as a lively protagonist in the contested ground of the nature and future of evangelicalism.

Much has already been written (and will continue to be so) on these and other aspects of Grenz's wider significance. Many are acknowledged and outlined in the essays which constitute this issue of *The Pacific Journal of Baptist Research*. The theme of the issue, however, calls for a particular focus. Grenz was a lifelong Baptist, asserting indeed that this identification was fundamental to his theological project. Much of his career was spent in Baptist or Baptist-related institutions. The essays which follow take this connection seriously, addressing Grenz's theological contributions through the lens of his Baptist roots.

Brian Harris, considers the wide range of contributions Grenz made to issues of theological method. He identifies Grenz's recovery of 'community as the integrating motif for theological construction' and his call for 'a communal reading of scripture' as both intuitively rooted in but also critical of Baptist spirituality.

Grenz's attention to ecclesiology was incomplete at his untimely death. Jason Sexton examines what can be known of the trajectory of Grenz's thought in this area. Ecclesiology has been central to Baptist polemics. As Sexton shows, classic Baptist themes such as covenant and believers' baptism were important to Grenz but they were recast in his theological enterprise. Here the influence of Pannenberg is crucial, with a baptist (small b) and increasingly ecumenical focus emerging from an essentially 'telic and trinitarian' vision.

---

<sup>1</sup> The diverse tributes linked to the website at [stanleyigrenz.com](http://stanleyigrenz.com) are testimony to the affection and admiration Grenz generated.

Jay Smith addresses the Trinitarian vision further. Key to understanding Grenz's methodological and epistemological proposals, Smith suggests, is a commitment to 'convertive piety'. This emphasis on personal conversion or heartfelt piety is characteristic of the Baptist traditions which Grenz imbibed. It also, moreover, connects naturally to wider evangelicalism, explaining Grenz's project to revision evangelical theology, in particular its epistemology in a postmodern context.

Jonathan Wilson also notes the pietist instincts of Grenz's thought. Rather than exploring what this emphasis directly generates, Wilson identifies what it tends to relegate – namely, attention to the doctrines of creation. Grenz the Baptist, who stands in the pietist way and indeed promotes its virtues, was also deeply influenced by the decidedly non-pietist Pannenberg, engendering both 'creative tension and incompleteness'. The tension was evident and unresolved in Grenz's theology of creation.

Together these essays make an important contribution to our understanding of Stanley Grenz's theology. Here was a Baptist who, to a degree matched by few others, entered creatively the wider debates of the theological world. The influence of Pannenberg comes through consistently, as does the sense that Grenz's Baptist identity was more a subtle presence than a driving motif. Might we surmise, then, that Grenz might only formally be viewed as a Baptist theologian? Perhaps. But maybe that is to ask the wrong question.

These studies of undoubtedly one of the finest theologians that Baptists have produced may reveal as much about the nature of Baptist thought as they suggest about Grenz himself. In recent studies Tom Nettles calls for a more confessionally defined Baptist vision.<sup>2</sup> Whilst Nettles' argument suits his polemical context it fits less well with the realities of the many Baptist stories. Rather than defining Baptist thought by confessions and defended doctrines we may better see it too, like the church itself, as telic, moving forward, changing and morphing as contexts and demands alter and shift. Rather than driven, by logic or even text, Baptist theology may most authentically be understood to be drawn forward, infinitely responsive to the rich magnificence of the Kingdom. Of this vision of theology Stanley Grenz was a prime exemplar.

**Martin Sutherland**  
**Editor**

---

<sup>2</sup> Tom Nettles *The Baptists: Key People in Forming a Baptist Identity* (Fearn, Rossshire: Mentor, 3 vols. 2005-2007).

## **Beyond Individualism: Stanley Grenz's Contribution to Baptist Theology**

### **ABSTRACT**

Stanley Grenz described himself as a Baptist and an evangelical. This essay explores the first of these labels, and the extent to which Grenz's Baptist heritage impacted the way in which he understood the theological task. After briefly outlining Grenz's theological method and his interaction with both Baptist and evangelical communities, it highlights the particular issues which Grenz's theological method raises for Baptist theologians. Noting the desire expressed in documents such as the Baptist Manifesto (1997) for Baptists to transcend the individualism often associated with the movement, it explores the potential within Grenz's theological method to move Baptists towards a genuinely communal vision for their ecclesial life and practice.

James McClendon wrote, "That there are few baptist theologians of merit will be granted by most observers."<sup>1</sup> Stanley Grenz's theological contribution, made after McClendon's bleak assessment, is a pleasing exception to what otherwise might be an accurate evaluation of the state of both capital 'B' Baptist and small 'b' baptist theology.<sup>2</sup> Grenz's theological contribution was made during the transition from one century to another, a change emphasised by it also heralding the start of a new millennium.<sup>3</sup> Theology can never be divorced from its context, and at a time of such symbolic significance it was only natural that theologians queried if existing models of theological construction were adequate for the era about to be

---

<sup>1</sup> James Wm McClendon Jr., *Ethics: Systematic Theology*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986), 21.

<sup>2</sup> To distinguish between denominationally driven theology and theology that is baptist in broad vision and flavour. Some, including Grenz, would argue that this situation is changing. See for example, A.J. Conyers, "The Changing Face of Baptist Theology," *Review and Expositor* 95, no. 1 (1998).; Stanley J. Grenz, "Conversing in Christian Style: Toward a Baptist Theological Method for the Postmodern Context," *Baptist History and Heritage* 35, no. 1 (2000): 82.

<sup>3</sup> Grenz's first article of note was published in 1982, with the bulk of his work published in the 1990's through until his death in 2005. Stanley J. Grenz, "Listen America! A Theological and Ethical Assessment," *Foundations* 25, no. 2 (1982).

entered. Noting the active interest in theological method by those whom he termed ‘mainline theologians’ but detecting a corresponding dearth of concern amongst evangelical theologians, Grenz set about to rectify the deficit.<sup>4</sup> His model for theological construction, intended particularly for a revised evangelical theology, is probably the most important piece of the theological legacy he has left behind.<sup>5</sup>

In attempting to assign Grenz to a theological category various terms can be used the most obvious being Baptist and evangelical.<sup>6</sup> Certainly Grenz was happy to write ‘My entire life, then, I have seen myself as a Baptist and as an evangelical.’<sup>7</sup> This essay sets out to explore the first of these labels, and the extent to which Grenz’s Baptist heritage impacted the way in which he understood the theological task. It will also attempt to highlight the particular issues which Grenz’s theological method raises for Baptist theologians, and thus some of the contribution Grenz has made to Baptist thought.

---

<sup>4</sup> With slight exaggeration, Grenz and Franke claimed that while ‘theologians in mainline theological circles have been in need of a reminder that theology involved more than simply reflecting on method... Evangelical theologians have... given little attention to methodological concerns.’ Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 13.

<sup>5</sup> *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* is probably best understood as Grenz’s programmatic work, and in it he outlines an agenda for evangelical theology to ensure its ongoing relevance in a new era. In particular he makes an initial methodological proposal for theological construction which he, together with John Franke, expands upon significantly in the 2001 text, *Beyond Foundationalism*. Grenz’s later works are largely an unpacking and development of the key ideas he explores in *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*. Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1993); Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context*.

<sup>6</sup> Whether this should be capital B Baptist or small b baptist is a matter for debate, my own stance being that in Grenz’s case, both are valid. Grenz was clearly rooted in specific Baptists contexts, spent most of his teaching career at denominational colleges (even when working at Regent College, he was primarily employed by the denominational Carey Baptist College in Vancouver) and was an active participant in the work of the Baptist World Alliance. However his underlying vision is broadly baptist and cannot be contained within formal denominational structures.

<sup>7</sup> Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 11.

First let me provide a brief summary of Grenz's theological method.<sup>8</sup>

Grenz proposes a model for evangelical theological construction that utilizes scripture, tradition and culture as the sources for theology, with the Trinity, community and eschatology as, in turn, its structuring, integrating and orienting motifs. He supplements these with the belief that the Spirit guides the church as it communally attempts to discern truth in changing contexts. Convinced that relevance in a postmodern era necessitates a method that moves beyond foundationalism, Grenz believes that his method succeeds in doing this as it appeals to a trio of interacting, conversing sources that are guided by three related motifs, rather than to a single foundational source, a role evangelicals usually reserve for scripture.

While there is nothing inherently new in Grenz's suggestion that evangelicals look to more than one source for theological construction,<sup>9</sup> the implication that tradition and culture can in some sense be equal conversation partners with scripture in theological construction is novel, although Grenz does somewhat ambiguously call scripture the 'norming norm'<sup>10</sup> for theology while at the same time insisting that the role of tradition and culture in theological construction is genuinely formative and impacts the theology constructed. If they were not, it would be difficult to argue that his model is a move *Beyond Foundationalism*, as the title of his major text on theological method proclaims.<sup>11</sup>

His model is that of a conversation where each partner has the ability to inform and shape the thinking of the other by the astuteness and relevance of their argument.<sup>12</sup> Because theological construction is an ever unfolding conversation, new and deeper insights are always possible, with the contribution of one conversation partner often leading to another modifying or reframing its stance. Thus scripture modifies the approval or

---

<sup>8</sup> For a fuller explanation of Grenz' method, see Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*. Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 184-217. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 61-108, 137-162.

<sup>9</sup> Grenz notes that the 'Wesleyan Quadrilateral' of scripture, reason, experience and tradition is often cited by evangelicals. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 91.

<sup>10</sup> Chapter 3 of *Beyond Foundationalism* is entitled 'Scripture: Theology's "Norming Norm".'

<sup>11</sup> Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context*.

<sup>12</sup> Grenz sometimes also describes the interplay between scripture, tradition and culture as 'this... perichoretic dance.' Grenz, 'Conversing in Christian Style', 88.

disapproval that we might give to different aspects of church tradition, and might lead us to embrace certain cultural innovations whilst shying away from others. At the same time the insights of culture could alert us that we might be interpreting certain passages of scripture in an oppressive manner, or that our lauding approval of certain periods of church history reflects a sectarian bias. The model is thus dynamic and conclusions cannot be assumed in advance of the discussion – nor indeed can they be locked away as perpetually valid, for new insights might urge us to reconsider our findings.

Important in Grenz's thinking, and of special relevance to Baptist theologians, is the conviction that when such discussion takes place within the community of faith,<sup>13</sup> the conversation is pneumatologically guided, the faith community having the responsibility of discerning what the Spirit is saying to the church.<sup>14</sup> The model thus stresses communal and corporate guidance, rather than individualism, and is also a move away from authoritarianism, potentially even from what could be perceived to be the authoritarianism of the biblical text. The church is pneumatologically guided, and while Grenz is clear that the Spirit's guidance will never be at the expense of scripture,<sup>15</sup> he argues that it would be a mistake to view the Spirit as trapped within the pages of scripture. He argues that some evangelicals have mistakenly adopted a static view of biblical inspiration and that they have sometimes adhered to this at the expense of the equally important concept of the ongoing illumination of scripture by the Spirit. Thus Grenz complains, 'we often collapse the Spirit into the Bible. We exchange the dynamic of the ongoing movement of the Spirit speaking to the community of God's people through the pages of the Bible for the book we hold in our hands.'<sup>16</sup> Earlier he expresses the view that 'eschatology reminds us that the Spirit is also God at work completing the divine plan' a plan with which the Spirit aligns the community as it listens to the Spirit speaking through 'the book of the community, the message of which is directed towards the 'future', toward the goal, or telos, of the divine activity in history.'<sup>17</sup> For Grenz then the Spirit's communal illumination of the scriptures helps the community of God discern its particular path forward within the broader move of the Spirit towards the completion of God's plan in and for the world.

---

<sup>13</sup> And in Grenz's thinking this is the appropriate location for such discussions.

<sup>14</sup> See for example Grenz, 'Conversing in Christian Style'

<sup>15</sup> He writes, 'whatever speaking that occurs through other media does not come as a speaking against the text.' Ibid.: 93.

<sup>16</sup> Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 117.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 115.

We will interact with Grenz's model as this article progresses, but this brief overview should first be supplemented with some reflections on Grenz's theological journey. In short, how did he come to articulate his model and what relevance does it have for Baptists?

In the 1980's Grenz's focus is primarily on matters related either to Baptist theology or to the prominent Baptist figure Isaac Backus or to the theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg.

The early Grenz is self consciously a Baptist in his writing and in the topics he engages with.

The first book he published, based on his doctoral thesis, is on Isaac Backus, and in the sub title of the book Grenz declares his intention to explore the thought of Backus and its 'Implications for Modern Baptist Theology.'<sup>18</sup> The focus was thus not on Backus' relevance to the broader theological community, but on its importance for Baptist theology. To some extent this is because Backus was so clearly a Baptist figure and was instrumental in redefining the nature of the Baptist movement in eighteenth-century New England. Several of Grenz' earlier publications focus on Backus' legacy to Baptist life and thought and highlight his contribution to the struggle for the separation of church and state.<sup>19</sup>

Backus' separation of the spheres of church and state and his delineation of the roles to be reserved for the church, find echoes in Grenz' emphasis on theology being done by and for the community of faith. Neither Grenz nor Backus see this separation as being inherently escapist, but as ensuring that the church has integrity when called to exercise a prophetic role in society.<sup>20</sup> Grenz is also impressed by Backus' view that

---

<sup>18</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *Isaac Backus, Puritan and Baptist: His Place in History, His Thought and Their Implications for Modern Baptist Theology* (Atlanta: Mercer University Press, 1983).

<sup>19</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, 'Church and State: The Legacy of Isaac Backus,' *Center Journal* 2, no. 2 (1983); Grenz, *Isaac Backus, Puritan and Baptist*; Stanley J. Grenz, 'Isaac Backus and the English Baptist Tradition,' *Baptist Quarterly* 30, no. 5 (1984); Stanley J. Grenz, 'Isaac Backus: Eighteenth Century Light on the Contemporary School Prayer Issue,' *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 13, no. 4 (1986); Stanley J. Grenz, 'Isaac Backus,' in *Baptist Theologians*, ed. Timothy George and David Dockery (Nashville: Broadman, 1990).

<sup>20</sup> See e.g. Grenz' approving summary of Backus' position that 'all human laws and all political systems be continually subjected to scrutiny in the light of God's coming rule. In this task, the religious community must play a major role, becoming the prophetic reminder that political systems are not final, in view of God's final rule.' Grenz, 'Church and State: The Legacy of Isaac Backus,' 89.,

conversion involves entering into a covenant relationship with both God and the church, and sees it as a ‘needed corrective for much Baptist thinking that builds largely on the individualism of the Baptist heritage while ignoring the corporate dimension...’<sup>21</sup> Grenz’ own conviction on the centrality of the community finds an early expression in this passage. Although Backus does not feature prominently in Grenz’ later theological construction, he serves as an inspirational figure for Grenz. Thus in the preface to *Renewing the Center* Grenz writes that, ‘This volume seeks to follow in the spirit of people like Backus and offer a hopeful appraisal of evangelical theology in the time of upheaval in which we are living.’<sup>22</sup>

The second book Grenz published also has an obvious Baptist focus, being entitled simply ‘The Baptist Congregation.’<sup>23</sup> The book is a useful resource for understanding the foundations for Baptist belief and polity, but understandably has had little impact beyond the Baptist circles for which it was so clearly written.

Grenz’s doctoral mentor was Wolfhart Pannenberg and it is therefore not surprising that Grenz made a careful analysis and evaluation of Pannenberg’s theology.<sup>24</sup> The choice of Pannenberg as his doctoral mentor is significant.<sup>25</sup> A noted theologian, Pannenberg is neither a Baptist

---

<sup>21</sup> Grenz, ‘Isaac Backus,’ 115-116.

<sup>22</sup> Later Grenz writes, ‘Evangelicals today can do no better than be admonished by, draw inspiration from, and follow after the examples of Edwards, Backus, and a host of other evangelical luminaries.’ Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 7, 23.

<sup>23</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *The Baptist Congregation* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishers, 1985).

<sup>24</sup> See Stanley J. Grenz, ‘Pannenberg and Marxism: Insights and Generalizations,’ *The Christian Century* 104, no. 27 (1987); Stanley J. Grenz, ‘Reasonable Christianity: Wolfhart Pannenberg Turns Sixty,’ *Christianity Today* 32, no. 12 (1988); Stanley J. Grenz, ‘Wolfhart Pannenberg’s Quest for Ultimate Truth,’ *Christian Century* 105, no. 26 (1988); Stanley J. Grenz, ‘Commitment and Dialogue: Pannenberg on Christianity and the Religions,’ *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 26, no. 1 (1989); Stanley J. Grenz, *Reason for Hope: The Systematic Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Stanley J. Grenz, ‘Pannenberg and Evangelical Theology: Sympathy and Caution,’ *Christian Scholar’s Review* 20, no. 3 (1991); Stanley J. Grenz, ‘Wolfhart Pannenberg: Reason, Hope and Transcendence,’ *Asbury Theological Journal* 46, no. 2 (1991); Stanley J. Grenz, ‘The Irrelevancy of Theology: Pannenberg and the Quest for Truth,’ *Calvin Theological Journal* 27, no. 2 (1992).

<sup>25</sup> In turn, the compliment of being accepted as a doctoral student by Pannenberg should be noted. Grenz was only the second student from the USA to complete a doctorate under Pannenberg. Grenz, Stanley J. *Reason for Hope*, vii.

nor has he traditionally been classified as an evangelical. Grenz's willingness to step outside of both classical Baptist and evangelical theology was an early indicator of his inclusive spirit, while in turn he helped to make the thinking of Pannenberg both more accessible and acceptable to evangelical theologians.<sup>26</sup>

Grenz's emphasis on eschatology, which he suggests should be theology's orienting motif, has clear links with Pannenberg's thought. This is particularly seen in his emphasis on eschatological realism.<sup>27</sup> However, there are interesting discontinuities. Grenz recognizes the value of science, but does not share Pannenberg's enthusiasm for the scientific method and is deeply conscious of its missiological limitations in trying to communicate with those shaped by a postmodern ethos. In an article that largely defends Pannenberg's theological method, he describes as 'problematic... Pannenberg's apparent thorough-going rationalism and hard-nosed rejection of any attempt to base theological conclusions on a faith decision that has not been through the fire of rational reflection and challenged by alternative viewpoints.'<sup>28</sup> Grenz however readily acknowledges that this rationalism is linked to Pannenberg's understanding of himself as a 'theologian called to serve the church in the public marketplace of ideas.'<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Specially remarkable was Pannenberg's co-operation in allowing Grenz to compile a summary of Pannenberg's *Systematische Theologie*, when the German version of the project was still underway and any hope of an English translation was years off. With only the first of the three volumes published in German, Grenz utilized material from Pannenberg's lectures in Munich to anticipate the thrust of the remaining two volumes. In the foreword to the book, Pannenberg notes that he thought the method 'touched me as a typically American desire to be always ahead of time' while he went on to confirm that 'concerning the overall synthesis of my theology, it provides a correct picture.' Grenz, *Reason for Hope*, ix.,

<sup>27</sup> While Grenz views Pannenberg's theology as consistent with several of the main trajectories of Christian theology, he maintains that Pannenberg moves beyond classical theology in his conviction that truth is not found in the unchanging essences behind the flow of time, but that truth is 'essentially historical and ultimately eschatological.' Grenz, 'Wolfhardt Pannenberg: Reason, Hope and Transcendence,' 77.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.: 86., Grenz is aware of another side to Pannenberg, and has written of his mentor's first encounter with Christ when, as a teenager walking through a wood, Pannenberg had an experience of feeling himself flooded or elevated by a sea of light. Grenz notes that 'Over the ensuing years this experience has become the basis for Pannenberg's keen sense of calling.' Grenz, 'Wolfhardt Pannenberg: Reason, Hope and Transcendence,' 74.,

<sup>29</sup> Grenz, 'Wolfhardt Pannenberg: Reason, Hope and Transcendence,' 86.,

By contrast, Grenz writes his theology ‘for the community of God.’<sup>30</sup> This is a significant difference from Pannenberg and in many ways reflects Grenz’s Baptist roots. Grenz notes that Pannenberg sees theology as a public discipline and that Pannenberg consciously opts for this to combat what he perceives to be the widespread privatization of religious belief.<sup>31</sup> An apologetic motivation thus undergirds Pannenberg’s approach. The irony of an evangelical theologian such as Grenz opting for an in-house approach to theology while the supposedly less evangelical Pannenberg opts for a more missional stance, is apparent. It is not that Grenz does not wish to be missional, but that his strategy is different. Like Backus and Baptists generally, Grenz believes that a renewed church will impact the world.<sup>32</sup>

The early 1990’s saw Grenz’s focus shifting slightly, and he began writing for the larger evangelical world, as opposed to a narrower Baptist readership. During this period he wrote works on AIDS, millennialism, the role of women in the church and sexual misconduct in the pastorate.<sup>33</sup> Myles Werntz has noted that during this stage ‘we see that Grenz’s writing would consistently confront issues that were relevant to the audience which would be reading his books.’<sup>34</sup> Probably the most successful of these works was his *A Primer on Postmodernism*.<sup>35</sup> Intended as a ‘Primer’ on the topic, it serves its purpose well.

---

<sup>30</sup> Grenz sees theology as ‘a second-order discipline pursued ‘from within.’ The enterprise is a critical, reflective activity that presupposes the beliefs and practices of the Christian community.’ Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 75.,

<sup>31</sup> Grenz, Stanley J. *Reason for Hope*, 8.

<sup>32</sup> Thus e.g. Grenz, citing Edwards and Backus as ‘surely correct’ writes that they ‘perceptively saw within the momentous changes transpiring in their day the Holy Spirit at work bringing renewal to the church and the world. And they were convinced that the time had come for the church to awaken so that Christ’s followers might fulfil their mission to the world.’ Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 23.,

<sup>33</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *The Millennial Maze: Sorting out Evangelical Options* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1992); Stanley J. Grenz and Roy D. Bell, *Betrayal of Trust: Sexual Misconduct in the Pastorate* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1995); Stanley J. Grenz and Denise Muir Kjesbo, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1995); Wendell W. Hoffman and Stanley J. Grenz, *Aids: Ministry in the Midst of an Epidemic* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990).

<sup>34</sup> Myles Werntz, ‘Stan Grenz among the Baptists,’ *Princeton Theological Review* 12, no. 1 (2006): 31.

<sup>35</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

Grenz states that his interest in postmodernism was sparked after an invitation to participate in a think tank on ministry to 'baby busters' that took place in Charlotte, North Carolina, from 26–28 October 1993.<sup>36</sup> A paper presented to the Southeastern Regional meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society at the campus of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in March 1994 provides the basis for the book's first chapter.<sup>37</sup> Grenz had previously raised questions about the implications of postmodernism for the future of theology, but claims that it was after these two events that 'I proceeded to immerse myself in postmodernism.'<sup>38</sup> Grenz's conviction that an understanding of and interaction with the postmodern context is crucial for meaningful theological engagement in the Western world is consistent with his conviction that culture should serve as a source for theology and that it inevitably functions as theology's embedding context. It does however reflect an unresolved tension in his thinking. On the one hand theological reflection is for the community of God. It is an in house activity. On the other hand the community of God finds itself in a broader cultural context with which it inevitably interacts. The interaction does not leave it untouched and it is influenced by the broader changes in societal ethos and perspective. It is thus a model that is simultaneously engaged and disengaged; it listens to what society is saying, but readily travels another route if the norming norm of scripture, advised by the tradition of the church, deems this appropriate.

Because Grenz's work on postmodernism is intentionally populist it covers well-traveled territory and it is unnecessary to detail the contents here. What is more important is to understand Grenz's motivation in writing the book and the issues Grenz signals to be of particular concern. Grenz is concerned that 'Evangelicalism shares close ties with modernity' and might therefore stake its future on a deficient and dated paradigm.<sup>39</sup> He suggests that in responding to postmodernism there will be areas where evangelicals will need to stand their ground and others where postmodern thought can be welcomed.

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., ix.,

<sup>37</sup> It was first published as Stanley J. Grenz, 'Star Trek and the Next Generation: Postmodernism and the Future of Evangelical Theology,' *Cruce* 30, no. 1 (1994). It reappeared in Stanley J. Grenz, 'Star Trek and the Next Generation: Postmodernism and the Future of Evangelical Theology,' in *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David S. (ed.) Dockery (Wheaton: BridgePoint, 1995).

<sup>38</sup> Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, x.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 161.

By this stage in his career Grenz is writing primarily for the evangelical world. While not hiding his Baptist origins, he is aware that he is painting on a wider canvas. At times he seems to acknowledge no difference in these two audiences. In *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* he dedicates the second chapter to explore the contours of a revised evangelical spirituality.<sup>40</sup> Conscious of the many loopholes in individualistically oriented definitions of spirituality, he broadens his approach and adds that evangelical spirituality involves holding in creative tension the pull between the outward and the inward and the corporate and the individual dimensions of holiness. It is interesting to compare the views Grenz is expressing about *evangelical* spirituality, to views he had earlier expressed about *Baptist* spirituality. In an article published in 1991 he suggests that the distinguishing feature of Baptist spirituality is its 'balance between the inward and the outward and between the individual and the corporate.'<sup>41</sup> It seems fair to ask if in Grenz's mind Baptist spirituality and evangelical spirituality is essentially the same thing. If so, is he perhaps trying to revision evangelical theology in a Baptist mould?<sup>42</sup> In other words, is Grenz simply writing for a wider audience, a world well beyond the walls of the Baptist denomination, but continuing to write with all the assumptions of a baptist theologian?

Grenz's journey into the world of evangelicalism was not without significant controversy. His understanding of scripture coupled with his willingness to embrace many aspects of postmodern thought was troublesome to some. His book *Renewing the Center*, published in 2000, drew a sharp response in the combative *Reclaiming the Center*, which while not purely an attack on Grenz's theology, is unlikely to have been written if Grenz's thought had not been attracting so much attention.<sup>43</sup> In it noted evangelical theologian Don Carson, whilst overstating his case, accuses Grenz of being 'utterly unable to detect any weakness in postmodern

---

<sup>40</sup> Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 37-59.

<sup>41</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, 'Maintaining the Balanced Life: The Baptist Vision of Spirituality,' *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 18, no. 1 (1991): 68.

<sup>42</sup> A general observation on Grenz is that the early Grenz is very consciously a *Baptist* evangelical theologian, in his middle stages, he is consciously an *evangelical* theologian and the later Grenz works on a yet broader canvas, and is primarily a *theologian*. While he never renounces his Baptist and evangelical roots, they feature less prominently in his later work.

<sup>43</sup> Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjos Helseth, and Justin Taylor, eds., *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004).

epistemology,<sup>44</sup> and elsewhere laments 'I cannot see how Grenz's approach to Scripture can be called 'evangelical' in any useful sense.'<sup>45</sup>

This antagonistic turn can perhaps be seen as part of the third stage in Grenz's journey. If the 1980's saw him speak to a largely Baptist audience and the 1990's to a growing evangelical audience, from the late 1990's until his death in 2005, his thoughts on a revisioned evangelical theology and on theological method saw him accused of being on the evangelical left.<sup>46</sup> His incomplete series, *The Matrix of Christian Theology*, speaks less of evangelical theology and appears to be a contribution to the broader theological arena. In a 2002 publication Grenz spoke of a desire that evangelicals would think of themselves as a centred rather than a bounded set.<sup>47</sup> His disappointment with a movement quicker to state who to exclude than to find ways to include, is apparent. In his tribute to Grenz, Roger Olson speaks of the dismay and bewilderment that Grenz felt at the strength of the opposition to his views expressed by some evangelicals,<sup>48</sup> and of Grenz's intention to form an alternate to the Evangelical Theological Society, an intention thwarted only by his early death.<sup>49</sup>

There are exceptions to this loose categorization into three stages, and I will select just one to suggest that Grenz's location in a Baptist community provides a unifying link in his theological journey.

A Baptist Grenz re emerges in a 2000 publication, 'Conversing in Christian Style: Towards a Baptist Theological Method for the Postmodern

---

<sup>44</sup> D.A. Carson, 'Domesticating the Gospel: A Review of Grenz's *Renewing the Center*,' in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, ed. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 45. Carson appears not to have read the closing chapter of Grenz's *Primer on Postmodernism* where Grenz weighs up both positive and negative aspects of postmodernism. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 161-174.

<sup>45</sup> D.A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 481.

<sup>46</sup> For example, Grenz is one of the theologians discussed in Millard J. Erickson, *The Evangelical Left: Encountering Postconservative Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997).

<sup>47</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, 'Die Begrenzte Gemeinschaft ('the Boundaried People') and the Character of Evangelical Theology,' *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45, no. 2 (2002).

<sup>48</sup> He writes 'Stan was absolutely bewildered by some of the reactions to his *Revisioning* proposal...' Roger E. Olson, 'Stanley J. Grenz's Contribution to Evangelical Theology,' *Princeton Theological Review* 12, no. 1 (2006): 28.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*: 27.

Context.<sup>50</sup> It is significant that this article is little more than a helpful summary of the theological method he develops in detail in *Beyond Foundationalism*, and other than for Grenz's acknowledgment of the work of some Baptist theologians at the start of the article, it is difficult to know why he inserted the term Baptist into the title, unless it was to ensure its publication in the denominational Baptist History and Heritage journal. However this assessment is in all probability too hasty. The overlap between Grenz's theological method articulated in a text intended for a broad readership with an article intended for a denominational readership more likely indicates that Grenz viewed his method as flowing from his Baptist heritage and being relevant to the wider theological arena.

If this is indeed the case, we are now in a position to ask what contribution Grenz has made to Baptist theology. Clearly Grenz's work cannot be considered a contribution to Baptist thought if it is completely discontinuous with it, so it is in the realm of overlap with minor extensions or subtly new emphases that we should look.

In his 1991 article, 'Maintaining the Balanced Life: The Baptist Vision of Spirituality', Grenz suggests that 'the genius of the Baptist vision of spirituality lies in the attempt – sometimes successful, sometimes thwarted – to maintain a delicate balance between, or to hold in creative tension, two sets of seemingly opposite principles: the inward versus the outward and the individual versus the corporate.'<sup>51</sup>

For Grenz, warm hearted personal faith is a given of Baptist thought, and lies behind the Baptist distinctive of a regenerate church membership. Grenz goes so far as to write 'Without a doubt, Baptists understand the Christian life as an individual matter. Both conversion and subsequent growth in faith are first and foremost the task of the individual.'<sup>52</sup> Noting that the fine balance of Baptist spirituality has often been lost, he laments that 'At times our sense of the individual had led to a schismatic individualism.'<sup>53</sup> Grenz's emphasis on community as the integrating motif for theological construction and his vision of the Spirit illuminated scriptures being interpreted and embraced by contextually embedded communities of faith goes a long way to move beyond such individualism.

Amongst Baptists, Grenz has not been alone in this plea. The influential 'Manifesto for Baptist Communities in North America', to which

---

<sup>50</sup> Grenz, 'Conversing in Christian Style.'

<sup>51</sup> Grenz, 'Maintaining the Balanced Life: The Baptist Vision of Spirituality,' 61.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 64.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 68.

Grenz was a signatory, has as its first affirmation, 'We affirm Bible Study in reading communities rather than relying on private interpretations or supposed 'scientific' objectivity.'<sup>54</sup> In expanding on this article the Manifesto sounds remarkably like Grenz when it speaks of 'an open and orderly process whereby faithful communities deliberate together over the Scriptures' claiming that 'when no one is silenced or privileged, the Spirit leads communities to read wisely and to practice faithfully the direction of the gospel...' A little further it more provocatively states, 'We therefore cannot commend Bible study that is insulated from the community of believers or that guarantees individual readers an unchecked privilege of interpretation.'

Some of the reactions to the Manifesto reflect the responses of Baptists to Grenz's proposals on the communal reading and discernment of scripture, Shurden being representative when he writes 'The right and responsibility of private interpretation of Scripture is most certainly part of the 'politics' of Baptist church polity. One may argue that Baptists, along with many other Protestants, are theologically wrong in calling for the personal interpretation of Scripture, but one cannot argue historically that Baptists have not embraced the idea.' A little further he continues, 'I am not sure that I have ever seen a statement on the Baptist identity proposing a denial of the private interpretation of Scripture prior to the *Manifesto*.'<sup>55</sup>

Whatever the strengths and weaknesses of the *Manifesto*, when Grenz calls for the communal reading of scripture he has several concerns in mind, all of which help to rectify a Baptist impulse towards individualism. He clarifies the process in *Beyond Foundationalism* when he writes, 'Reading within community occurs as we approach the text conscious that we are participants in the one faith community that spans the ages.' Implicitly then, reading scripture within community involves a hearing informed by tradition. A little later he adds, 'Reading within community occurs as well as we approach the text conscious that we are participants in the contemporary church... We do well also to consider what the Spirit is saying to us as a global community regarding what it means to be the one church in the world today.' The need to listen to the voice of the Spirit via scriptures interaction with culture is implicit in this concern. In the next paragraph he adds, 'Being conscious that we are participants in the church today means above all, however, reading the text within the local congregational setting. We come to scripture aware that we are participants

---

<sup>54</sup> 'Re-Envisioning Baptist Identity: A Manifesto for Baptist Communities in North America,' *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 24, no. 3 (1997).

<sup>55</sup> Walter B. Shurden, 'The Baptist Identity and the Baptist Manifesto,' *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 25, no. 4 (1998): 325.

in a concrete, visible fellowship of disciples in covenant with one another.<sup>56</sup> Here the voice of Grenz as Baptist speaks loudly. As with Baptists through the ages, Grenz affirms the importance of the local church discerning the voice of the Spirit speaking in its particular context.

Rather than representing a weak view of scripture that might somehow undermine a classic Baptist commitment to the authority of scripture, Grenz is at pains to demonstrate what a clear commitment to scripture might mean for Baptist communities. In Grenz's thought this commitment is never less than a communal commitment to hear what the Spirit has said to the church through the scriptures in the past, what the Spirit is currently saying to the church globally through the scriptures, and the particular voice of the Spirit speaking to the local congregation as it corporately listens to the Spirit speaking through the scriptures in its own local context. Conversing with tradition and the global cultural context has as a key goal the discernment of the voice of the Spirit to the church in a specific local setting.

This stress on the importance of the local church is one which resonates with Baptists, Martin Sutherland arguing that a key text, possibly even the key text for Baptist ecclesiology, is Matthew 18:20 with its affirmation that the risen Christ is present when even two or three are gathered in his name.<sup>57</sup> As it is in the gathering that Christ is encountered, Sutherland believes that one can speak of the sacramentality of the gathered community. While this possibly goes a little further than Grenz, it again reflects a desire within Baptist circles to move beyond the individualism with which Baptists are often associated.

So important is the idea of the local church in Baptist ecclesiology that Baptists affirm the autonomy of the local church, thereby indicating a belief that the local church under the lordship of Christ is equipped to serve as a church, without the need to rely on external church bodies for approval or validation. While intended to free the local church to confidently engage in ministry in its own setting,<sup>58</sup> it has often led to an unhealthy 'individualism' of the local church, with a corresponding disrespect for tradition and the broader concerns of the church in the world. In Baptist circles the local and provincial all too often become the major driver for the church. Grenz's model goes a long way to combat such

---

<sup>56</sup> Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 91-92.

<sup>57</sup> Martin Sutherland, 'Gathering, Sacrament and Baptist Theological Method,' *Pacific Journal of Baptist Research* 3, no. 2 (2007): 56.

<sup>58</sup> In many instances this was also to distinguish the church from the State church.

insular thinking. As local communities of faith gather to listen to what the Spirit is saying to the church through the scriptures, and as that conversation is enriched by the voice of tradition and the Spirit speaking through culture,<sup>59</sup> the impulse towards parochialism is overcome. If this is strengthened by Grenz's conviction that the eschatological vision of the redeemed community is the orienting motif for theology, the impetus away from individualism gains momentum. This is again reinforced by Grenz's assertion that the structuring motif for theological construction should be the Trinity, with community serving as the integrating motif. Rather than autonomous local churches acting independently of one another, these images capture a hopeful interdependence as churches journey together towards a compelling portrait of the future – a future where they belong together, and which they should therefore seek to actualise in the present.

Should they embrace such a vision, Baptist churches will be well positioned to move beyond individualism. If this is part of Grenz's contribution to Baptist theology, he has indeed been able to construct *Theology for the Community of God*.

**Brian Harris**  
**Vose College, Perth**

---

<sup>59</sup> Grenz is clear that it is not culture but the Spirit speaking through culture that is the source for theological construction. He acknowledges that both the voice of the Spirit and the voice of the demonic can be discerned in cultural trends. The community of faith, in conversation with tradition and scripture, needs to distinguish between them. See Stanley J. Grenz, 'Culture and Spirit: The Role of Cultural Context in Theological Reflection,' *Asbury Theological Journal* 55, no. 2 (2000).

## **Stanley Grenz's Ecclesiology: Telic and Trinitarian<sup>1</sup>**

### **ABSTRACT**

At the turn of the millennium, leading evangelical theologian Stanley Grenz sought to develop a comprehensive trinitarian theology that worked itself out into the traditional categories of systematic theology, one of which was ecclesiology, the doctrine of the church. While often overlooked by those interacting with Grenz's work, his ecclesiology took a unique shape informed keenly by his trinitarian outlook. Simultaneously he remained firmly imbedded in his evangelical and Baptist traditions, which enabled him to begin developing an ecclesiology loyal to his tradition while conversant with voices in the wider church. While plans to develop his ecclesiology further were unrealized, since this topic received attention throughout much of his career, what remains is not just a largely coherent evangelical, Baptist ecclesiology, but one that is both oriented toward the future as well as being perhaps the most determinedly trinitarian ecclesiology offered by any North American evangelical in recent history.

### **1. Introduction**

Evangelicals have not had an easy time developing their ecclesiology. Sympathizing with Derek Tidball's assessment that evangelicals 'have differed over the Church,' Stanley Grenz saw the situation as 'more dire.' He asserted that '[e]vangelicals have never developed or worked from a thoroughgoing ecclesiology' and he related this to the 'parachurch' nature of evangelicalism which he perceived as actually working 'against giving serious and sustained attention to questions regarding the nature of the church.'<sup>2</sup> He stated elsewhere that 'a deeper dimension of the evangelical psyche' includes a parachurch ethos that 'works against the ability of the movement to develop a deeply rooted ecclesial base from which to

---

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Edinburgh Dogmatics Conference, The Rutherford House, Edinburgh, 25 Aug 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, 'Restoring a Trinitarian Understanding of the Church in Practice,' in *Evangelicalism and the Stone-Campbell Movement*, ed. by William R. Baker (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 228-9. See also the reference to Bloesch's statement of the appalling neglect of ecclesiology in evangelicalism (Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), 168) (hereafter, *RET*).

understand its own identity and upon which to ground its mission, whether it sees that mission as being as, to, or on behalf of the body of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

Recognizing ecclesiology as 'a topic of theological reflection that is gaining increased attention,'<sup>4</sup> the unique contribution from Stanley Grenz, self-identified as 'unabashedly Baptist'<sup>5</sup> and declared 'a preeminent evangelical theologian,'<sup>6</sup> would have been imminent.<sup>7</sup> This volume would have been the fourth of six volumes from the explorative engagement which Grenz intended to serve the subsequent systematic task. His anticipated treatment on Christology saw Jesus as 'originator' and 'foundation for the new community,' which necessarily 'leads to ecclesiology.'<sup>8</sup> His proposal to WJK for the volume on the church had a shorter description than the rest:

This, in turn [after a Christology], would be connected to a volume on ecclesiology that would draw from contemporary communitarian thought, as well as the postmodern realization of the importance of a transcendent foundation for any viable social order, to set forth a vision of the church as an eschatological trinitarian community.<sup>9</sup>

There are at least three things surprising about this one-sentence description for the proposed ecclesiology volume. First, its brevity. Other volumes had lengthier descriptions, perhaps resulting from those loci being laden with community (i.e., ecclesiological) concepts already. Second, it only emphasizes one source of his theological method – culture – and seems uninterested in the near incalculable issues in the church's history or

---

<sup>3</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-theological Era*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 298 (hereafter, *RTC2*).

<sup>4</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, 'Peer Review' of Veli-Matti Kärkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical & Global Perspectives* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 16 Nov 2001 (unpublished), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), xxxi (hereafter, *TCG2*).

<sup>6</sup> Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier, eds., 'Acknowledgments,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), xv.

<sup>7</sup> Vol 4 of *The Matrix of Christian Theology* series had a '2008' writing deadline, which would have presumably set a Fall 2009 date for publication. See Stanley J. Grenz, 'Writing Deadlines,' 22 Feb 2005 (unpublished).

<sup>8</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, 'Getting Beyond the 'Plastic' Jesus,' Session 4, Critical Concerns Course, Emergent Conference, Nashville, TN, 19 May 2004 (unpublished), 5-6.

<sup>9</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, 'Toward a Matrix of Trinitarian, Communitarian, Eschatological Theology,' proposal submitted to Westminster John Knox, 3 Dec 1998 (unpublished), 2-3.

contemporary context that make an evangelical ecclesiology quite challenging. Third, it does not give a glance to earlier contributions he made to ecclesiology,<sup>10</sup> nor any indications of treatments on his horizon,<sup>11</sup> the latter of which he may have simply been unaware at the time. And yet, ‘a thoroughly trinitarian’ ecclesiology was an intentional part of Grenz’s overall program, which he saw providing the only cause for genuine evangelical renewal in the church.<sup>12</sup>

The goal of this essay is to mine what of Grenz’s ecclesiology had developed by early 2005, and what shape this took in his program as might be observed throughout his writings and lectures. And while this sketch of his ecclesiology does not include what would have been borne from a rigorous one-volume treatment, it nevertheless hopes to offer a meagre glimpse into the ‘eschatological covenant community’ which he understood as God’s intention for the church.<sup>13</sup>

## 2. Belonging to the Covenant Community<sup>14</sup>

### 2.1. Covenant Community

Indicated by his proposed description for the fourth *Matrix* volume, Grenz was highly interested in listening to voices from culture which highlighted particular developments and the overall ethos of his situatedness. This

---

<sup>10</sup> Including the following works by Stanley J. Grenz: *Isaac Backus--Puritan and Baptist*, NABPR Dissertation Series 4 (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983); *The Baptist Congregation* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1985; reprint ed., Vancouver, BC: Regent College, 2002); *RET*, 163-89; *TCG2*, 461-570; and co-authored with Denise Muir Kjesbo, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry* (InterVarsity, 1995).

<sup>11</sup> E.g., Stanley J. Grenz, ‘Ecclesiology’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. by Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), 252-68; Grenz, *RTC2*, 295-332; and Grenz, ‘Restoring a Trinitarian Understanding of the Church,’ 228-34.

<sup>12</sup> Grenz, ‘Restoring a Trinitarian Understanding of the Church,’ 232.

<sup>13</sup> Grenz, *TCG2*, 570.

<sup>14</sup> The main headings under this section will be explored following a 2005 outline Grenz used to describe the church as ‘the place where we belong,’ referring to it as (1) a covenant community, (2) a ministering community, and (3) also that ‘Our belonging is symbolized in acts of commitment’ (Stanley J. Grenz, ‘Getting Back to Basics: Truth, Humanity, Church and Scripture,’ Session 3: Church, Critical Concerns Course, Emergent Conference, San Diego, CA, 1 Feb 2005 [unpublished], 1-8).

approach, he believed, enabled him to work towards a construction able to serve the church 'in formulating its message in a manner than can speak within the historical-social context.'<sup>15</sup> This also gave him awareness of distinct questions being asked by the contemporary culture,<sup>16</sup> making room for the transcendent basis for all reality (i.e., the doctrine of the Trinity) to correctively respond to them. For Grenz the pursuit of covenant community was not at all something driven by culture. He explicitly rejected impulses from sociology, anthropology, or cosmology that might dictate views of the church.<sup>17</sup> Theology, he affirmed, is the ultimate basis for developing a doctrine of the church as a community since the church is part of the divine program that God's action in salvation history works to bring about toward the goal of the Spirit establishing covenant community.<sup>18</sup>

#### 2.1.1. *The Ecclesial Covenant*

Unlike covenants established in the biblical text (i.e., old, new, Abrahamic, etc.) or reformed covenantal views (i.e., divine, eternal and elective, or else 'works,' 'grace,' etc.),<sup>19</sup> covenant here begins in the Congregationalist-Baptist sense.<sup>20</sup> It signifies a covenant between God and God's people.<sup>21</sup> Like the reformed, it includes election, but not from 'the unfathomable eternity past.' Instead, election logically begins with the final goal of history, unto a community that displays the 'revealed intention of God for his creation in which his work in history will culminate.' Unfolding history climaxes with the eschaton, ultimately determining those 'in Christ' who

---

<sup>15</sup> Grenz, *RET*, 99.

<sup>16</sup> This includes the contemporary *theological* culture as well. See Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 163-6.

<sup>17</sup> Grenz, 'Ecclesiology,' 258; Grenz, *RTC2*, 330.

<sup>18</sup> Grenz, 'Ecclesiology,' 258-9.

<sup>19</sup> Lothar Perlit, 'Covenant: OT' in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, 5 vols., ed. Erwin Fahlbusch, trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1999-2008), 1:709-11; Hans Hübner, 'Covenant: NT' in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, 1:712-13; and Alasdair I. C. Heron, 'Covenant: Dogmatic Aspects,' in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, 1:713-14.

<sup>20</sup> Keith W. Clements, 'Congregationalism: History,' *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, 1:658-60.

<sup>21</sup> Grenz, *The Baptist Congregation*, 47.

will be part of the eternal community into which the Spirit brings them.<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, covenant is marked by history, yielding a ‘dynamic ecclesiology’ that is ‘constituted by its future destiny as related to God’s reign,’ which in turn causes the church to be ‘determined’ by what it is ‘destined to become.’<sup>23</sup> The covenant people are ‘called out of the world by the preaching of the Gospel in order to live in covenant.’ Therefore these participants are a special people with ‘a special consciousness’ consisting of their standing as a body under Christ’s lordship. Therein they find themselves ‘in covenant with God through Christ,’ having a relationship with the God ‘who saves them,’ and having ‘a special standing in fellowship with each other’ as a people sharing in the same salvation. As such, the ‘church-constituting covenant is a mutual agreement to walk together as the people of God.’<sup>24</sup>

While this covenant is historical it is also local. It is a ‘human,’ earthly commitment to walk together with a generous balance between leaders and the corporate people, between the individual and the group – walking *together* – sharing covenant ‘among a particular, visible group of believers.’<sup>25</sup> It is similar to the marriage covenant, mutually sharing a kind of permanent ‘bonding’ that subsists in its human-to-human commitment. Yet because of believers’ confession of Jesus’ lordship, their bond ‘is greater than all other human bonds.’<sup>26</sup> Grenz elaborates elsewhere that while ‘the OT elevates marriage as the primal bond uniting man and woman, in the NT we discover an even more theologically important relationship . . . into which humans can enter the covenant with God in Christ that in turn leads to membership in the covenant community, the fellowship of Christ’s disciples.’<sup>27</sup>

### *2.1.2. Entry into the Covenant*

On entering the covenant, and whether the church is ‘voluntarist’ or ‘gathered,’ Grenz starts by acknowledging that the covenant foundational to the church is ‘primarily vertical.’ That is, the basis of the church covenant is the ‘personal confession, “Jesus is Lord.”’ The Spirit facilitates

---

<sup>22</sup> Grenz, *TCG2*, 452-5.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 478-9.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 464, 471.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 469-71.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 480.

<sup>27</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, ‘Theological Foundations for Male-Female Relationships,’ *JETS* 41/4 (December 1998), 624.

this as 'the one who brings us to confess Jesus' lordship,' and becomes the bond which simultaneously links believers in a salvation occurring in relationships, not in isolation.<sup>28</sup> While some have mistaken Grenz to view the local church as completely voluntarist due to his usage of this language,<sup>29</sup> this mistake betrays unfamiliarity with his approach to theology, and how he carefully crafts other positions before constructing his own.<sup>30</sup> Whereas he sees covenant as a human phenomenon, it is not merely a sequence of unilateral individual or merely social acts.<sup>31</sup> Rather, it 'commences with the primal event(s) that called the community into being,' establishing the transcendent vantage point with the 'community-constituting biblical narrative that spans the ages from the primordial past to the eschatological.'<sup>32</sup> He states explicitly, 'Rather than a voluntary

---

<sup>28</sup> Grenz, *TCG2*, 480-1.

<sup>29</sup> Paul S. Fiddes mentions this in a brief paper entitled, 'Paul S. Fiddes and Stanley Grenz in Retrospect,' nd (unpublished). See this misreading also made by Michael S. Horton, *People and Place: A Covenant Ecclesiology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 176-7, who attributes the voluntarist position to Grenz without adequately nuancing his historical account of congregational polity, and that Grenz's own free church ecclesiology moves well beyond the post-Reformation convictions of Baptists/Anabaptists/Congregationalists. See also Gregg R. Allison, *The Assembly of 'the Way': The Doctrine of the Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, forthcoming), where he advocates a 'conversionistic covenantalism,' and cites Grenz as correcting the reversed priority of the earlier Congregationalists and Baptists. Allison shows Grenz representing a more balanced, biblical view where 'the church transcends the totality of its members at any given time,' and also where God's calling to individuals to be in covenant with God through Christ grants the special consciousness and confession that gives them a special fellowship with each other (see Grenz, *TCG2*, 468-72).

<sup>30</sup> Grenz also commonly integrates dimensions of earlier views into his own position, including democratic congregationalism's 'radical idea that the church is constituted by the voluntary covenant of converted believers' (*TCG2*, 554). See also how Grenz does this elsewhere by presenting the common Baptist idea of church rites as 'ordinances' instead of 'sacraments,' a position which he then goes on to argue against (Stanley J. Grenz, 'Baptism and the Lord's Supper as Community Acts: Toward a Sacramental Understanding of the Ordinances,' in *Baptist Sacramentalism*, ed. Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson [Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2003], 81).

<sup>31</sup> Grenz, 'Ecclesiology,' 257; Grenz, *The Baptist Congregation*, 49.

<sup>32</sup> Grenz, 'Baptism and the Lord's Supper,' 87-90; Grenz, 'Ecclesiology,' 257; see also the role baptism plays for this in Stanley J. Grenz, 'But We Are Baptized: Baptism as the Motivation for Holy Living' *Preaching* 16/6 (May-June 2001), 19-24.

organization, the church is the specifically Christian community of reference.<sup>33</sup>

This understanding of 'gathered' was not grounded in an eternal-past decision, but consists of the 'one central moment' where God calls the church into existence in order to accomplish his wider intent.<sup>34</sup> This speaks of God's eternal purpose, involving his triune nature which might be ordered thus: (1) 'The Father sent the Son in order to realize God's eternal design to draw humankind and creation to participate in his own life'; (2) we enter this not merely as individuals but as 'coparticipants in the relationship enjoyed between the Father and the Son, which is the Holy Spirit'; and therefore (3) the community of love which the church is called to be experiences a fellowship that is 'nothing less than our common participation in the divine communion between the Father and the Son mediated by the Spirit.'<sup>35</sup> Accordingly, the community is now gathered around the biblical text,<sup>36</sup> participating in word and sacrament,<sup>37</sup> which (as in the Reformation) highlights the relevance of the local congregation.<sup>38</sup> Mark Medley summarizes by saying that Grenz 'calls upon evangelicals to revitalize their ecclesiology by affirming the church as a visible, gathered community that is soteriologically relevant.'<sup>39</sup>

Additionally, entry into this covenant community involves nothing less than the 'new birth.' This is the Spirit's doing, who 'enables us to participate together as God's children in the eternal communion shared between the Father and the Son.' Christians are thus a 'community in love together.'<sup>40</sup> Through placing individuals in Christ 'the Spirit draws us out of

---

<sup>33</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, 'Belonging to God: The Quest for a Communal Spirituality in the Postmodern World,' *Asbury Theological Journal* 54/2 (Fall 1999), 49.

<sup>34</sup> Grenz, *TCG2*, 487.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 484.

<sup>36</sup> Grenz, 'Restoring a Trinitarian Understanding of the Church,' 231.

<sup>37</sup> Grenz, *RTC2*, 329.

<sup>38</sup> Grenz, 'Ecclesiology,' 261.

<sup>39</sup> Mark S. Medley, 'An Evangelical Theology for a Postmodern Age: Stanley J. Grenz's Current Theological Project,' *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 30/1 (Spring 2003), 84.

<sup>40</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, 'Being There for Each Other: The Church as Genuine Community?' *Enrichment Journal* (2005), 125. This pneumatological thrust from a trinitarian emphasis is a major thread leading to significant misinterpretations of Grenz, even by those favourable to much of his constructive work. E.g., Horton, *People and Place*, 84-7 characterizes Grenz's positions, suggesting the following: (1) that Grenz sees 'experience' determining doctrine, although in the same book Horton cites, Grenz actually argues against the position Horton attributes to him (*RET*, 91-93); (2) that Grenz appreciates and appropriates

our alienation into a reconciled relationship with God,' and 'transforms us from a collection of individuals into a people or 'one body'.<sup>41</sup> Grenz finds this balancing the individual and corporate,<sup>42</sup> while Shults suggests that it also makes possible the 'individual *and* communal dimensions of life in Christ' since Grenz places 'the concept of the body of Christ into a larger trinitarian vision, in which the church is the image of God.'<sup>43</sup>

### 2.1.3. 'Baptist' or 'baptist'?

In not wanting to focus primacy on either individual or corporate aspects of Christian identity, Grenz moved away from an accepted Congregationalist-Baptist distinction of a 'contractual ecclesiology,' which places emphasis on the individual believer.<sup>44</sup> He hoped to correct it with an 'older, more biblical emphasis' in order to cultivate renewal in the church by observing church membership as 'membership in a covenanted people.'<sup>45</sup> Part of this move away from the priority of the individual believer might be a move closer to something like James McClendon's 'baptist vision,'<sup>46</sup> though without what seemed to be a Trinity-lite approach compared to Grenz's aim.<sup>47</sup> It could also be consonant with his rejection of

---

'Wesley's quadrilateral' [*sic*], although Grenz actually notes its grave difficulties (RET, 91); and (3) that Grenz advocates a modification of Schleiermacher's subjective-experiential view of community creating the Word, although Grenz makes clear distinction between first and second-order endeavours (RET, 80-81), which Horton does not acknowledge, along with Grenz's numerous critiques elsewhere of Schleiermacher's principles. It seems that, at least in Horton's case, this treatment could have given a closer reading of the work, could have considered how seminal ideas sketched early in 1993 bore fruit in further exposition in Grenz's later work, and could have understood better what Grenz was communicating in light of his attempt to find a more robust role played by the Spirit in the world, the church, and theology.

<sup>41</sup> Grenz, 'Belonging to God,' 50.

<sup>42</sup> Grenz, TCG2, 471.

<sup>43</sup> F. LeRon Shults, 'The 'Body of Christ' in Evangelical Theology,' *Word & World* 22/2 (Spring 2002), 184 (italics Shults's). See also Grenz, TCG2, 406-7, 482-3.

<sup>44</sup> Grenz, RTC2, 322-3.

<sup>45</sup> Grenz, TCG2, 471; Grenz, *The Baptist Congregation*, 48.

<sup>46</sup> James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Ethics: Systematic Theology: Volume I* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1986; rev. and enl., 2002), 26-39.

<sup>47</sup> While he claimed that at least vol. 2 of his systematic theology is a '(trinitarian) book' and therefore he did not need to offer a distinct treatise on trinitarianism (James Wm. McClendon, Jr, *Doctrine: Systematic Theology: Volume II*

the ‘modernist understanding of the church’ which ‘treats the faith community as a conglomerate of self-contained individuals, an aggregate of modern selves.’<sup>48</sup> Or it may be caused by Grenz’s heritage of dual-citizenship as a Baptist and an evangelical.<sup>49</sup>

Grenz understood evangelicalism to be a ‘renewal movement’ characterized by emphasis on the ‘new birth,’ existing within the broader church, and pulsating within local churches.<sup>50</sup> Ultimately this phenomenon yielded the independent evangelical movement (and subsequent megachurch phenomenon), and the myriad of parachurch groups that largely rode the wave of Post WWII American affluence, television, and the emphasis on the individual and personal decisions.<sup>51</sup> Stan Grenz was as much part of the evangelical ethos as he was part of First Baptist Church, Vancouver, or the Canadian Baptists. Yet he also saw himself as a part of the wider church, the true church within the institutional one, which the reformers understood as characterized by unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity. Holding these marks as ‘goals to be sought,’ the true church embodies a dynamic essence, but would go astray were these ‘ideal’ marks to cause the invisible church to become disjointed from the one in the world. Borrowing from Guder, the church is to be a proclaiming, reconciling, sanctifying, and unifying community, which marks a missional, ecumenical ecclesiology.<sup>52</sup> And to what extent did Grenz’s ecumenism go?

He was not enthusiastic about breaking any ecclesiastical organizational unity and seemed equally at home in the ‘believer ecumenism’ of contemporary evangelicalism, as well as in the broader ‘church ecumenism’ that describes the modern ecumenical movement.<sup>53</sup> His own development shows a trajectory from his German (North American Baptist) upbringing to seminary at the more US neo-evangelical Denver Seminary (Conservative Baptist), followed by doctoral studies in

---

(Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1994), 317), his 3 volume systematic work does not have the same trinitarian thrust that other twentieth century offerings have, nor does he have the Trinity informing all theology and ethics, as in Grenz.

<sup>48</sup> Grenz, ‘Belonging to God,’ 49.

<sup>49</sup> See explorations on this Stanley J. Grenz, ‘Concerns of a Pietist with a Ph.D.,’ *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 37/2 (Fall 2002), 58-76.

<sup>50</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, ‘Die Begrenzte Gemeinschaft (the Boundaried People) and the Character of Evangelical Theology,’ *JETS* 45/2 (June 2002), 311.

<sup>51</sup> Mark Noll, ‘Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism in North America Since the End of World War II,’ paper presented at the Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism in Britain Project, London, 16 June 2009.

<sup>52</sup> Grenz, *RTC2*, 327-9.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 308-16.

Munich with Pannenberg. According to Pannenberg, Grenz may have entertained the idea of actually becoming Lutheran, at which point the German theologian offered a deterrent argument: '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.'<sup>54</sup>

While Grenz highly valued his heritage as a Baptist, he saw in the universal church the interconnectedness of all local congregations, meanwhile favouring a return to the missional ecumenism that motivated the modern ecumenical movement.<sup>55</sup> Still, as a Baptist he affirmed deep commitment to local autonomy, that each local fellowship is 'the church of Jesus Christ in miniature.' Albeit, cooperative associations were needed to give expression to the wider Christian fellowship, to resist isolation and express interdependency, and to engage the task of the entire people of God.<sup>56</sup> As his academic program grew, his dialogue also increased with others outside the Baptist and evangelical guild. Perhaps this resulted from the theologically meagre US evangelical context, or perhaps it was prompted especially by what he saw in others' robust trinitarian engagements (e.g., from Lutherans, Reformed, Scottish Presbyterian, Orthodox, and Catholic), and pneumatology.<sup>57</sup> And he also found himself increasingly engaged with other ecumenical groups from across the globe in order to serve them.<sup>58</sup> But ultimately, Grenz had no interest whatever in forsaking his rich unabashed Baptist heritage.<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, cited in Erik C. Leafblad, 'Prolegomena: In Dedication to Professor Stanley Grenz,' *Princeton Theological Review* 12/1 (Spring 2006), 1.

<sup>55</sup> Grenz, *RTC2*, 320, 328.

<sup>56</sup> Grenz, *TCG2*, 552-3.

<sup>57</sup> Describing the volume on the Spirit in the WJK *Matrix* proposal, Grenz stated, 'Such a pneumatology would be truly ecumenical, drawing insights from the Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant traditions' ('Toward a Matrix of Trinitarian, Communitarian, Eschatological Theology,' 3).

<sup>58</sup> See his conversations with those from the Stone-Campbell movement, Emergent and other denominations including the Assemblies of God, and other charismatic and ecumenical groups from around the globe, which highlight his growing interest not just in the local community but also in the worldwide (evangelical) church. This also included a growing reciprocal interest and invitation from these groups to be influenced by Stan. Incidentally, some have misread Grenz's impulse toward a 'generous orthodoxy' (e.g. Brian D. McLaren, 'Church Emerging: Or Why Do I Still Use the Word Postmodern With Mixed Feelings?' in *Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, eds. Doug Pagitt and Tony Jones (Grand Rapids, Baker, 2008), 150). According to Roger Olson, 'Stan saw

## 2.2. Ministering Community

As has already been identified, entry into the covenant community of believers for Grenz carries a standing with incredible privileges and responsibilities. These relate to what the church is and what its tasks are, including the means by which they are accomplished.

### 2.2.1. Nature and Purpose of the Church

Not unlike most Baptists, Grenz's view of the church had a lot to do with kingdom theology. Early in his program, he asserts that 'the kingdom of God' was given more attention by biblical scholars and theologians than any other topic in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and he employs it early as a (the?) major theological motif,<sup>60</sup> although it evolves nearly out of the atmosphere in his mature methodological work.<sup>61</sup> The early kingdom thrust may result from his earlier Baptist or dispensational emphases,<sup>62</sup> or may borrow from his observations of Pannenberg's ecclesiology – the church as the sign of the kingdom, the messianic fellowship, and the elected community.<sup>63</sup> Either

---

himself as a *missionary* to the emerging church, helping them to have a theology' (personal interview with Roger E. Olson, 23 April 2009, Waco, TX).

<sup>59</sup> Grenz, *TCG2*, xxxi. Cp. the statement on the ecumenical ethos which enabled evangelicals 'to affirm one another within existing viable structures and join hands across ecclesiastical boundaries,' in Grenz, *RTC2*, 308.

<sup>60</sup> Grenz, *TCG2*, 472; Grenz, *RET*, 139-47.

<sup>61</sup> *Beyond Foundationalism* makes no listing of 'kingdom' in the index, and is completely replaced by the Trinity as theology's structural motif and eschatology as its orienting motif. See the reticence to use it in Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 234-5.

<sup>62</sup> While Grenz does not see the kingdom arriving in its fullness on earth in history (cp. Grenz, *TCG2*, 619 and Grenz, *Sexual Ethics: An Evangelical Perspective* [Dallas: Word, 1990; rev. ed., Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997], 49), he still finds some good in dispensationalist eschatology, with its recovery of a futurist eschatology (Stanley J. Grenz, 'The Deeper Significance of the Millennium Debate,' *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 36/2 (Spring 1994), 20-1). See also the discussion in Russell D. Moore, 'Leftward To Scofield: The Eclipse of the Kingdom in Post-Conservative Evangelical Theology,' *JETS* 47/3 (September 2004), 429-31, although Moore fails to mention the 'kingdom' in *RET* and therefore does not reckon with the germane development in Grenz's own program, especially as he is trying to work it out in a trinitarian manner.

<sup>63</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, 'Sacramental Spirituality, Ecumenism, and Mission to the World: Foundational Motifs of Pannenberg's Ecclesiology,' *Mid-stream* 30/1

way, he saw the church as being understood within the context of the broader kingdom concept. As such, it is a sign of the kingdom specifically in its community dynamic.<sup>64</sup> The church 'is the *product* of the kingdom, produced by the obedient response to the announcement of the divine reign.' As such, it is 'the product of the work of the Spirit,' called into being by 'the proclamation of the kingdom of God.'<sup>65</sup>

In order to conduct ministry as a community, a foundation for this ministry must exist, which is summed up in the church's purpose. According to Grenz, this is linked to the purpose of all creation – to glorify God. He sees that God's intention is to establish community, and thus asserts, 'We glorify the Triune God as we fulfill our mandate, which focuses on advancing community, and thereby are the *imago dei*.'<sup>66</sup> The church's fundamental calling 'to be the foretaste of the *imago dei*' relates to the universal human design to be the divine image. This church's role as the *imago dei*, however, doesn't find its source in God's design for humanity, but rather in its 'fundamental existence 'in Christ.' This, in turn, speaks of the communal fellowship that Christian's share, which is 'a shared participation – a participation together – in the perichoretic community of divine persons.' Marking the true church, then, this participation in the highest sense of community describes a people whose life is hidden in Christ (i.e., the invisible church) even while they live in this world (i.e., the visible church). This very existence is the 'calling of those whose lives have been, and are being, transformed by the Spirit.' And this calling 'determines the church's proclaiming, reconciling, sanctifying, and unifying mission in the

---

(January 1991), 20-28. Whereas 'elect community' has to do with eschatology (perhaps the motif he later adopts as 'eschatological orientation'), Grenz finds no usage of 'messianic fellowship' in his program and may have, instead, replaced it with 'community' as theology's integrative motif, which also relates to Grenz chiding Pannenberg for neglecting it as a major theme (see Stanley J. Grenz, 'The Irrelevancy of Theology: Pannenberg and the Quest for Truth,' *Calvin Theological Journal* 27/2 [Nov 1992], 310-11). There may be reason, however, for Grenz's criticism to be put a bit milder. See the description of community in relation to kingdom and *imago dei* in Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 531-2.

<sup>64</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, 'Theology, Church and Ministry in the Postmodern Context,' Part 1, Adelaide Intensive Seminar, 28 Feb 2001 (unpublished), 6.

<sup>65</sup> Grenz, *TCG2*, 472, 478 (italics Grenz's); Grenz, *RTC2*, 323.

<sup>66</sup> Grenz, 'Getting Back to Basics,' Session 3, 4-5.

world’ – the sharing of God’s mission.<sup>67</sup> Put in other terms, the church is ‘a community with a mandate: worship, edification and outreach.’<sup>68</sup>

### 2.2.2. *Organization of Community*

The church must organize itself in order to accomplish its divinely given task in the world, to carry out its ministry of embodying and announcing ‘the narrative of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit—to the glory of God.’<sup>69</sup> Broadly speaking, this organizing deals with the church’s structure and leadership, or polity and authority. Cognizant of certain difficulties in maintaining the ‘democratic congregational ideal’ in practice, Grenz held that ‘[t]he people as a whole... must retain final authority for the exercise of church powers – membership, mandate, and organization (including the selection of local officers and ordination).’<sup>70</sup> On membership, Grenz sought to move ‘beyond denominationalism’ to stress baptism (the symbol of genuine conversion) and its need to be restored without ‘unchurching’ others throughout the broader church. This approach avoids baptistic legalism but places baptism in its proper place, highlighting an individual allegiance to Christ and to future participation in the kingdom.<sup>71</sup> It also enables the body of Christ to conduct discipline (i.e., being ‘cut off from the covenant’) of its members in cases of spreading false doctrine, heresy, and other extremities.<sup>72</sup>

Concerning leadership in the church, officers are selected by the congregation based on stringent criteria: spiritual qualification (1 Tim 3:1-7), giftedness, interest, proven effectiveness at other tasks. Based on perceived needs, various ‘helper’ offices may be added under the church board to help the leaders in the accomplishment of their tasks, with people selected for these roles also meeting similar spiritual criteria (1 Tim 3:9-11). Amidst the complicated era of educated, more mobile pastors, and larger

---

<sup>67</sup> Grenz, *RTC2*, 330-1.

<sup>68</sup> Grenz, ‘Getting Back to Basics,’ Session 3, 5. See also Grenz, *TCG2*, 490-510.

<sup>69</sup> Grenz, ‘Restoring a Trinitarian Understanding of the Church,’ 231.

<sup>70</sup> Grenz, *TCG2*, 556-7.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 548.

<sup>72</sup> Grenz, *The Baptist Congregation*, 47-8; Grenz, *TCG2*, 498; and Grenz, ‘Die Begrenzte Gemeinschaft,’ 313. See also the scenario of ‘clergy misconduct,’ and the enormous issues therein involving discipline, restoration and potential retraining in Stanley J. Grenz and Roy D. Bell, *Betrayal of Trust: Confronting and Preventing Clergy Sexual Misconduct* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995; 2d ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 105-8, 174.

congregations, Grenz found the two-tiered organizational structure of uncomplicated polity normally preferable over the three-tiered, which begins to move away from the local community. Pastors are called to serve for indefinite periods of time while other officers serve definite terms.<sup>73</sup> Based on mutual dependence within the Trinity, Grenz sees women and men also mutually dependent, and therefore finds gifted and qualified men and women equally serving at every level within the body of Christ, including leadership roles.<sup>74</sup>

The local congregation maintains the responsibility of officially ordaining certain members to function as servant leaders in the body of Christ. Ordination for service, then, is a church's 'corporate acknowledgement of the Spirit's sovereignty in calling persons to ministry.'<sup>75</sup> Ultimately it is the Lord's prerogative to ordain leaders for his people. But because Christ's authority functions immediately in the local congregation, it follows that, in the final analysis, ordination is the prerogative of the local congregation. Grenz affirms the WCC's consensus statement that 'ordained ministry has no existence apart from the community.'<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, the ministry of ordained persons is not directed toward leadership in the local congregation necessarily, but toward ministry 'for the entire church.' Ordination is not therefore ontological but *functional*, or *missional*, serving the mission of the entire people of God while also being set aside for ministry to and on behalf of the whole community of Christ.<sup>77</sup> All of this facilitates the working out of the mission that the church is committed to, which is none other than the mission of the triune God.<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>73</sup> Grenz, *TCG2*, 560-1.

<sup>74</sup> Stanley J. Grenz and Denise Muir Kjesbo, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995), 154.

<sup>75</sup> Grenz, *TCG2*, 569.

<sup>76</sup> *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper #111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), 22, cited in Grenz, *TCG2*, 569. See also the attention paid to this document in Gordon T. Smith, 'The Sacraments and the Embodiment of Our Trinitarian Faith,' in *Trinitarian Theology for the Church*, ed. by Daniel J. Treier and David Lauber (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009), 185-203.

<sup>77</sup> Grenz, *TCG2*, 565-8.

<sup>78</sup> Grenz, *RTC2*, 330.

### 2.3. Community Commitment

For Grenz, community and church are not synonymous, although overlap exists, each informing the other.<sup>79</sup> The local congregation, however, is where genuine community is found that is identity shaping and which also cultivates true belongingness.<sup>80</sup> This formation and belonging are shaped by the church community's narrative, which is distinctly manifest in the church's special acts of commitment.

#### 2.3.1. Community Narrative

In Lindbeckian fashion, Grenz sees the church is a 'narrative people' whose members have their personal and communal identities constructed by the biblical narrative.<sup>81</sup> This biblical salvation framework displays a universal cast as a result of its situatedness within the creation-fall-new creation drama. While God's intention is ultimately found in the goal of eschatological new creation, Grenz nevertheless see this as 'present in embryonic form in creation.'<sup>82</sup> As such, the Spirit is currently bringing about what will be. Through Christ's death and resurrection, he is the 'life-giving spirit' (1 Cor 15:45) who 'opens the way for the transformation of what was begun in the creation of the First Adam.'<sup>83</sup> Believers enter this narrative at conversion, marking the beginning of their constitution by this story which looks for identity backward to certain events and forward for hope. In this way believers experience both dimensions of the narrative, neither ending with past events nor extending just into the present, but also into the future. It is this story wherein Christians 'find meaning in their personal and communal stories,' discovering the link between their lives and the transcendent story of God's work in history.<sup>84</sup>

---

<sup>79</sup> Grenz, *TCG2*, 479-85, 498-501.

<sup>80</sup> Grenz, *RTC2*, 320-7; Grenz, 'Ecclesiology,' 256-60; Grenz, 'Getting Back to Basics,' Session 3, 1-8; Grenz, 'Belonging the God,' 45-51; Grenz, 'Being There for Each Other,' 124-6; Grenz, 'Theology, Church and Ministry,' Part 3, 4.

<sup>81</sup> Grenz, 'Restoring a Trinitarian Understanding of the Church,' 231.

<sup>82</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, 'The Universality of the Jesus-Story' and the 'Incredulity Toward Metanarratives,' in *No Other Gods Before Me? Evangelicals and the Challenge of World Religions*, ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 98-99.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>84</sup> See Grenz, 'Ecclesiology,' 254-6; and Grenz, 'Baptism and the Lord's Supper,' 84-9, displaying Grenz's theological interpretations of recent developments in sociology.

The connection to this broader story gives rise to the 'political act' that is Christian worship. Worship is a political act in that it is a 'reminder that we are connected to a story greater than any national or tribal story,' and that 'no earthly allegiances can claim ultimate loyalty, but that such loyalty rests with the triune God alone.'<sup>85</sup> This narrative constitutes the church as a true community made up of many stories,<sup>86</sup> and embodying the ultimate story displayed in the covenant community's confessional marks and rites.<sup>87</sup>

### 2.3.2. *Community Marks*

A major corrective Grenz gives to the parachurch nature of evangelicalism is a revitalized ecclesiology affirming the church as 'visible, gathered,' and 'soteriologically relevant.'<sup>88</sup> Grenz identified the Reformers as clearly accepting the creedal marks of the *notae ecclesiae* (i.e., one, holy, catholic, apostolic) while placing due emphasis as the community gathered around Word and sacrament. This opened the door for them to see the earlier *notae* 'more as eschatological goals to be sought than as attributes that can be realized on earth.'<sup>89</sup> Consequently, this brought Grenz to see the church as missional with respect to its traits.<sup>90</sup> It is a church active in mission (apostolic), *proclaiming* through Word and sacrament the good news of God's work in Christ as those having been sent into the world. It is also a *reconciling* community, seeking to be an active agent in divine reconciliation, fostering wholesome relationships with all humans in every dimension of life as a way of bringing people of great diversity into the fellowship of Word and sacrament. Third, the church is a *sanctifying* community, set apart

---

<sup>85</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, 'Beyond the Worship Wars: Entering into World-Saving Worship (John 4:1-26),' from 'What Does it Mean to be Trinitarians?' Part 3, Bible and Theology Lectureship, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, MO, 20 Jan 2005 (unpublished), 6.

<sup>86</sup> Grenz, 'Ecclesiology,' 257; and Grenz, *TCG2*, 500.

<sup>87</sup> Grenz, *TCG2*, 516-18.

<sup>88</sup> Medley, 'An Evangelical Theology for a Postmodern Age,' 84.

<sup>89</sup> Grenz, *RTC2*, 319-21, 327.

<sup>90</sup> The neglect of the church as 'missional,' particularly with recent developments by groups like the Gospel and Culture Network, was a significant shortcoming Grenz saw in Kärkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology*, particularly the third section on 'contextual ecclesiologies' which avoided altogether recent work on the missional church (see Grenz 'Peer Review,' 2). Kärkäinen yielded all discussion of missional theology to the chapter on Newbigin.

for God's use but also patterning human life after God, which consequentially brings about internal transformation among those who regularly gather around Word and sacrament, who are becoming the people whose lives cause others in the world to view God as 'holy.' Finally, the church is intended to have a *unifying* effect, both as church members gather together locally around a unifying participation in Word and sacrament, and among all congregations who share in these sacred acts. These four marks are part of the missional church, which gathers around the Word and sacrament in this 'penultimate age,' concretely anticipating and bearing witness to 'the Spirit's fashioning of one new humanity in Christ (Eph 2:15) and the eschatological day when God will dwell with the redeemed in the renewed creation (Rev 21:1-5; 22:1-5).'<sup>91</sup>

### 2.3.3. *Community Rites*

The special acts of commitment for the church are Baptism and the Lord's supper. These acts are events which are integral to community life and, in a sense, 'establish' the community.<sup>92</sup> Early in his writings, Grenz saw the need for a balanced position designating these as both 'ordinance' and 'sacrament,' using the former for its emphasis on obedience, and the latter's original sense (*sacramentum*) expressing fidelity to the Lord Jesus Christ. Later he increasingly emphasized sacramentalism as personally strengthening the identity of community participants as a result of the narrative that these ritual ordinances symbolize.<sup>93</sup> Grenz saw these vivid symbolic acts giving opportunity to affirm believers' faith as the Holy Spirit also uses these acts 'to facilitate our participation in the reality of the acts they symbolize,' which are the very acts forming the foundation of believers' identity as persons united with Christ.<sup>94</sup> With this, he saw a 'deeper dimension of incorporation into the narrative community.'<sup>95</sup>

Baptism is 'the God-given means whereby we initially declare publicly our inward faith' and thereby offers the means of confessing personal faith.<sup>96</sup> It is the initial act of community-commitment forming one's personal identity, and, 'in a sense, it even sets holy living in motion.'

---

<sup>91</sup> Grenz, *RTC2*, 328-9; Grenz, 'Ecclesiology,' 265-6.

<sup>92</sup> Grenz, 'Getting Back to Basics,' Session 3, 5.

<sup>93</sup> Grenz, 'Baptism and the Lord's Supper,' 89-95.

<sup>94</sup> Grenz, *RTC2*, 516-18; Grenz, *The Baptist Congregation*, 29-32.

<sup>95</sup> Grenz, 'Baptism and the Lord's Supper,' 93.

<sup>96</sup> Grenz, *TCG2*, 529.

Above all, it symbolizes union with Christ in his death and resurrection.<sup>97</sup> It is based on the past, symbolically recounting former events while simultaneously being based on the future in anticipation – both for the sake of the believer's present. Baptism also symbolizes covenant with God and others who have been baptized into the one body, thereby shaping the community identity as well. And baptism effectively *proclaims* Christ's death and resurrection while anticipating his glorious return. This proclamation occurs within and without the redeemed community, wherein the Spirit issues a call to respond to the gospel.

Grenz preferred believers' baptism to alternatives, although did not see the mode constituting the rite. Nevertheless, asserting its greater biblical and theological support, it is preferable as the most significant mode. He wanted to extend membership to persons baptized in infancy and confirmed who are truly converted.<sup>98</sup> Facing challenges inherent with some of these positions, Grenz saw signs of 'growing consensus' among paedobaptist (recognizing primacy of believers' baptism) and believers' Baptists (coming to terms with paedobaptism), and he wanted to find a place where Baptist insights and emphases can be offered while listening for insights from other traditions.<sup>99</sup>

The second practice displaying community loyalty and commitment is the celebration of the Lord's supper, which is the regular recounting and reaffirming of identity together in Christ. Like baptism, it too is a proclamation of the gospel and past events inherent to the gospel. But it also points to a 'future orientation,' a concept undiscovered until the twentieth century when, according to Grenz, it was integrated into ecclesiology and all other *loci*. He added a third dimension to the past and future dynamics of the narrative recounted at the Lord's supper, namely, 'community.' This highlights the community's experience at the table where Christ is 'present' through the mediation of the Spirit's ongoing constituting of the church. This eating at the Lord's table consists of the renewal of the

---

<sup>97</sup> Grenz, 'But We Are Baptized,' 19-24.

<sup>98</sup> See the recent controversy this view caused among US Baptists <[http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2007/08/21/baptizoblogodebate-roundup-with\\_21/](http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2007/08/21/baptizoblogodebate-roundup-with_21/)> accessed 29 Dec 2009.

<sup>99</sup> Grenz, 'Theology, Church and Ministry,' Part 3, 6-8; and Grenz, TCG2, 520-31.

covenant with the Lord, and fellowship with members of Christ's *local* body.<sup>100</sup>

The Spirit works through the symbolic activity where individual believers are strengthened by the personal ingesting of the elements, along with the community-building event of 'our ingesting the elements together as participants in the one community of faith.'<sup>101</sup> At the Lord's table 'the Spirit strengthens and declares our unity with Christ,' with whom even greater communion will be enjoyed in the future eschatological community of God.<sup>102</sup> Something special happens in this act, which is perhaps why Grenz stressed, 'Above all, the Communion meal is an ordinance.' By this, he emphasized the need to obey it regularly, and that it is 'Communion,' highlighting the 'community,' meanwhile he was still partial to the term, 'The Lord's Supper.'<sup>103</sup> Incidentally, the concept of 'acts of belonging'<sup>104</sup> was not present much in the 1990's for Grenz's one-volume systematic theology, nor was the narrative concept dominant, as it became later.<sup>105</sup> This seems to indicate significant evolution not only in his own theological development and engagement, but also the sustainable role that 'community' had in his program, bringing him to new heights of awareness of God's working in Christ bring about 'community in the highest sense.'<sup>106</sup>

---

<sup>100</sup> This 'local' emphasis was displayed by Grenz's unwillingness to take communion at Regent College chapel services, a practice he made known to many of his students (I am grateful to Rev. Sean Cook for this detail).

<sup>101</sup> Grenz, 'Theology, Church and Ministry,' Part 3, 11-12.

<sup>102</sup> Grenz, *TCG2*, 537-8.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 540, 536. Grenz once expressed concern over what he deemed was his pastor Bruce Milne's misuse of the ordinance in occasional evangelistic Open Communion where the gospel invitation was linked with the Lord's Supper. Milne 'occasionally (and only when there was a natural evangelistic application present in my earlier sermon text) invited those not yet committed to Christ to remain for the Supper and to express their response to [the] gospel invitation by "partaking of him" by faith in the Supper elements.' While comfortable 'on biblical and theological grounds,' after Grenz shared his conviction, Milne stated, 'In deference to [Stan], I restrained my use of this invitation afterwards, though I did not feel unable to continue the practice (which was already very irregularly expressed) if I felt prompted by the Spirit' (I am grateful to Dr. Bruce Milne for sharing these details, personal interview, 21 April 2009).

<sup>104</sup> Grenz, 'Getting Back to Basics,' Outline, 10.

<sup>105</sup> See Stanley J. Grenz, 'Jesus as the *Imago Dei*: Image-of-God Christology and the Non-Linear Linearity of Theology,' *JETS* 47/4 (Dec 2004), 621-3.

<sup>106</sup> Grenz, 'Ecclesiology,' 268.

### 3. The Eschatological and Trinitarian Community

Dimensions of Grenz's composition thus far observed are not merely a result of his Baptist convictions, or his evangelical identification, although these factors are not unrelated to his doctrine of the church. More importantly, it results from working towards a coherent structure that, above all, was marked more by a trenchant eschatology and a steady resolve to see the doctrine of the Trinity thoroughly permeate his ecclesiology. For Grenz, then, the jumping off point for his trinitarian theology was a doctrine of God.<sup>107</sup> He began to access to the Trinity through *imago Dei*, and ultimately in an *imago Dei* Christology, since Christ is the image of God. The union of believers to Christ ensures their conformation unto the *imago Dei*, both indicating and realising what humans were designed to be – in communion with the triune God via God's own mediation. This life with God, this communion in the highest sense with the Trinity, will only come in the future.

#### 3.1. Telic

The *OED* describes 'telic' as an adjective used for 'expressing end or purpose,' or, 'directed or tending to a definite end; purposive.'<sup>108</sup> Grenz used the term occasionally in his later writings, with seemingly this same meaning.<sup>109</sup> Yet in spite of his mild use of the term, the idea is permeating and dominant. The idea related the earlier prominent 'kingdom' theme in Grenz's work, which referred generally to God's overall reign.<sup>110</sup> And while 'kingdom' became less prominent in his later writings, marking a significant shift for the role it played in his theology, the theme in no wise vanished.<sup>111</sup> It became less prominent in Grenz's later writings as he found more promise in the *imago Dei* theme for the fulcrum of his program.<sup>112</sup> With an

---

<sup>107</sup> Grenz, 'Restoring a Trinitarian Understanding of the Church,' 228; and Grenz, *TCG2*, 482-4, 511.

<sup>108</sup> 'Telic,' in *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, 2d ed. (Oxford: OUP, 1989) <<http://dictionary.oed.com/>> accessed 31 Dec 2009. The term originated in nineteenth c. English from the Gk. *telikos* 'final' and *telos* 'end,' and observes that 'With God, results are all purposed' (Alford, *Grk. Test.*, III [1856], 90 n2).

<sup>109</sup> E.g., Stanley J. Grenz, 'Eschatological Theology: Contours of a Postmodern Theology of Hope,' *Review and Expositor* 97/3 (Summer 2000), 342, 346-7.

<sup>110</sup> Grenz, *TCG2*, 452-3, 472-9.

<sup>111</sup> While minimized in his later methodological and theological work, the 'kingdom' theme never entirely went away, but was simply relocated.

<sup>112</sup> Interestingly, the common feature between 'kingdom' and '*imago Dei*' was that both were *telic*.

almost forgotten 'kingdom' language, Grenz saw the church as called to be 'the foretaste' of the divine image.<sup>113</sup> The church's emergence unto this dynamic reality relates to the eschatological in-breaking creating new life amidst the brokenness of the present as a result of God's work in salvation-history and the presence of the Spirit.<sup>114</sup> As such, the church becomes the eschatological covenant community of love,<sup>115</sup> taking its shape and very nature from 'the redeemed humanity in the new creation.' This carries eschatological implications for the church 'to pioneer the future community in which God dwells with his people,' and 'to explore the implications that the vision of the future has for life in the present.'<sup>116</sup>

This paradigm is consonant with Grenz's 'eschatological realism,' which understands the future as 'far more real, and hence more objective, than the present world, which is even now passing away (1 Cor 7:31).'<sup>117</sup> In this, Grenz has not completely moved away from Pannenberg's ontological priority of the future, although he holds a more responsible view of the present than his mentor.<sup>118</sup> Accordingly, Grenz identifies prayer as the primary place for expressing the greatest impulse of believers' present longings. After observing prayer's primary OT characteristic as worship relating to community life, the NT augments prayer as 'eschatological,' being 'directed toward the coming of the kingdom.' The 'central character of prayer,' then, has now become 'the cry for the kingdom,' replete with all its 'theological undergirding.' Specifically, while oriented toward the kingdom, believers are to 'beseech God that the marks of God's rule be present in the current situation which [is] characterized by need and insufficiency.' 'Prayer,' therefore, 'is the request for the coming of the future into the present.' As such, it cannot go without deep expression of thanksgiving and gratitude 'for past experiences of the in-breaking of God's love and power.' And yet, it inches further forward as 'the cry for the coming of God's rule,' shouting, 'Do it again, God!' Precisely how Jesus taught his disciples to pray, this prayer is 'an acknowledgment of a partnership, as we do our part in opening up the present to the in-breaking of the power of the future.'<sup>119</sup>

---

<sup>113</sup> Grenz, *RTC2*, 331.

<sup>114</sup> Grenz, *TCG2*, 474-6.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 486.

<sup>116</sup> Grenz, 'Theology, Church and Ministry,' Part 1, 7.

<sup>117</sup> Grenz, *RTC2*, 254.

<sup>118</sup> Grenz, *TCG2*, 479. In his own adaptation of this feature, Grenz has somewhat modified Pannenberg's emphasis.

<sup>119</sup> 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*

Grenz saw the telic nature of the church not just as wrapped up in what the Spirit is presently working to conform believers unto (i.e., ultimate completion as *imago Dei* in the future), which places tremendous emphasis on the future and what God will ultimately bring about based on his greatest purpose. But believers in the present are oriented toward active prayer for the kingdom to come, while concurrently experiencing it proleptically. Therefore, while longing for the *telos* in the present, marking Grenz's ecclesiology as *telic*, the main feature driving it, and all his theology, is the doctrine of the Trinity.

### 3.2. Trinitarian

At the centre of Grenz's theology is the Trinity. It has been called 'the true *theologia* and the conceptual-relational-methodological heart of all that Grenz says theologically.'<sup>120</sup> As such, 'his ecclesiology stands methodologically within and from the being and action of the triune God, the divine community.'<sup>121</sup> Grenz asserted that 'the triunity of God ought to inform all systematic theology,'<sup>122</sup> arguing that 'the cause of evangelical renewal in the church can only be fostered by an ecclesiology that is thoroughly trinitarian.' Over and against a Christocentric model, this trinitarian conception of the church locates the church's ultimate basis for understanding itself and its unity in its relationship to the triune God.<sup>123</sup>

For Grenz, trinitarian theology begins with Jesus, whose revelatory significance as true God and true human bestow both God's self-disclosure and 'ontological participation' in the triune life, since Jesus 'shares in the triune community.'<sup>124</sup> But trinitarian theology is deficient if it ends only with Christ. Therefore 'the theological foundation for a trinitarian ecclesiology' was not the Christological emphasis of free churches and

---

Lectureship, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, MO, 19 Jan 2005 (unpublished), 6-7.

<sup>120</sup> John D. Morrison, 'Trinity and Church: An Examination of Theological Methodology,' *JETS* 40/3 (Sept 1997), 446.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 447.

<sup>122</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), x.

<sup>123</sup> Grenz, 'Restoring a Trinitarian Understanding of the Church,' 231-2.

<sup>124</sup> Grenz, *TCG2*, 304-5. Even though Grenz used the relational analogy to access the Trinity, this was never divorced from his Christology (i.e., God's self-revelation in the historical Jesus), and ultimately evolved into an *imago Dei* Christology, where he saw the relational analogy preeminently displayed in Christ, who unites those who are 'in him' to the one God, who is Father, Son and Spirit.

evangelical Protestants, nor the hierarchical trinitarian model of the liturgical churches. In light of the twentieth century's renaissance of trinitarian theology, God as the divine community of love has been observed as the foundation for ecclesiology, resulting in a model where the church resembles the triune God particularly 'as those who are proleptically brought to share in the dynamic of the divine life.' Grenz asserted, "The church is a people placed in Christ by the Holy Spirit to the glory of the Father,' and 'a people bound together by love (i.e., the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of the relationship between the Father and Son).'<sup>125</sup> On an earlier version of Grenz's budding description of the church as 'a manifestation of the reciprocity of love which characterizes the triune God,' Tom Nettles remarked that Grenz's vision 'is moving and well deserves serious and prayerful attention.'<sup>126</sup> Yet for Grenz this vision could not last without the 'anthropological bridge' spanning from his theological foundation (i.e., God as the divine community of love) to its ecclesiological implication (i.e., that humans are called to be the *imago dei*, a communal reality): i.e., the image of God.<sup>127</sup> God's purposes of having humankind reflect his own nature (love) by 'bringing humans to be the image of God' addresses both the corporate and individual aspects of humanness. This participation in the dynamic of trinitarian love is a privilege shared among all believers, who are drawn together into one family by the Spirit who mediates this relationship.<sup>128</sup>

The Spirit mediates further participation in the divine dynamic through prayer, where the underlying dynamic 'entails us being brought by the Spirit into the prayer of the Son.' Based on Romans 8, Grenz stated

The Holy Spirit causes us to cry out, 'Abba' – it's almost forced with the Spirit poured out in us. The Spirit brings us into a dynamic so that now when we pray, we are praying right there in Jesus Christ the Son. Our position in prayer is being right there in the heart of the trinitarian dynamic – in this location as joint-heirs with Christ. Unless we catch this, prayer will not be meaningful.<sup>129</sup>

---

<sup>125</sup> Grenz, 'Theology, Church and Ministry,' Part 1, 8.

<sup>126</sup> Review of Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, *Trinity Journal* 15:1 (Spring 1994), 130.

<sup>127</sup> Grenz, 'Getting Back to Basics,' Session 3, 3.

<sup>128</sup> Grenz, 'Restoring a Trinitarian Understanding of the Church,' 232-3.

<sup>129</sup> Grenz, 'What Does It Mean to Be Trinitarian in Prayer?' 9 (the extended quote was a departure from his notes and came extemporaneously during the lecture).

Evidencing a sturdy patrology,<sup>130</sup> Grenz's trinitarian ecclesiology also revealed a robust pneumatology, while its Christology was just as stout. Although his Christology went further, for while seeing the church as the prolepsis of the divine image, yielding a communal ontology that led to the 'ecclesial self,' with its communal character,<sup>131</sup> all of this is brought about from union with Christ, who both himself is, and fulfils the human vocation as, the image of God.<sup>132</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

As a concluding thought, one might wonder what Stan Grenz's ecclesiology contributed to the wider world of ecclesiology that others did not. The uniqueness of his work consists at least in precisely how much of a telic, trinitarian ecclesiology he developed without ever having devoted a concentrated work exclusively to the topic. What he offers is indicative of his forthright baptistic convictions, which is somewhat unique considering his evangelical embeddedness.<sup>133</sup> And his expanding ecumenism led him into places where many Baptists would not have gone, serving and being served by the church both at the local and wider level. This also displayed the missional character of his ecclesiology, with its perspective on the Trinity's active work in the narrative of salvation history, which prioritized the future as the place where the fullness of God's intention is realised. Grenz's ecclesiology, as the rest of his theology, appears to have been the most determinedly trinitarian offering generated by any working evangelical (or Baptist) theologian at the turn of the millennium.

**Jason S Sexton**  
**St Mary's College**  
**University of St Andrews, Scotland.**

---

<sup>130</sup> Grenz, *TCG2*, 102-3; 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), 3.

<sup>131</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 331-6.

<sup>132</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, 'Jesus as the *Imago Dei*: Image-of-God Christology and the Non-Linear Linearity of Theology,' *JETS* 47/4 (Dec 2004), 624-7.

<sup>133</sup> See Brad Harper and Paul Louis Metzger, *Exploring Ecclesiology: An Evangelical and Ecumenical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), whose broad evangelical treatment rarely takes any distinct ecclesiological positions not shared among the wider evangelical and ecumenical world.

## **A Trinitarian Epistemology: Stanley J. Grenz and the Trajectory of Convertive Piety**

### **ABSTRACT**

Grenz understood himself to be Baptist before he was evangelical. Thus 'convertive piety' is not only a key motif, but a critical key to Grenz's theological project. It is shown to be characteristic both of Baptist thought (specifically in the German Baptist tradition from which Grenz draws) and broader evangelicalism. His roots, in potent combination with the challenges of postmodernism and Pannenberg's theological method, critically inform Grenz's project to revision evangelical epistemology.

Stanley J. Grenz considered himself a Christian, a Baptist and an Evangelical, and definitively in that order:

As an outworking of my heritage, I cannot claim to be a 'card-carrying evangelical' in Marsden's sense. Nevertheless, I am evangelical in spirit, if the spirit of evangelicalism focuses on the vision of what it means to be Christian...For me, being evangelical can never come at the cost of being Baptist. Rather, it is as a Baptist that I sense my affinity with the evangelical movement, for my piety as a Baptist coalesces with evangelical piety as I understand it and which I see as comprising the heart of evangelicalism.<sup>1</sup>

His mooring in the North American Baptist denominational tradition, with its focus on conversion and experiential religion, greatly influenced his theological journey.<sup>2</sup> Those who seek to understand his

---

<sup>1</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, 'Theology and Piety Among Baptists and Evangelicals' in *Southern Baptists & American Evangelicals: The Conversation Continues*. Edited by David S. Dockery (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1993) 162. See also Stanley J. Grenz, 'Baptist and Evangelical: One Northern Baptist's Perspective' in *Southern Baptists & American Evangelicals: The Conversation Continues*. Edited by David S. Dockery (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 53-54.

<sup>2</sup> Grenz's father, Richard Grenz, served as a pastor of North American Baptist Conference churches in Michigan, South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, Colorado and Oklahoma during his son's life time. The North American Baptist Conference was originally the German Baptist Churches of North America.

thought must not overlook that important fact. Dr. John Franke, Grenz's co-author in *Beyond Foundationalism*, asserts that the concept of convertive piety 'simply informs his work at every point and enabled him to emphasize creativity and seek a unique perspective on theology that was less concerned with demonstrating its continuity with tradition than it was with addressing Christian faith to the contemporary situation.'<sup>3</sup>

This essay briefly examines Grenz's understanding of 'convertive piety' and charts the trajectory and evolution of this concept in his work. It begins by outlining a general understanding of the conversion experience from a Baptist perspective, a particularly German Baptist perspective.<sup>4</sup> It continues by following Grenz's argument that convertive piety is not a concept exclusive to Baptists, but is an aspect of the evangelical trajectory in general, emerging as it did from the Puritan-Pietist trajectory in the eighteenth century. The essay turns then to examine briefly how Grenz attempts to establish convertive piety as the legitimate Evangelical epistemological source by recasting the nature of evangelical experience through the postmodern critique and the influence of Wolfhart Pannenberg's eschatological realism and Trinitarian focus.

### **The Baptist Conversion Experience**

The first century following the posting of Martin Luther's ninety-five theses upon the Wittenberg castle church door witnessed a fragmenting of the Protestant movement into several expressions. It has become commonplace to divide these expressions into two primary camps: the Magisterial Reformation and the Radical Reformation.<sup>5</sup> Of those two expressions, it is probable that the Baptist movement emerges from the

---

<sup>3</sup> Email correspondence, John R. Franke to Jay Smith. December 10, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> According to Southern Baptist historian Leon McBeth, German Baptist work in America originates with Conrad Fleischman, a German heavily influenced by Baptists in Bristol, England. (See H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1987), 732). According North American Baptist Conference Archives, the North American Baptist Conference was originally organized as the German Baptist Conference in 1851. (See 'Background for the North American Baptist Conference' at <http://www.nabarchives.org/NABC.html>).

<sup>5</sup> See C. P. Williams delineation of the different trajectories of the Reformers in his article, 'Reformation, Radical,' in *New Dictionary of Theology*. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright and J. I. Packer, eds. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 563-65.

latter.<sup>6</sup> Although contemporary Baptists trace their roots directly to English Separatism, both continental Pietism, originating in the Magisterial Reformation, and the Anabaptist movement in the Radical Reformation, heavily influenced the Separatism from which the contemporary Baptist tradition evolves.<sup>7</sup>

The English Reformation, from which English Separatism springs, finds its origin in the economic and political issues of the day.<sup>8</sup> Like its continental counterparts, the Anglican Church began splintering; losing adherents to the Puritan, Separatist, Quaker and Wesleyan movements. Both the Magisterial and Radical Reformation movements on the continent influenced these Anglican splinter movements. Thus drawing eclectically from the continental theologies of John Calvin, Jacobus Arminius and Menno Simons, the English Separatist and consequently, Baptist, movement finds its diverse theological moorings.

This theological diversity becomes evident in the divergence of the 'particular' from the 'general' Baptist in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.<sup>9</sup> Despite this diversity, it becomes apparent quickly that the universal affirmation of 'believer's baptism' with its attendant theological commitment to 'experiential' conversion was the cornerstone belief of the earliest Baptist congregations. Baptist historian William Brackney concludes that the early English Separatist and pioneer Baptist

---

<sup>6</sup> See Alister E. McGrath and Darren C. Marks, 'Protestantism: The Problem of Identity,' in *The Blackwell Companion to Protestantism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 4.

<sup>7</sup> W. R. Estep examines this relationship carefully, concluding 'it seems more than mere chance that the Separatist movement in England bore such a close resemblance to sixteenth-century Anabaptism.' See Estep, *The Anabaptist Story* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1963), 208f. James Leo Garrett affirms an interpretive influence when he states, 'The sixteenth century Anabaptists on the continent of Europe have played a singular role in the interpretation of Baptist origins.' See Garrett, *Baptist Theology: A Four Century Study* (Macon, GA: Mercer 2009), 8f. Additionally, Bradley Holt suggests this relationship in his understanding of the formation of European Protestant spirituality in 'Protestantism and Spirituality,' *The Blackwell Companion to Protestantism*, 383-85.

<sup>8</sup> For this assessment, see Gerald Bray, 'English Protestantism to the Present Day,' in *The Blackwell Companion to Protestantism*, 98-99.

<sup>9</sup> See McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, 67; Robert G. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists* (Philadelphia: Judson, 1952), 62-72 and A. C. Underwood, *A History of English Baptists* (London: The Baptist Union of Great Britain & Ireland, 1947), 28-62. James M. Renihan attempts to distinguish a very specific theological trajectory for English Baptists in *Edification and Beauty: The Practical Ecclesiology of the English Particular Baptists, 1675-1705*, Vol. 17, *Studies in Baptist History and Thought* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2008), 1-36.

John Smyth was the first to articulate this commitment when Smyth concluded that the Anglican, Puritan and Separatist traditions did not adhere to true baptism by baptising both infants and non-Christians.<sup>10</sup> Thomas Helwys, Smyth's benefactor at Gainsborough and later Baptist pastor at Spitalfields states, 'we [sic] hold that men confessing their faith and sins are only to be baptised and that infants not capable of the word of God, nor or faith and repentance are also incapable of the baptism of repentance.'<sup>11</sup> Thus for these early Baptists, churches that admitted these two groups – infants and non-professing adults - were not 'true' churches.

The Baptist teaching on conversion thus becomes foundational for the sacrament of believer's baptism.<sup>12</sup> A profession of faith must precede baptism and thus admission to full church membership. As Baptist theologian Bill Leonard affirms,

[the] concern for personal conversion is consistent with that of the earliest Baptist groups that originated in Holland and England during the seventeenth century. Like the English Puritans from whence they came, these Baptists insisted that the true church was composed of believers only...All Baptists agreed that personal conversion was necessary for those who would claim Christian faith and membership in the church.<sup>13</sup>

For the early Baptists, believer's baptism was a crucial issue. John Bunyan, John Smyth and Thomas Helwys were harassed, exiled or imprisoned for their insistence on their Baptist beliefs. Thus the accompanying commitment to personal, experiential conversion and a life of 'convertive spirituality' are paramount to the Baptist belief grid.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> William H. Brackney, *The Baptists* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1988), 55-57.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Helwys, 'A Declaration of Faith of English People Remaining at Amsterdam in Holland,' in *The Life and Writings of Thomas Helwys*, ed. Joe Early Jr. *Early English Baptist Texts* (Macon, GA: Mercer University 2009), 65.

<sup>12</sup> The concept of baptism as 'sacrament', rather than simply 'symbol' is gaining a devoted following among Baptists in the United Kingdom and United States. Grenz was a part of this movement. See, *Baptist Sacramentalism*, ed. Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson, vol. 5, *Studies in Baptist History and Thought* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 2003).

<sup>13</sup> Bill Leonard, 'Southern Baptists and Conversion: An Evangelical Sacramentalism' in *Ties that Bind: Life Together in the Baptist Vision*, ed. Gary A. Furr and Curtis W. Freeman (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 1994), 11.

<sup>14</sup> See James W. McClendon, Jr., 'Toward a Conversionist Spirituality' in *Ties That Bind: Life Together in the Baptist Vision*, ed. Gary A. Furr and Curtis W. Freeman (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 1994), 23-32.

*Believer's Baptism and the Import of Conversion*

One over arching concern dominates the doctrinal positions of these early Baptists: In whom does the true membership of the church consist? Although the Particular Baptists and General Baptists would disagree over the nature of election, or to whom salvation was directed,<sup>15</sup> they agreed, along with the Puritans and other Separatists, that the true Christian would be able to recount a conversion experience in order to qualify for church membership. Indeed, as Alan Kreider claims, the history of Christianity as a whole is a history of conversion.<sup>16</sup> Yet the Baptist trajectory reclaims the conversion experience as the heart of the Biblical experience of God. John Smyth, one of the earliest Baptists, exemplifies this emphasis in his own struggle to understand conversion with his move from a strict Calvinist position on election to a more Arminian or general position.<sup>17</sup> Baptist theologian James McClendon, Jr. posited that the Baptist understanding of this experience was best expressed as 'conversionist spirituality,' a spirituality of transformation found in tension between the individual and the community of faith.<sup>18</sup> Contemporary English Baptist theologian Paul Fiddes affirms this position when he posits the idea that there is a 'Baptist experience' that shapes theology, being a distinctive experience of God by the individual in community as a 'response to the rule of Christ.'<sup>19</sup> Historian Janet Lindman makes the assertion that the conversion experience was crucial to the early North American colonial Baptist experience:

Being a Baptist began with the emotional and corporeal experience of conversion. Conversion marked the Baptist body through a spiritual crisis that transfixed individuals and their bodies. After the painstaking and physically draining process of gaining salvation, Baptists preserved their faith through church ritual.<sup>20</sup>

Although Baptists consistently have affirmed the Biblical and personal nature of conversion, they have not always agreed upon the process or duration of conversion. Bill Leonard elucidates six important

---

<sup>15</sup> See Janet Lindman's concise appraisal in *Bodies of Belief: Baptist Community in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2008), 8.

<sup>16</sup> Alan Kreider, *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International 1999).

<sup>17</sup> See Jason K. Lee, 'Smyth's View of General Atonement' in *The Theology of John Smyth* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008), 167f.

<sup>18</sup> James W. McClendon, Jr., 'Toward a Conversionist Spirituality,' 23-27.

<sup>19</sup> Paul S. Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology*, vol. 13, *Studies in Baptist History and Thought* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2003), 6-8.

<sup>20</sup> Lindman, *Bodies of Belief*, 5.

traditions that have coloured the Baptist understanding of the conversion process in North America: Regular, Separatist, Landmark, Revivalist, Sunday School and Fundamentalist. Of these six, four have immediate bearing on our topic: the Regular, Separatist, Revivalist and Sunday School traditions. First, the adherence of the 'Regular' (Particular) Baptist tradition with a more thoroughgoing Calvinist theology, suggests an approach to conversion that highlights the process itself.<sup>21</sup> The Separate (General) Baptist tradition, with their Arminian leanings suggests 'a greater emphasis on free will and human participation.'<sup>22</sup> In the Revivalist tradition, the conversion process was not only institutionalized, but also shortened significantly.<sup>23</sup> William McLoughlin describes the heart of the revivalist experience in the mid-eighteenth century Great Awakening through the eyes of Isaac Backus:

IN THE BEGINNING was the experience – the explosive, power-full, transforming experience of a direct confrontation with Divine Truth. The experience came to Isaac Backus, as it did to thousands of Americans, in the 1740's. The experience not only transformed their souls – infusing them with God's grace and thereby saving them from hell – but it recast their whole outlook on life. They had lived in a dark cave and suddenly the stone in front was rolled away. The blinding light of the 'real world' shone in upon them for the first time. 'The Lord God is a Sun, ' said Backus, and 'when any Soul is brought to behold his Glories, them eternal rays of Light and love Shine down particularly upon him to remove his darkness.'<sup>24</sup>

For Leonard, these 'Revivals produced a powerful set of symbols that dramatized the need for and possibility of an immediate, conscious conversion event.'<sup>25</sup> Revivalism thus catapults 'conversion' to the forefront of the North American Baptist theological experience.

The 'Sunday School' is Leonard's final convertive tradition. Although the 'Sunday School' as an institution finds its genesis in nineteenth century England,<sup>26</sup> as a Baptist tradition, it has in some sense become a

---

<sup>21</sup> Bill Leonard, 'Southern Baptists and Conversion,' 12.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-17.

<sup>24</sup> William G. McLoughlin, *Isaac Backus and the American Pietistic Tradition* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1967), 1.

<sup>25</sup> Leonard, 'Southern Baptists and Conversion,' 16.

<sup>26</sup> Henry Clay Trumbull finds the origins of the modern Sunday School in the work of Robert Raikes in the late eighteenth century in Gloucester, England.

‘catechetical preparation for conversion’ in the lives of children and a facilitator of the continuing process of conversion for spiritual maturation.<sup>27</sup> In this fashion – through theological emphases of the Regular and Separate Baptists, as well as the liturgical influence of Revivalism and the catechetical emphasis of the Sunday School – the institutionalization of the conversion process has become commonplace in the contemporary North American Baptist expression, thus grounding the concept of ‘believer’s baptism’.

The emphasis on ‘believer’s baptism’ with its grounding in personal conversion permeates the whole of Baptist life, from its beginnings in the English Separatist tradition through its contemporary expressions. To understand Grenz’s Baptist theological *ethos* this emphasis on conversion and its experiential dimension must be factored into any rendering of his theology.

#### *German Baptists and the Predilection of Piety*

Stanley Grenz was ordained, as was his father, in churches affiliated with the North American Baptist Conference (NABC). The NABC designation originally identified the group of churches called the ‘German Baptist Churches of North America’. How Grenz understood his own Baptist orientation is most thoroughly accounted for through this expression with its liturgical and theological nuances. Consequently, this expression of the Baptist family, though rooted in the German language tradition,<sup>28</sup> has an amalgam of theological expressions at its heart that differ from its sister churches in different ethnic trajectories. As Leon McBeth asserts, German Baptists represented ‘a blend of the Pietist tradition from Europe, the revivalism of early America and the Social Gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch.’<sup>29</sup> Most important to Albert Ramaker, one of the earliest historians of the NABC, is the influence of the Continental Pietist tradition on German Baptists in America in what Ramaker labels, ‘the personal experience of religion.’ Ramaker states:

---

See Trumbull, *The Sunday-School: Its Origin, Mission, Methods, and Auxiliaries* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1903), 109f.

<sup>27</sup> Leonard, ‘Southern Baptists and Conversion,’ 17-18.

<sup>28</sup> Dr. Jackie Howell, a personal friend of Stanley and Edna Grenz, as well as a colleague of Grenz’s at Sioux Falls Seminary (An NABC affiliated seminary), noted that the Grenz family spoke exclusively German in the home for years after returning from Germany as a means of reinforcing their German Baptist roots. Email correspondence, Jackie Howell to Jay Smith, December 19, 2009.

<sup>29</sup> McBeth, *Baptist Heritage*, 732.

It was most fortunate that the pioneers – all of them – were men of deep religious convictions, and that these centered in a personal religious experience. Themselves coming out from religious bodies where formalism and sacramentalism reigned supreme, this experience was esteemed the more highly because of the contrast...a change of life was to them the essence of New Testament Christianity. This emphasis has never become lost or displaced in our churches, and it has been a leading factor in the testimony of our people.<sup>30</sup>

Cindy Wesley, Chair of Religion at Lambuth University, similarly affirms the ‘distinct pietist theological basis’ of the German Baptist trajectory in North America, with its emphasis on a personal religious experience.<sup>31</sup> According to Wesley, the German Baptists, like the earlier German Pietists, understood that regeneration was just as important as justification in the conversion process.<sup>32</sup> Finally, Grenz himself details how important the issue of conversion was to him, as he recounts giving an ‘altar call’ or an ‘invitation’ after a sermon on the topic of the character of pre-Pentecost Christians in Acts 1:

I expected that one or perhaps two of those in attendance would heed my call. When the number swelled to eighteen, I was moved nearly to tears. So overwhelmed was I by this evidence of the Spirit’s presence that I could not offer the promised dedicatory prayer, but had to call on the interim pastor to replace me on the platform to pray in my stead.

This incident was a vivid reminder to me of how deeply steeped I am in the warm-hearted, relational, pietistic conception of the Christian faith that I saw in my father’s ministry and imbued in the churches he served. The concern for heartfelt piety does not only tie me to my own immediate genealogical history, however; it also links me to a long trajectory of proponents of ‘experimental’ Christianity that dates at least to the eighteenth-century Great Awakening.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Albert J. Ramaker, *The German Baptists in North America: An Outline of Their History* (Cleveland, OH: German Baptist Publication Society, 1924), 44.

<sup>31</sup> Cindy K. Wesley, *The Role of Pietism and Ethnicity in the Formation of the General Conference of German Baptists, 1851-1920* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 139-143.

<sup>33</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, ‘Concerns of a Pietist with a PhD’ in *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 37:2 (Fall 2002): 58-59.

Grenz clearly credited his denominational theological roots much more so than any other of his North American Baptist evangelical contemporaries. He wrote a multitude of articles for a variety of Baptist publications from Billy Graham's *Decision* magazine to *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, the scholarly journal of the National Association of the Baptist Professors of Religion. It is here that one begins to identify not only that Grenz identified strongly with his Baptist heritage, but also with the fact that the concept of convertive piety was seminal to his thought.<sup>34</sup> Although several of Grenz's North American theological contemporaries - Millard Erickson, D.A. Carson, Wayne Grudem and John Piper - claim a variety of Baptist affiliations,<sup>35</sup> they have clearly chosen to pitch their tents primarily as evangelicals, rather than Baptists as evidenced by their sustained engagement in that arena. For Grenz, however, claiming the evangelical rubric was secondary to that of his Baptist roots.

### The Evangelical Roots of Convertive Piety

Shaped by his understanding of conversion through his Baptist identity, Grenz sought to correlate this understanding with the greater evangelical trajectory. In that his own German Baptist upbringing merged the Puritan and Pietist streams of the Reformation, Grenz sought to understand Evangelicalism as a transdenominational movement in the light of the new piety brought about through conversion.

Grenz begins his charting of the course of convertive piety by delineating its roots in the soteriological thought of the Protestant

---

<sup>34</sup> A short review of article titles identifies this awareness: Stanley J. Grenz, 'A Baptist Ecclesiology for the Contemporary World,' *Search* 22:4 (Summer 1993): 7-15; 'Refuge Under God's Wings,' *Decision* 34:6 (June 1993): 31-35; 'Abundant Living in a Hostile Society: A Sermon on 1 Peter 1:3-12' *The South African Journal of Theology* 13 (2004): 156-63; 'Maintaining the Balanced Life: the Baptist Vision of Spirituality,' *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 18:1 (Spring 1991): 59-68; 'Christian Spirituality and the Quest for Identity: Toward a Spiritual-Theological Understanding of Life in Christ,' *Baptist History and Heritage* 37:2 (Spring 2002): 87-105; 'Participation in What Frees: The Concept of Truth in the Postmodern Context,' *Review and Expositor* 100:4 (Fall 2003): 687-693.

<sup>35</sup> Although there are a variety of materials out on each of these scholars, none of the extent material suggests that any of them makes his Baptist sentiments as clear a priority as Grenz. For background on these scholars see Andreas J. Köstenberger, 'D. A. Carson' in *Bible Interpreters of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, ed. Walter Elwell & J. D. Weaver (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 423-24; *Baptist Theologians*, ed. George and Dockery; and James Leo Garrett, *Baptist Theology: A Four Century Study*.

Reformation.<sup>36</sup> He rightly asserts the formative influences of Martin Luther in Germany and John Calvin in Geneva in regards to the import of salvation. Yet Grenz also notes an important difference between Luther and Calvin in how they treated the issue of sanctification. For Luther, justification and sanctification are a unified activity within the salvation process.<sup>37</sup> Calvin, however, nuances this position in a manner that separates sanctification from justification. Whereas Luther dissolves sanctification into a constant process of justification, Calvin construes the return of sanctification, yet at the expense of separating it from justification. This distinction becomes important to Grenz's project in that he sees it colouring, and even defining the post-Reformation developments of evangelicalism and thus the essence of convertive piety.

Following his explication of the Reformation and its founders' approach to sanctification with the roles of law and grace, Grenz outlines the development of the Puritan and Pietist impulses in post-Reformation Protestantism. In general, the Puritans stood as the heirs of the Reformation in English speaking Great Britain and the Pietists stood as heirs to the Reformation in Germany. Both movements are reactionary: the Puritans sought to bring reform to the church of England in light of their Calvinist theology and the Pietists sought to recapture 'an authentic Christianity' in the wake of the scholastic Lutheranism of the day. In regards to the Puritans, Grenz charts their development in terms of ecclesiology and the reformation of the Church of England. The Puritans envisioned a 'pure' church constituted by the 'truly elect'. According to Grenz, the 'assurance of election' the Puritans sought after was ultimately found in a 'religious experience that had made them aware of their elect status.'<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, the outworking of this belief took a different turn. In order to scrutinize 'the signs of grace' that characterize the formative religious experience, the 'Puritans came to base one's personal sense of election on the believer's own piety.'<sup>39</sup> Thus the Puritans, in their quest for 'churches of visible saints' become the Reformation's 'most powerful moulder of the *ethos* and theology of the evangelical movement.'<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> This section is drawn from Grenz's most thorough elucidation of the genesis and trajectory of evangelicalism. See Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000).

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>38</sup> Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 39.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

Following on the heels of the Puritan movement in England was the rise of the Pietist movement on German soil.<sup>41</sup> Mark Noll notes that ‘Continental pietist movements played a significant role in the beginning of evangelical movements in Britain, and the main themes of pietism anticipated the main themes of evangelicalism.’<sup>42</sup> Like the Puritans, the Pietists envisaged their work as a reform of the church; yet ‘their intent was to reform the church from within, rather than through separation.’<sup>43</sup> In contrast to the dry Lutheran scholasticism that dominated the German church at that time, the Pietists, led by Spener, sought to bring a depth to the church that was unreachable through doctrine alone.<sup>44</sup> This leads Grenz to conclude, ‘The focus on the objectivity of justification that had consumed Luther and to a lesser extent Calvin was replaced by a concern for the work of regeneration, understood as the transformation of the heart, as the wellspring of a transformed life.’<sup>45</sup> Consequently, it is at the intersection of Puritanism and ‘Reformed Pietism’<sup>46</sup> that Grenz finds the birth of contemporary evangelicalism as a hybrid movement in the eighteenth century.<sup>47</sup>

#### *Convertive Piety as Evangelical Experience*

From this starting point, Grenz delineates what he believed were evangelicalism’s two central concerns: ‘convertive piety’ and ‘experimental piety’. Convertive piety, derived from both Puritanism and Pietism, is the

---

<sup>41</sup> The Puritan movement would seem to predate the Pietist movement by about 50 years. See Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys*, vol. 1 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 53-65.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>43</sup> Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 40. For a similar understanding of these groups see, James Stein’s article on Phillipp Jakob Spener as well as Carter Lindberg’s glossary entry under ‘*Collegium pietatis*’ in *The Pietist Theologians*, ed. Carter Lindberg (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 84 and 274-75.

<sup>44</sup> Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 41-42.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* For an elaboration on this assertion, see a similar assessment by Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 2007), 24-27.

<sup>46</sup> Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 44. Also see Kidd, *The Great Awakening*, 26, for this understanding of the mix of Puritanism, Pietism and Presbyterianism that stands as the fount of evangelicalism.

<sup>47</sup> Historical theologian and self-professing ‘Postconservative’ evangelical argues persuasively for Grenz’s position. See Roger E. Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming: The Postconservative Approach to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 61-63.

‘vision of faith that focuses on personal regeneration...as the key to a changed life.’<sup>48</sup> Grenz finds that this focus on convertive piety is most keenly felt in the Methodist movement of John Wesley, which Grenz, characterizes as ‘epitomizing the point where Puritanism and Pietism met.’<sup>49</sup> This leads Grenz to the following conclusion:

Convertive piety as the central hallmark of evangelicalism has, in turn, given shape to evangelical theology. The theological task as understood by generation of evangelical theologians since the early eighteenth century has focused not only on holding for the heritage of Reformation doctrine, as was the case in Protestant scholasticism, but more importantly on reflecting on and delineating the nature of the conversion experience, which all evangelicals share.<sup>50</sup>

Experimental piety, the second concern of Grenz’s understanding of the advent of evangelicalism, marks a new emphasis in salvation upon the concept of assurance. This understanding of assurance as the focus of ‘experimental’ piety, Grenz concludes, is a concept developed in the methodological quests of early modernity and the consequent elevation of the empiricist, inductive, scientific method in theological circles.<sup>51</sup> He posits that this acceptance of scientific method is evident in the works of Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley in the early origins of evangelicalism<sup>52</sup> and reaches a peak in the middle of the nineteenth century. This introduction of Enlightenment scientific method into evangelical theology is of critical import to Grenz’s understanding of the contemporary shape of evangelicalism and its current bifurcated trajectory.<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 44.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 50. In regards to Edwards’ empirical theological method, Bruce Kulnick states: ‘To the extent that empiricism was a distinct position in the middle of the eighteenth century, Edwards was an empiricist. But he also believed that the supernatural was conveyed in experience; he was an experimental Calvinist.’ See Bruce Kulnick, *A History of Philosophy in America: 1720-2000* (New York: Oxford, 2001), 18.

<sup>53</sup> Both Roger Olson and Rob Warner see this bifurcation as well, though Warner delineates it as ‘Conservatives’ and ‘Entrepreneurs’ and Olson as ‘Conservatives’ and Postconservatives.’ See Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming*, 57-59; and Rob Warner, *Reinventing English Evangelicalism 1966-2001: A Theological and Sociological Study*, Studies in Evangelical History & Thought (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2008), 15-16.

Evangelicalism thus posited as a 'religion of the changed heart' resulted in a transformed life and was a shared characteristic the earliest evangelicals issuing from Reformed tradition. English literature of the nineteenth century is replete with the influence of early English evangelicalism. Indeed, literary scholar Elisabeth Jay argues that it is the 'practical piety' that marked the 'religion of the heart' of the earliest English evangelicals and thus shaped much early Victorian literature.<sup>54</sup> Jonathan Edwards commented on this phenomenon of the transformed heart and renewed mind as well in his observations of the Great Awakenings in North America.<sup>55</sup> In the twentieth century, English historian W. R. Ward posits the genesis of Evangelicalism with the Pietist movement as a reaction to the 'confessionalisation' and Aristotelianism of the Lutheran Orthodoxy and their preoccupation with 'theological system-making.'<sup>56</sup> For Ward, the experiential focus of the early Pietists is exemplified in Philipp Jakob Spener, who sought to unite justification by faith with an active Christian life. In regards to Spener's attempt, Ward tellingly states, 'The living faith needed for this purpose was not the dead consent to theological propositions, it was the personal trust which lead indeed to knowledge of divine illumination.'<sup>57</sup> In reference to Pietism's influence on evangelicalism in North America, historian Thomas Kidd states, 'The Pietist 'religion of the heart' and New England's developing expectation of revival became two to three most important influences on early Evangelicalism.'<sup>58</sup> Further, English theologian Alister McGrath affirms the contribution of Continental Pietism's influence on the contemporary evangelical trajectory and notes how it illustrates the 'positive place of experience in the Christian life.'<sup>59</sup> Indeed, McGrath expands on this understanding when he posits, 'evangelicalism is as much a devotional ethos as it is a theological system' and as such, is 'strongly experiential and personal, capable of transforming both the heart and the mind.'<sup>60</sup> Ultimately for Grenz, both convertive and

---

<sup>54</sup> See Elisabeth Jay, *The Religion of the Heart: Anglican Evangelicalism and the Nineteenth Century Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

<sup>55</sup> See Jonathan Edwards, 'The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God,' in *The Great Awakening*, ed. C. G. Goen, vol. 4, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 226-88.

<sup>56</sup> W. R. Ward, *Early Evangelicalism: A Global Intellectual History 1670-1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1-5.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>58</sup> Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 24.

<sup>59</sup> Alister McGrath, *Evangelicalism & the Future of Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 25.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

experimental piety, understood together, become the cornerstone of the shared evangelical experience of the Triune God.

**From Shared Experience to Evangelical Epistemology:  
Postmodernity, Pannenberg and Trinitarian Participation**

Grenz's personal and communal affirmation of convertive piety as the essence of evangelical experience is refined further by his understanding of postmodernism as critique and opportunity; and, Wolfhart Pannenberg's influence in the areas of eschatology and Trinity. Although these elements would seem to be incongruent, it is precisely through these theological stimuli that Grenz's understanding of convertive piety ultimately coalesces into a uniquely evangelical epistemology.

*The Postmodern Shibboleth*

Grenz's concern over the theological centrality of convertive piety for evangelicalism runs into a roadblock with the incursion of Enlightenment rationalism and its offspring, modern foundationalism and the new scientific method. As Grenz maintained in his delineation of experimental piety,<sup>61</sup> the nature of evangelical experience shifted from the shared experience of convertive piety to a foundational emphasis on the nature of scripture. This shift was due at least in part to the inroads that both modern philosophical foundationalism and scientific method had made upon evangelical theology.<sup>62</sup> Over the next two centuries, roughly 1760-1980, Grenz posits that both evangelical theology and mainline Protestant theology, either intentionally or naively, allowed philosophical foundationalism and scientific method to colour or even distort the earlier evangelical theological centre. Grenz would not cry foul at such a trajectory were it not for the advent of the 'postmodern turn'. For Grenz, theology is a context-driven enterprise. As long as the modern cultural *ethos* reigned, then theology spoke to it via those epistemological presuppositions and methods. Nevertheless, with the 'postmodern turn' Grenz saw not only a problematic shift of emphases, but also a means by which evangelical theology could recover its former theological commitment to convertive

---

<sup>61</sup> See Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 69-80.

<sup>62</sup> This shift is complicated and hotly contested. Those evangelicals from a confessional or stringently Reformed background tend to contest Grenz's understanding of convertive piety, whereas those from an Anabaptist or Wesleyan background tend to affirm Grenz's understanding.

piety and thus reach a generation of people who had become disillusioned with the Modern world.

Grenz's project of critique, recovery and construction is, of course, not without its critics. D. A. Carson, Millard Erickson and the contributors to *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*<sup>63</sup> have vigorously assailed Grenz's position. These criticisms have varied levels of merit, but often consist of apologetic rhetoric designed to defend the individual critic's own indebtedness to a particular confessional stance or their own modern philosophical presuppositions.<sup>64</sup> By far the largest ground for critique of Grenz's proposal is on the meaning of the term 'postmodern'.<sup>65</sup> Even Grenz's critics are undecided as to the nature and import of the postmodern. Is the 'postmodern' the next philosophical era after the modern and that which precedes the post-postmodern?<sup>66</sup> Is the 'postmodern' actually the modern's own self-criticism?<sup>67</sup> Is the 'postmodern' antithetical to modern evangelical sensitivities and thus a threat to destroy theology as we understand it?<sup>68</sup> Grenz's approach to the postmodern cannot be neatly summarised by these questions nor can he be neatly labelled a 'postmodernist' as his critics are prone to do. Nevertheless, in light of Grenz's emphasis on convertive piety, it becomes clearer that Grenz views the postmodern turn neither as a friend to be embraced nor as a foe to be rejected, but rather as both a critique and an opportunity.

---

<sup>63</sup> *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, ed. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoos Helseth and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004).

<sup>64</sup> English sociologist Rob Warner has made a telling study of this type of criticism in *Reinventing English Evangelicalism*. Particularly trenchant is his analysis of Carson's critique of Grenz, p. 6-8.

<sup>65</sup> Because whatever 'postmodern' means is so highly contested, I will use the general rubric of 'postmodern, rather than move between the nomenclature of postmodern, postmodernism and postmodernity.

<sup>66</sup> This is the question Millard Erickson poses in *Truth or Consequence: The Promise & Perils of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 306f.

<sup>67</sup> This is the question and position of Thomas Oden in *After Modernity...What?: Agenda for Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990).

<sup>68</sup> This is the general position and question posed by several authors. See D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996); R. Scott Smith, *Truth & the New Kind of Christian: The Emerging Effects of Postmodernism in the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005); Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press 2000) and the contributors-in-general to *Reforming or Conforming?: Post-Conservative Evangelicals and the Emerging Church*, ed. Gary L. W. Johnson & Reginald N. Gleason (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008).

With the advent of the postmodern, Grenz identified a 'Luther-like Babylonian Captivity' of evangelicalism by Enlightenment foundationalism. If indeed convertive piety was at the centre of what it meant to be a 'classical' evangelical, then contemporary evangelical theology could not be grounded in an epistemology that was unbiblical and unspiritual. Thus Grenz saw the advent of the postmodern not as the latest system of thought to be embraced nor simply as a replacement for a dead or dying Modernity. Rather, he viewed it as an opportunity to rethink his own inherited evangelical theological paradigm in order to expound the gospel for a new, post-modern, post-foundational era.<sup>69</sup> With the postmodern criticism of classical foundationalism, both modern theology's reliance upon Schleiermacher's individualistic *'gefühl'*<sup>70</sup> and evangelicalism's reliance upon 'inerrancy'<sup>71</sup> are brought into question as epistemological foundations for the theological endeavour. Thus the postmodern critique allows Grenz to posit the shared experience of convertive piety as the defining evangelical experience and constructively engage other epistemological alternatives to explain the Christian understanding of reality.

*Pannenberg, Eschatology and Trinitarian Participation*

Although deeply rooted in the theological ground of his German Baptist heritage and augmented by a conservative evangelical seminary education, it was Wolfhart Pannenberg who made the greatest impact on Grenz's theological trajectory. Grenz was profoundly shaped by his *Doktorvater*. Pannenberg's theological fingerprints are evident throughout Grenz's project: from the Trinitarian structure to its relational anthropology. Yet nowhere is this impact more apparent than in Grenz's appropriation of Pannenberg's eschatological thought.

---

<sup>69</sup> See Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996), xi.

<sup>70</sup> Several contemporary scholars are revisiting and attempting to renovate Schleiermacher's understanding of *gefühl* or 'feeling', though evangelical's still tend to reject his contribution. For example, see Clinton Curle, 'The Schleiermacher Redemption: Subjective Experience as a Starting Point for Evangelical Theology,' *Didaskalia* 9:2 (Spring 1998): 17-36.

<sup>71</sup> The debate over inerrancy, or better, the nature of theological authority rages on in North America. In recent years this debate has taken on the added weight of hermeneutics, but for the outsider looking in, the debate has become 'shallow' and 'trivializing.' (See N.T. Wright's assessment in *The Last Word: Beyond the Bible Wars to a new Understanding of the Authority of Scripture* (San Francisco: Harper, 2005), 21f.)

In his book-length treatment of Pannenberg's work, Grenz describes the heart of Pannenberg's understanding of truth:

Although agreeing that truth is objective, he declares that complete coherence, which alone is the full measure of truth, is an eschatological expectation, incapable of being realized in any present moment...According to Pannenberg, truth lies ever before the pilgrim enroute to the eschatological celestial city. This leads him to call into question any claim to the possession of full truth in the present, a stance that harmonizes well with the modern conception of truth. Yet he has not budged from the concept of truth as an objective reality. In his thinking an objective standard remains against which all truth claims are to be measured, and this standard is the most significant imaginable, the eschatological revelation of the glory of God.<sup>72</sup>

This understanding of the eschatological nature of truth permeates every aspect of Pannenberg's thought, from his doctrine of revelation,<sup>73</sup> theology proper,<sup>74</sup> cosmology,<sup>75</sup> theological anthropology<sup>76</sup> and Christology.<sup>77</sup> Consequently, Pannenberg's eschatological emphasis gives further theological shape to Grenz's understanding of the trajectory of convertive piety. For Grenz, convertive piety – the conscious experience of the grace of God in conversion,<sup>78</sup> a communally shaped and thus shared experience – is at the heart of what it means to be an evangelical Christian.

---

<sup>72</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *Reason for Hope: The Systematic Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005), 38-39.

<sup>73</sup> See Pannenberg, 'Dogmatic Theses on the Doctrine of Revelation' in *Revelation as History* ed. Wolfhart Pannenberg, trans. David Granskou (New York: MacMillan, 1968), 123-58.

<sup>74</sup> See Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 5§ 'The Trinitarian God', vol. 1, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 259-336. For an illuminating commentary on Pannenberg's trinitarianism, see Iain Taylor, *Pannenberg on the Triune God* (New York: T & T Clark/Continuum, 2007).

<sup>75</sup> See Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 7.III 'Creation and Eschatology', vol. 2, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 136-146.

<sup>76</sup> See Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, trans. Matthew O'Connell (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 522-32.

<sup>77</sup> See Pannenberg, *Jesus-God and Man*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., trans. Lewis Wilkins and Duane Priebe (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968/1977), 53f.

<sup>78</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 23.

Combined with Pannenberg's eschatological understanding of reality, convertive piety becomes for Grenz the proleptic experience of the Triune God, realized fully only in the eschaton. Indeed, as Iain Taylor has noted, this proleptic experience of God is nothing less than participation in the divine Triune life.<sup>79</sup> As Grenz states in *The Social God and the Relational self*, 'Although participation in the divine life – and hence the advent of the ecclesial self in its fullness – is ultimately eschatological, the deification that constitutes the self-in-community is proleptically present in the here and now.'<sup>80</sup>

From Pannenberg, Grenz not only adopts an understanding of reality as eschatologically framed, but also develops his basic Trinitarian ontology and structural form for theology. Indeed, Grenz's systematic theology, *Theology for the Community of God*, could be considered an attempt to 'evangelicalize' Pannenberg's project with his own distinctive evangelical nuances.<sup>81</sup> This trinitarian approach to the Doctrine of God opened Grenz up to the possibilities of a fruitful, new approach to the evangelical theological endeavour. Through his affirmation of Pannenberg's eschatological realism as the Christian reality, Grenz came to question the sufficiency of the 'Kingdom of God' motif as a unifying centre for the theological enterprise.<sup>82</sup> Grenz asks the question, 'What is the kingdom of God that is coming but is already present among us?'<sup>83</sup> His answer is the 'community' of God. Inspired by the seminal work on community by sociologist Robert Bellah in *Habits of the Heart*,<sup>84</sup> Grenz recasts his integrative motif as 'community'. For Grenz, this does not displace the 'kingdom of God' motif, necessarily, but grounds it in a more basic idea: 'Taken as a whole, the Bible asserts that God's program is directed to bringing about community in the highest sense of the word – a redeemed people, living within a redeemed creation and enjoying the presence of their Redeemer God.'<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, Grenz locates this assertion even more fundamentally in the ontology of the Trinity. If God's program is to bring about a fundamental community of the redeemed, God does so out of the

---

<sup>79</sup> Taylor, *Pannenberg on the Triune God*, 165-67.

<sup>80</sup> Grenz, *The Social God*, 334.

<sup>81</sup> Note Grenz's methodological prolegomenon in *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville: Broadman, 1994 / Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans 2000), 1-25 and its similarity to Pannenberg's own systematic project as outlined by Grenz in *Reason for Hope*, 11-55.

<sup>82</sup> Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 147-48.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>84</sup> Robert N. Bellah et al, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985).

<sup>85</sup> Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 156.

communion that is the Trinity. Nowhere is this more clearly stated than in *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (2001), where Grenz, building on the social Trinitarian work of Pannenberg, Colin Gunton, John Zizioulas and Catherine LaCugna, connects the perichoretic being of God with the proleptic nature of the redeemed community.<sup>86</sup>

It is only a short intellectual distance from the Trinity and community formation to the Trinity and conversion. For Grenz, just as for Pannenberg,<sup>87</sup> Jesus comes ‘as the exemplary human being, the revelation of who we are to be’ in order that he might take the ‘sins of all upon himself in his death’ and thus ‘mediate to eternal life through our union with him.’<sup>88</sup> Consequently, the Holy Spirit is responsible for the establishment of community by witnessing to the truth of Christ and gathering together the people who believe into a singular body, transcending every human division.<sup>89</sup> Thus the relationship forged in Christ through the Holy Spirit in the initial activity of conversion, becomes participation in the very being of the Triune God in convertive piety.

*From Piety to Participation: Grounds for a Trinitarian Epistemology*

Grenz does not stop with conversion as a change in attitude displayed by belief in the Triune God; nor does he simply view it as salvation from sin. Rather, Grenz affirms that ‘through conversion, the Holy Spirit causes us to be children of God’<sup>90</sup> and consequently, through the gateway of conversion we become participants in the divine life. Grenz, after observing the apostle Paul’s understanding of the role of the Spirit in believers’ lives, describes this participation:

by incorporating the new humanity into Christ, the Spirit gathers them into the dynamic of the divine life. Yet the Spirit does so in a particular manner – namely, specifically and solely ‘in the Son.’ Through the Spirit, those who are ‘in Christ’ come to share the eternal relationship that the Son enjoys with the Father. Because participants in this new community are by the Spirit’s work co-heirs with Christ, the Father bestows on them

---

<sup>86</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

<sup>87</sup> See Taylor, *Pannenberg on the Triune God*, 125-30.

<sup>88</sup> Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 158-59.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

by virtue of their being 'in Christ' what he eternally lavishes on the Son.<sup>91</sup>

In that the inner dynamic of the Trinity is marked by a reciprocal glorification of the Father and the Son through the Spirit, the new humanity, thus drawn into the inner life of God participates in this glorification as well.<sup>92</sup> Grenz has thus reconfigured conversion from the simple 'act of turning from one's sin in repentance and turning to Christ in faith,'<sup>93</sup> to 'convertive piety' - a continual, active participation in the divine life. In the postmodern context, this encounter with Father and Son through the Spirit becomes the cornerstone of Christian experience and thus an evangelical 'epistemic norm'.

Grenz's evolving understanding of 'convertive piety' is an interesting study in cultural engagement embedded in, and coloured by, evangelical commitments. The depth of his commitment to these tenets and his theological interpretation of these commitments are vigorously and even rightly challenged by his evangelical peers. The density of his thought, the evolution of his theological position regarding the postmodern critique and his commitment to convertive piety are areas that demand sustained attention from the critic. Nevertheless, his theological project is too important simply to be dismissed, as some scholars are predisposed to do.

<sup>94</sup>

Criticism aside, Grenz has done evangelicalism a service by positing a contemporary theological understanding of 'experience'. In his quest to better understand the concept of conversion, Grenz spent much of his academic career attempting to explicate this understanding of the shared, evangelical experience in scholarly terms while simultaneously attempting to contextualise this thought for a postmodern world. Although other theologians have touched on the concept of the Christian life as participation in the Trinity, none have so thoroughly engaged the issue as Grenz.<sup>95</sup> In his final work, *The Named God and the Question of Being* (2005),

---

<sup>91</sup> Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 326.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 327.

<sup>93</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 946.

<sup>94</sup> Warner, *Reinventing English Evangelicalism*, 4-15.

<sup>95</sup> For example, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *One with God: Salvation as Deification and Justification* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004); Catherine M. LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and the Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1985). Interestingly, Paul Fiddes, an English Baptist, shares this affinity with Grenz and details a similar trajectory in Paul S.

Grenz completes his thought in this area by asserting that it is through the inclusion of our name into the story of the self-naming God (the divine Trinity) that we are given the 'gift of being' and fulfill our human *telos*.<sup>96</sup> Thus what begins with the conversion experience becomes the orientation and attitude of the evangelical life in convertive piety and through Grenz, finally finds its completion in the concept of Trinitarian participation and the legitimization of a Trinitarian epistemology.

**Jay T. Smith**  
**Howard Payne University**  
**Brownwood, Texas**

---

Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000).

<sup>96</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *The Named God and the Question of Being: A Theo-Ontology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 342f.

## **Do Pietists Need a Doctrine of Creation? God's World in the Baptist Tradition and Stanley J. Grenz**

### **ABSTRACT**

The importance of robust doctrines of creation at this moment in history cannot be overstated. This essay calls for a renewed attention to this aspect of theology. Stanley Grenz, standing in the pietist tradition, exhibits a characteristic tendency to underplay the theme. Although there are important hints in his work of 'creation as future' this eschatological framework is undeveloped. The essay calls for a more intentional 'Baptist catholicity' which bears witness to the God's redemption of creation.

### **Missing Creation**

One of the most important tasks of theology in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is the recovery of a robust, mature research program on the doctrine of creation. Many of the most pressing issues in the life and witness of the people of God are directly dependent on the doctrine of creation: the scope of salvation, the 'environmental crisis,' sexuality, gene therapy, justice, what it means to be human. All of these require a mature theological understanding of creation to underwrite and guide faithful life and witness. But at the same time that we need a mature theological conversation on the doctrine of creation, we discover that we have neglected that conversation for over 250 years. Since around the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, theologians have ceded to the natural sciences any accounts of what would be studied under the doctrine of creation.<sup>1</sup> Quite a bit later, the social sciences entered into contest with the natural sciences over this same ground.

---

<sup>1</sup> This 'ceding' of the world to the natural sciences results from two contrasting attitudes in theology. One attitude 'entrusts' accounts of creation to the sciences out of a confidence that 'empirical science' is the God-ordained means by which humans may come to understand and control this world. Another attitude 'retreats' from any theological account of the world of creation out of the conviction that theology cannot compete with the sciences. Both of these attitudes and consequent actions have their roots in the disconnection of creation from redemption, a theological mistake that parallels the errors chronicled by Michael J. Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (Yale, 1987).

The church and its teachers have a lot of work to accomplish if we are going to recover a conversation about the doctrine of creation. When theology ceded ‘God’s world’ to the natural sciences, we retreated into the realms of Gefühl and Heilsgeschichte—the inner life of the believer and the realm of ‘salvation-history’ separate from critical history. This two-fold movement from any responsibility for giving an account of God’s world to piety and salvation-history, has resulted in some serious lacunae and even errors in the life and witness of the church.<sup>2</sup> In the church, we find an inability to address care for creation in terms other than pragmatic and survivalist, when we should be able to articulate and practice care for creation as participation in and witness to the good news of Jesus Christ. We also find difficulty in many parts of the church with embracing the arts as anything other than instrumental to salvation. And we find a doctrine of salvation that is proto-gnostic because it has been severed from the doctrine of creation or connected to a doctrine of creation that regards creation merely as the stage on which God works the salvation of humankind. This becomes fully Gnostic when it becomes a doctrine of salvation as rescue from creation. When the church’s proclamation and practice of salvation is lightly connected to or disconnected from life in this world, here and now, then the church becomes highly vulnerable to other ideologies and turns into a counter-witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup>

As a consequence of theological inattention to the doctrine of creation, theology has made itself marginal to the academy. It has simply absconded from the field of battle.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, the academy also loses through the absence of any challenging teleological account of the world. Lacking this challenge, the academy becomes captured by ‘techne’ that was exposed years ago by Jacques Ellul but only recently given more thorough attention by theologians such as Timothy Gorringer, Michael Northcott, Amy Laura Hall, and philosopher Albert Borgmann.

---

<sup>2</sup>In my 2007 Grenz lectures, I discuss the consequences of ‘Missing Creation in the Church’ and ‘Missing Creation in the Academy.’ These lectures are available from the Regent College Bookstore ([www.regentbookstore.com](http://www.regentbookstore.com)). These lectures and one additional lecture, ‘Missing Creation in Society,’ will be revised and incorporated in the book I am currently writing, tentatively titled, *God’s World: A Biblical, Theological, Practical Doctrine of Creation* (Baker Academic Press).

<sup>3</sup> I am thinking here of the church in Nazi Germany, in Rwanda, and to a (so far) less destructive but more subtle way, the church in the U.S.A.

<sup>4</sup> Here the eschewing of ‘false humility’ and the robustness of faith represented by radical orthodoxy represents a call of God as does the work of Alister McGrath. But we need many more voices joining theirs in this conversation.

In society, our neglect of the doctrine of creation contributes directly to the development of emotivism and expressivist morality. The development and failure of this morality has been brilliantly told by Alasdair MacIntyre.<sup>5</sup> Without a doctrine of creation, we have only simulacra of morality because morality only makes sense in light of a *telos* that depends upon some doctrine of creation. If we humans are our own creators, free to be and become whatever we choose, then morality is merely a matter of self-expression.

This is devastating enough for human life in community, but it does not get at the heart of the problem for witness to the good news of Jesus Christ. If the good news of Jesus Christ is God's love for the world and the reconciliation of all things to God through Christ (surely the biblical references are obvious: John 3:16-17; Colossians 1:15-20; Revelation 21-22), then the absence or weakness of the doctrine of creation in theology entails the absence or weakness of the doctrine of redemption. Just as MacIntyre's narrative exposes the simulacra—the 'pretense' of our morality—so the absence of mature theological teaching on the doctrine of creation results in the proclamation of and participation in a pretense of God's redemption and reconciliation rather than its reality.

MacIntyre warns us that if his argument is correct, then we will have difficulty discerning the true nature of our circumstances.<sup>6</sup> The very forces that produce the circumstances in which we find ourselves also conceal themselves in the circumstances. The same is true of our theological situation. We may be able to identify the practical issues that inexorably force themselves upon us—global warming, gene 'therapy,' and so on—but we may not be able to see past them to the dynamics that produce them and that conceal from us our proper response. In the circumstances that we find ourselves in, without a robust doctrine of creation, we think that these problems are technical problems to be solved by the application of human capacities. But this is to mistake our situation. More properly, it is to mistake who God is and our proper relationship to God. We need a doctrine of creation that is revealed fully in Jesus Christ and that in turn reveals Christ to us.<sup>7</sup> Apart from this 'basic research' in the doctrine of

---

<sup>5</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (University of Notre Dame Press, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> MacIntyre, 4.

<sup>7</sup> There are happy exceptions to the claim that I am making generally about modern theology. Some exceptions are Karl Heim in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Karl Barth mid-century, and Jürgen Moltmann late 20<sup>th</sup> Century. More recently, Catherine Keller has made a provocative contribution and Eastern Orthodox resources are increasingly entering the Western theological discussions. Many

creation the life and witness of God's people will flounder like medical doctors would flounder if they were trying to treat a bacterial or viral infection without the basic research that tells us how the human body lives.

### **Creation in the Baptist Tradition**

I cannot begin to give a full treatment of this topic here: I do not have the learning, the temperament, or the space. But I can make some suggestions that may prove helpful and illuminating and that will provide us with a segue to a consideration of the doctrine of creation in the theology of Stanley J. Grenz.<sup>8</sup>

I have been tempted to develop a typology of Baptist theologies in order to locate various accounts of creation or the absence of such accounts in the Baptist tradition. Although such a typology is outside the scope of this essay, a brief consideration of the possibility will eventually help us better understand Grenz's doctrine of creation. One way to develop a typology of Baptist theologies would be through Lindbeck's scheme of cognitive-propositionalist, experiential-expressivist, and cultural-linguistic.<sup>9</sup> In this scheme, one can easily find Baptist representatives: Carl Henry, E.Y. Mullins, and James Wm. McClendon, Jr., to restrict ourselves to the U.S. Or one could use Hans Frei's five-fold schema and again find Baptist representatives.<sup>10</sup>

But I am sufficiently leery of typologies and their restrictive power that I use them only to illuminate what is already there, not to determine what should or must be there. In the case of creation, one illuminating factor in much Baptist theology is the pietist influence in Baptist life and thought. Again, at the risk of making things overly complex, we must

---

entries into the controversy over science and religion edge toward the doctrine of creation but also typically reveal the need for the kind of 'basic research' in the doctrine of creation that I advocate.

<sup>8</sup> I am aware that North America is the focus of the following discussion. This is so for two reasons. First, North America is largely the intellectual context for Grenz's work, though his influence is much wider. Second, I am no expert in the history of Baptist theology. I am conscious that we desperately need more work on Baptist theology around the world and long for more recognition of and learning from the work being done outside North America and other Anglo cultures.

<sup>9</sup> George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Westminster Press, 1984).

<sup>10</sup> See 'Five Types of Theology' in Hans W. Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, ed. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (Yale University Press, 1992), 28-55.

recognize that pietist and pietism are not monolithic realities. In the case of the doctrine of creation, and in Grenz's theology, our pietist heritage is directly and powerfully relevant.

By using pietist here, I am seeking to acknowledge the strong revivalist and inward, 'religion of the heart,' that marks a lot of Baptist life and thought. This is not the only mark of Baptist life and thought. We could again develop another potential typology of Baptist theology. We could identify some Baptists as 'confessional,' particularly in the light of a resurgent Calvinism among Southern Baptists. Other Baptists may be well-described as 'creedal,' especially those for whom Nicea is the touchstone for theology. Still others could be identified as 'Bible only' Baptists: 'No creed but the Bible.' Yet others might be predominantly identified by liberation themes in their theology. And on we could go. These and other identifiers are familiar to most of us who have had much experience in Baptist life.

Each of these identifiers creates a particular context within which or through which the doctrine of creation receives attention or suffers neglect. Some of them lead more directly to the development of a doctrine of creation, but none of them guarantees attention to the doctrine. There are ways to avoid or neglect the doctrine of creation within almost any practice of theology. At the same time, none of them necessarily leads to the neglect of creation.

If this essay were an attempt to represent various ways of treating the doctrine of creation in the history of Baptist thought, we could find relative neglect in E.Y. Mullins and A.H. Strong.<sup>11</sup> In D.C. Macintosh, we would find the doctrine of creation displaced by *Theology as an Empirical Science*.<sup>12</sup> In Dale Moody, we would find a more extensive and promising

---

<sup>11</sup> Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Judson Press, 1907), 371-464 (about 7%); Edgar Young Mullins, *The Christian Religion in Its Doctrinal Expression* (Roger Williams Press, 1917), 251-301 (about 10%). Beyond the percentage, what is telling in these works is that the doctrine of creation plays no significant role in the theology. Removing these passages would require very little change in the rest of the theology.

<sup>12</sup> Douglas Clyde Macintosh, *Theology as an Empirical Science* (Macmillan, 1919).

account of the doctrine.<sup>13</sup> At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, we receive a brief but typically creative treatment from Jim McClendon.<sup>14</sup>

Because McClendon's doctrine of creation is a particularly illuminating treatment of the doctrine in the Baptist tradition, it is worth considering before we conclude this section and focus on Grenz's doctrine of creation. McClendon concludes his chapter on creation by acknowledging that

[The task of this chapter] was made harder by the three-hundred-year-old tendency to assign the full understanding of nature to natural sciences alone, to dissociate God from the world (the absence-of-God theme), and to focus creation thought only upon the human creature. These tendencies could not be defeated in this space, and they continue, powerful even though unspoken, in reader's minds and in today's churches.<sup>15</sup>

McClendon then specifies three ways that he has sought to resist these tendencies:

(1) 'by recalling the broad biblical view that they themselves replaced—God as creation's Alpha and Omega . . . .' (2) by unfolding 'more fully the concept of creation as work in progress, and to relate God's suffering and ours to that ongoing divine work . . . .' (3) by examining creation 'as an arena of promise whose destiny lies in its relation to what lasts and what comes last (Chapter Two) and to the new that comes in Christ (Chapter Three)'.<sup>16</sup>

McClendon concludes with a promise of further development of the doctrine of creation in Christ in Chapter Seven. Clearly, this is a doctrine of creation that is integral to the whole account of the gospel in McClendon's theology.

To this point I have suggested that the pietist strand of Baptist heritage may play a significant role in the lack of development of the doctrine of creation in Baptist theology. But I have taken a brief detour

---

<sup>13</sup> Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth; A Summary of Christian Doctrine Based on Biblical Revelation* (Eerdmans, 1981), 127-270 (about 25%).

<sup>14</sup> James Wm. McClendon, Jr. *Doctrine: Systematic Theology, Volume II* (Abingdon, 1994), 146-189 (about 10%); but beyond the portion allotted to creation is the centrality of the doctrine in McClendon's theology.

<sup>15</sup> McClendon 188.

<sup>16</sup> McClendon 188-189.

from developing that claim to acknowledge that the pietist story is not the only story in Baptist theology. Other influences and strands of Baptist life and thought provide their own accounts of creation or neglect it.

In the pietist strand of Baptist heritage, neglect of the doctrine of creation is not a necessary logical consequence of pietism, but it is an easy and typical development. If the focus is on the individual's experience of salvation and if this focus develops into an exclusive field of vision, then everything drops away except what is necessary to bring the individual to a moment of decision and conversion. All doctrine becomes instrumental to this one purpose. So it would seem that pietists do not need a doctrine of creation. They only need a doctrine of salvation and a stage upon which that work of salvation takes place. Any account of that 'stage' may be left to other disciplines, other thinkers. Only salvation is important to theology and only theology can give an account of salvation. Leave lesser matters to other disciplines.

But as McClendon's theology suggests and guides us, and as we will see in our study of Grenz, a proper doctrine of salvation also requires a doctrine of creation. Any theology that develops a doctrine of salvation and neglects a doctrine of creation loses any reality to its witness to and participation in salvation. Moreover, in its account of salvation, it creates the kind of situation that Jesus describes in which the demon-possessed man is swept clean of demons, but given nothing in their place. And so the demons return in even greater number and influence. A doctrine of salvation without a doctrine of creation produces 'believers' who are prepared for ideological captivity and exploitation. Such was the case in Germany with the rise of National Socialism, such was the case in South Africa with apartheid, such is the case in many parts of the world today with the promise of health and prosperity through Christ. So, yes, a pietist needs a doctrine of creation.

### **Stanley Grenz as Pietist**

To understand Grenz's theological project, it is essential to recognize the formative influence of pietism on him and the significance of his self-identification as a pietist. The North American Baptist Conference originates in German immigrants. It is rooted in German pietism and continues to be strongly influenced by the characteristics of pietism.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> The standard history of the North American Baptist Conference is Frank H. Woyke, *Heritage and Ministry of the North American Baptist Conference* (North American Baptist Conference: Oakbrook, IL, 1977). This work and other

Grenz acknowledges his own identity as a pietist—with a Ph.D.<sup>18</sup> His primary concern in this article is to work out the relationship between the ‘convertive piety’ of ‘awakening evangelicalism’ and the ‘right doctrine’ of ‘scholastic evangelicalism’ for ‘contemporary evangelicalism’. He is typically generous and irenic in his discussion, drawing out the best in each area and looking for commonality. But in the end, he sides with the concerns of ‘convertive piety’:

Rather than the quest for right doctrine, therefore, the commitment to convertive piety—which comprises the great contribution and lasting legacy of the eighteenth century awakening—must remain the integrative principle of the evangelical ethos. Whatever value evangelicals may (rightly) place on doctrinal orthodoxy, historically they have always been adamant that doctrine is never an end in itself, but is important insofar as it serves and nurtures the transformation of the heart and true Christian piety. Consequently, concern for biblical doctrine must always remain the handmaiden to commitment to the gospel of heartfelt piety.<sup>19</sup>

As we will consider below, Grenz’s identity as a pietist provides an important context for examining his doctrine of creation. But before we focus there. Two other topics are relevant.

First, this concern to properly relate convertive piety and right doctrine pervades Grenz’s work. It gives it much of its internal tension and contributes significantly to the external tensions between Grenz and other evangelical theologians. In short, Grenz’s willingness to live with this tension and allow it to be central to his work is a significant factor in his creativity and influence. Most evangelical theologians find ways to resolve, relieve or sequester this tension in the process of their education and professional lives.

Second, Grenz’s consideration of the tensions between convertive piety and right doctrine parallels Lindbeck’s analysis of *The Nature of Doctrine*. But Grenz seems to have only Lindbeck’s first two positions (cognitive-propositionalist and experiential-expressivist) and has to resolve the tension by granting privilege to one or the other. So Grenz argues for

---

reference articles on the NAB give little attention to its theological ethos. That is best identified in the actual life of its congregations and the testimony of its members, such as Stan Grenz.

<sup>18</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, ‘Concerns of a Pietist with a Ph.D.’, *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 37/2 (Fall 2002): 58-76.

<sup>19</sup> Grenz, ‘Concerns of a Pietist with a Ph.D.’, 74.

the priority of convertive piety and doctrine as its handmaiden. What concerns me in this move is that the privileging of piety in one generation has led to the abandonment of orthodoxy in the next. Lindbeck's proposal of a third way, the cultural-linguistic, provides a resolution that preserves convertive piety and right doctrine, relates them properly, and provides the means (though not a guarantee) that both will be sustained by the disciple community from one generation to the next.<sup>20</sup>

### **Grenz's Doctrine of Creation**

After a long and winding road, we arrive finally at an examination of Grenz's doctrine of creation. In our examination we will think of Grenz as a theologian in the pietist Baptist tradition. This identity immediately presents Grenz with obstacles. As I have noted above, pietism—convertive piety, as Grenz names it—does not have a strong, internal need for a doctrine of creation. Other doctrines are essential and require significant development. Sin, humankind, atonement, sanctification—these areas of doctrine are central and others may be essential as supportive.<sup>21</sup> For example, in much of convertive piety the doctrine of the Incarnation is largely instrumental to the atonement.

But in much of convertive piety, the doctrine of creation is almost entirely reduced to the doctrine of humankind, as McClendon notes above. Creation itself, then, is almost entirely instrumental to salvation and plays only the role as the stage upon which the drama of salvation is played out. Creation is not a part of the drama and when the drama has reached its end, the stage may be dismantled and set aside. Creation plays no role in the drama itself.

This description of the instrumental place of creation is largely true of popular, unreflective theology in the tradition of convertive piety, but it is also true in different ways in more reflective theology of much of convertive piety. Grenz himself exposes this when he describes the early years of 'awakening evangelicalism' and 'the influence of the new empiricist,

---

<sup>20</sup> The claims of this paragraph require further development and argument. I hope to return to them in my work for a future book on the gospel and theology. For now, see Jonathan R. Wilson, 'Theology and the Old Testament,' in Craig C. Broyles, *Interpreting the Old Testament: A Guide for Exegesis* (Baker Academic 2001), 245-264, esp. 249-254, where I exposit and revise Lindbeck's account and propose an 'imaginative-practical' understanding of doctrine.

<sup>21</sup> One of the admirable qualities of Grenz and his work is that as he pursued some of these supportive doctrines, he recognized that they were central not peripheral. I am thinking here especially of the doctrine of the Trinity.

inductive, experiment-focused scientific method that had been mediated to Wesley and others by the Enlightenment thinkers, especially John Locke.<sup>22</sup> This confidence in empirical science may have had two effects on pietism: first, providing a model for ‘experimental religion’ that trusted the human senses to grasp the experience of faith; second, to trust empirical science to provide a truthful account of God’s world. I do not mean by this to denigrate the role of the supernatural in much of pietism but to identify the dynamic of pietist life and thought in the context of its cultural origins. That original dynamic continues to be an influence in pietism and in the pietist Baptist tradition that shapes Grenz’s work.<sup>23</sup>

In Grenz’s case, his pietist formation is complicated and partially transformed by his study with Wolfhart Pannenberg. Grenz was not only ‘a pietist with a Ph. D.,’ but a pietist with a Ph.D. completed under a German theologian who is far from being a pietist—perhaps about as far as one could get. These two streams—piety and Pannenberg—represent the creative tension and incompleteness of Grenz’s work that gives it some of its liveliness.

Grenz never published on the doctrine of creation at the same level as he did on the Trinity or the *imago dei*.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, in his list of topics for the planned but never completed *Matrix of Christian Theology*, he names ‘the central foci of the systematic theology corpus: theology (proper), anthropology, Christology, pneumatology, ecclesiology, and eschatology.’ The doctrine of creation is not separately identified as a focus.

---

<sup>22</sup> Grenz, ‘Concerns of a Pietist,’ 63, referencing David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A Survey from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Baker, 1992), 53; and George M. Marsden, ‘Evangelicals, History, and Modernity,’ in George M. Marsden, ed., *Evangelicalism and Modern America* (Eerdmans, 1984), 98.

<sup>23</sup> As I was working on this article it also occurred to me that Grenz was formed in the same geographical part of North American Baptist life (the Dakotas and Manitoba) as D.C. Macintosh, who gave us *Theology as an Empirical Science*.

<sup>24</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Westminster John Knox, 2001), and *The Named God and the Question of Being* (Westminster John Knox, 2005; these are the first two volumes of a planned six-volume series titled *The Matrix of Christian Theology*. See my review essay on these volumes as well as *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (Augsburg Fortress, 2004) and *Prayer: The Cry for the Kingdom* (Eerdmans, revised edition, 2005) in Jonathan R. Wilson, ‘Stanley J. Grenz: Generous Faith and Faithful Engagement,’ *Modern Theology* 23/1 (January 2007): 113-121.

If the main source that we have for Grenz's doctrine of creation is a reliable guide to any more mature treatment of the theme in Grenz's *Matrix*, then Grenz would treat creation under the doctrine of God. In *Theology for the Community of God*, Grenz devotes a separate chapter to 'The Creator God.'<sup>25</sup> This short chapter concludes 'Part 1' on the doctrine of God. It is followed by Part 2, Anthropology, Part 3, Christology, Part 4, Pneumatology, Part 5, Ecclesiology, and Part 6, Eschatology. In the brief section that Grenz devotes to the Creator God, and the lengthy section on anthropology, Grenz reflects the pietist tendency to place much more emphasis on the latter.

Nevertheless, he does treat the doctrine of creation in a stand-alone chapter. Moreover, although his discussion is brief and appropriate to its place in a textbook, it reflects a more sophisticated and significant doctrine of creation than a mere instrumental account. Grenz begins by characterizing God's act of creation as a free and loving act. He grounds both of these characterizations in the doctrine of the Trinity. Although he references Karl Barth only once, Grenz is clearly following Barth's account.<sup>26</sup> But Grenz makes minimal use of this teaching in reference to other portions of his theology and does not extend these insights in relation to other doctrines.

Grenz then moves on to consider directly the doctrine of the Trinity and gives an account of the roles of the Father, Son, and Spirit. The Father is 'the ground of all that exists' and as such is 'the ultimate, direct agent in the creative act.' (102) The Son is 'the principle of creation' (103-105) and the Spirit is 'the divine power active in creating the universe.'<sup>27</sup> While Grenz is right to give an account of creation as the work of the triune God, the terms that he uses and the biblical references that he draws on raise some questions about the adequacy of his account. How is the direct agency of the Father related to the Spirit as 'the divine power active' in creation? Is 'principle' a sufficient description of the role of the Son in relation to Bible passages such as Proverbs 8, John 1, and Colossians 1, which Grenz references? Do not these passages force us beyond a discrete doctrine of

---

<sup>25</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Eerdmans 2000), 98-123.

<sup>26</sup> See Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* 102, note 2. The account of creation in Barth's *CD III* follows from the account of the divine perfections of God's loving and God's freedom in *CD II/1*. This same treatment of freedom and love may be found to some degree also in Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, Volume 2, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Eerdmans, 1994), 1-35.

<sup>27</sup> Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 102-106.

creation to an account of creation that is more robust and directly integrated with redemption?

Following this account, Grenz covers the sovereignty of God, the time of creation, and God's providence. His treatments of God's sovereignty and providence demonstrate Grenz's sensitivity to our context and the challenges presented to us by our history while offering a faithful account of the tradition that provides a satisfactory response to contextual challenges.

In his treatment of the time of creation, Grenz offers his most creative and helpful thinking on the doctrine. For him, while we must acknowledge 'creation as past', the most important aspect is 'creation as future.' For Grenz, 'the understanding of creation as a divine future act lies at the heart of the biblical message.' Thus, 'only at the consummation of God's activity in history will the world take on its final shape and thereby reflect fully the destiny or design God intends for creation.'<sup>28</sup>

These are critically important convictions that witness to the good news of Jesus Christ. Grenz rightly sees beyond the instrumental account of creation that is often present in pietist traditions. Regrettably, he does not develop these convictions in any significant way nor do they permeate the rest of his theology. Grenz asserts 'the eschatological consummation of history,' but this consummation is left dangling; it has no clear and explicit connection, no thick integration with God's redemptive work in Christ.<sup>29</sup> It is almost as if creation has its own eschatological destiny alongside the eschatological consummation of redemption. That is, creation and redemption are parallel works of God, each of which has its own proper destiny in an eschatological consummation.<sup>30</sup> When Grenz treats eschatology later in the text, his discussion is almost entirely concerned with the redemption of individuals in community. Only in a final few pages do we get some reflection on 'the new creation,' and even here the 'new creation' is instrumental to divine and human community.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 109-112

<sup>29</sup> See Pannenberg's discussion of creation and eschatology, 136-161.

<sup>30</sup> For alternative accounts in the baptist tradition, see the suggestions of McClendon (above): Laura Ruth Yordy, *Green Witness: Ecology, Ethics, and the Kingdom of God* (Cascade 2008), especially chapter 2, 'God's Eschatological Creation'; and Norman Wirzba, *The Paradise of God: Renewing Religion in an Ecological Age* (Oxford 2008).

<sup>31</sup> Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 644-649. An examination of Grenz's other texts add nothing substantive to this account. He briefly grounds ethics in the doctrine of creation, but does not develop this theme or integrate it into

### Pietist and Catholic Baptists?

The disparate sections of this essay do have a unifying concern. That concern is that theology has neglected the doctrine of creation for almost 300 years and now finds itself trying to serve the people of God in a time when a mature, robust doctrine of creation is most needed. In my own tradition and the one for which I am writing this essay, the renewal of theology around the doctrine of creation must be cognizant of the contributions and impediments to such a renewal in our Baptist tradition. One of the most prolific and influential Baptist theologians of the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century is Stanley J. Grenz. If we turn to him for guidance and assistance in renewing theological reflection on creation, we must be aware of his pietist heritage, which many of us share, and the impediments that it places in our way. In Grenz's own theology he shows some signs of moving past those impediments, but this movement is never developed or integrated with the more pietist elements of his thinking.

We must find more ways in our Baptist tradition and our cultural context, if we are to be faithful in our witness to the good news of Jesus Christ for all creation. One way is to overcome some of the limitations in our reading of Scripture placed on us by our tradition and simply to become more faithful readers of the biblical witness to the reconciliation of all things in Christ.<sup>32</sup>

Another means by which we may become more faithful witnesses to Christ is by intentionally broadening our Baptist tradition. Our tradition has always been a work of *bricolage*, drawing from material at hand in service to the gospel.<sup>33</sup> So let us continue this practice of embodying through time the baptist tradition that bears witness to the gospel. One way in which we might do that is by following those who propose a 'baptist catholicity'.<sup>34</sup>

---

the rest of his ethical work. See Stanley J. Grenz, *The Moral Quest: Foundations of Christian Ethics* (IVP 1997), 260-262.

<sup>32</sup> The doctrine of creation is beginning to receive a great deal more attention from Bible scholars. One of those is Stephen Chapman, a Baptist OT scholar at Duke Divinity School.

<sup>33</sup> I learned the term *bricolage* from Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics After Babel: The Languages of Morals and Their Discontents* (Beacon Press 1988), 74-77; but I adopt the term to represent Paul's assertion that 'we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ' (2 Corinthians 10:5; TNIV).

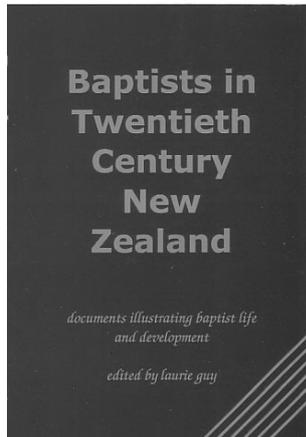
<sup>34</sup> Barry Harvey, *Can These Bones Live? A Catholic Baptist Engagement with Ecclesiology, Hermeneutics, and Social Theory* (Brazos 2008); Steven R. Harmon, *Towards Baptist Catholicity: Essays on Tradition and the Baptist Vision* (Wipf and Stock 2006); see also the symposium on this book in *Pro Ecclesia* XVIII/4 (Fall 2009):367-392.

Although these proposals have not explicitly promoted the renewal of a doctrine of creation, the ‘catholicity’ that they propose would lead naturally to an expansion and revision of the pietist Baptist tradition.

Whatever sources we draw on, we must begin the work of making our witness to the gospel more faithful to the good news that God is redeeming creation. We must maintain the pietist passion for the new birth and the Christian life, but we must set these within the context of the cosmic drama of salvation. This is not a matter of choosing between Christian traditions, convertive piety and right doctrine, or creation and redemption; it is a matter of participation in God’s work in the world and witness to that work, which is the hope of all creation.

**Jonathan R. Wilson**  
**Carey Theological College**  
**Vancouver, Canada**

# **NZ Baptists - in their own words!**

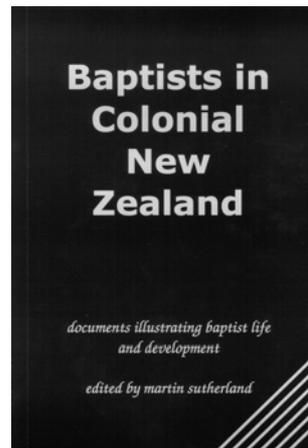


*Baptists in Twentieth-Century  
New Zealand: documents illustrating  
Baptist life and development*  
Edited by Laurie Guy,  
Carey Baptist College, 2005,  
ISBN 0-908649-08-8 (284 pp)  
(includes biographical appendix)

Price: US \$30.00 plus p & p

*Baptists in Colonial New Zealand:  
documents illustrating  
Baptist life and development*  
Edited by Martin Sutherland,  
Carey Baptist College, 2002,  
ISBN 0-908649-07-X (224 pp)  
(includes biographical appendix)

Price: US \$25.00 plus p & p



Orders to: The N.Z. Baptist Research and Historical Society  
PO Box 12149. Auckland, New Zealand  
Fax 64-9-525 4096  
Or email [martin.sutherland@laidlaw.ac.nz](mailto:martin.sutherland@laidlaw.ac.nz)

## Contributors to this Issue:

**Brian Harris** completed PhD research on Stanley Grenz at the University of Auckland, NZ. He is Principal at Vose Seminary, Perth, Western Australia

**Jason S. Sexton** is a licensed minister with the Evangelical Free Church of America and a PhD candidate in Systematic Theology at St Mary's College, University of St Andrews.

**Jay T. Smith** is an assistant professor of Christian studies at Howard Payne University, Brownwood, Texas, where he teaches courses in theology and ethics. He was Stanley Grenz's research assistant from 1999-2005 and co-authored *The Pocket Dictionary of Ethics* (IVP: 2003) with him.

**Martin Sutherland** is Vice-Principal at Laidlaw College, Auckland, NZ. His research is in Baptist history and thought and in theological method. He is editor of PJBR.

**Jonathan R. Wilson** is Pioneer McDonald Professor of Theology at Carey Theological College, Vancouver. He is presently working on a book on the doctrine of creation to be published by Baker Academic Press.