

Stanley Grenz's Ecclesiology: Telic and Trinitarian¹

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.'² 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

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

² 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.³

Recognizing ecclesiology as 'a topic of theological reflection that is gaining increased attention,'⁴ the unique contribution from Stanley Grenz, self-identified as 'unabashedly Baptist'⁵ and declared 'a preeminent evangelical theologian,'⁶ would have been imminent.⁷ 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.'⁸ 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.⁹

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

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

⁴ 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.

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

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

⁷ 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).

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Beyond the 'Plastic' Jesus,' Session 4, Critical Concerns Course, Emergent Conference, Nashville, TN, 19 May 2004 (unpublished), 5-6.

⁹ 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,¹⁰ nor any indications of treatments on his horizon,¹¹ 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.¹²

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.¹³

2. Belonging to the Covenant Community¹⁴

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

¹⁰ 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).

¹¹ 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.

¹² Grenz, 'Restoring a Trinitarian Understanding of the Church,' 232.

¹³ Grenz, TCG2, 570.

¹⁴ The main headings under this section will be explored following a 2005 outline Grenz used to described 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.’¹⁵ This also gave him awareness of distinct questions being asked by the contemporary culture,¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸

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.),¹⁹ covenant here begins in the Congregationalist-Baptist sense.²⁰ It signifies a covenant between God and God’s people.²¹ 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

¹⁵ Grenz, *RET*, 99.

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ Grenz, ‘Ecclesiology,’ 258; Grenz, *RTC2*, 330.

¹⁸ Grenz, ‘Ecclesiology,’ 258-9.

¹⁹ Lothar Perlitt, ‘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.

²⁰ Keith W. Clements, ‘Congregationalism: History,’ *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, 1:658-60.

²¹ Grenz, *The Baptist Congregation*, 47.

will be part of the eternal community into which the Spirit brings them.²² 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.’²³ 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.’²⁴

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.’²⁵ 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.’²⁶ 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.’²⁷

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

²² Grenz, *TCG2*, 452-5.

²³ *Ibid.*, 478-9.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 464, 471.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 469-71.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 480.

²⁷ 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.²⁸ While some have mistaken Grenz to view the local church as completely voluntarist due to his usage of this language,²⁹ this mistake betrays unfamiliarity with his approach to theology, and how he carefully crafts other positions before constructing his own.³⁰ Whereas he sees covenant as a human phenomenon, it is not merely a sequence of unilateral individual or merely social acts.³¹ 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.'³² He states explicitly, 'Rather than a voluntary

²⁸ Grenz, *TCG2*, 480-1.

²⁹ 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).

³⁰ 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).

³¹ Grenz, 'Ecclesiology,' 257; Grenz, *The Baptist Congregation*, 49.

³² 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.³³

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.³⁴ 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.'³⁵ Accordingly, the community is now gathered around the biblical text,³⁶ participating in word and sacrament,³⁷ which (as in the Reformation) highlights the relevance of the local congregation.³⁸ 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.'³⁹

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.'⁴⁰ Through placing individuals in Christ 'the Spirit draws us out of

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

³⁴ Grenz, *TCG2*, 487.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 484.

³⁶ Grenz, 'Restoring a Trinitarian Understanding of the Church,' 231.

³⁷ Grenz, *RTC2*, 329.

³⁸ Grenz, 'Ecclesiology,' 261.

³⁹ 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.

⁴⁰ 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'.⁴¹ Grenz finds this balancing the individual and corporate,⁴² 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'.⁴³

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.⁴⁴ 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'.⁴⁵ 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,'⁴⁶ though without what seemed to be a Trinity-lite approach compared to Grenz's aim.⁴⁷ 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.

⁴¹ Grenz, 'Belonging to God,' 50.

⁴² Grenz, TCG2, 471.

⁴³ 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.

⁴⁴ Grenz, RTC2, 322-3.

⁴⁵ Grenz, TCG2, 471; Grenz, *The Baptist Congregation*, 48.

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

⁴⁷ 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.’⁴⁸ Or it may be caused by Grenz’s heritage of dual-citizenship as a Baptist and an evangelical.⁴⁹

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.⁵⁰ 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.⁵¹ 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.⁵² 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.⁵³ 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.

⁴⁸ Grenz, ‘Belonging to God,’ 49.

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

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

⁵¹ 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.

⁵² Grenz, *RTC2*, 327-9.

⁵³ 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.'⁵⁴

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.⁵⁵ 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.⁵⁶ 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.⁵⁷ And he also found himself increasingly engaged with other ecumenical groups from across the globe in order to serve them.⁵⁸ But ultimately, Grenz had no interest whatever in forsaking his rich unabashed Baptist heritage.⁵⁹

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

⁵⁵ Grenz, RTC2, 320, 328.

⁵⁶ Grenz, TCG2, 552-3.

⁵⁷ 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).

⁵⁸ 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 20th century, and he employs it early as a (the?) major theological motif,⁶⁰ although it evolves nearly out of the atmosphere in his mature methodological work.⁶¹ The early kingdom thrust may result from his earlier Baptist or dispensational emphases,⁶² 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.⁶³ 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).

⁵⁹ 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.

⁶⁰ Grenz, *TCG2*, 472; Grenz, *RET*, 139-47.

⁶¹ *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.

⁶² 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.

⁶³ 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.⁶⁴ 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.'⁶⁵

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*'.⁶⁶ 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.

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

⁶⁵ Grenz, TCG2, 472, 478 (italics Grenz's); Grenz, RTC2, 323.

⁶⁶ Grenz, 'Getting Back to Basics,' Session 3, 4-5.

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

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.’⁶⁹ 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).’⁷⁰ 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.⁷¹ 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.⁷²

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

⁶⁷ Grenz, *RTC2*, 330-1.

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

⁶⁹ Grenz, ‘Restoring a Trinitarian Understanding of the Church,’ 231.

⁷⁰ Grenz, *TCG2*, 556-7.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 548.

⁷² 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.⁷³ 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.⁷⁴

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.'⁷⁵ 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.'⁷⁶ 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.⁷⁷ 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.⁷⁸

⁷³ Grenz, *TCG2*, 560-1.

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

⁷⁵ Grenz, *TCG2*, 569.

⁷⁶ *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.

⁷⁷ Grenz, *TCG2*, 565-8.

⁷⁸ Grenz, *RTC2*, 330.

2.3. Community Commitment

For Grenz, community and church are not synonymous, although overlap exists, each informing the other.⁷⁹ The local congregation, however, is where genuine community is found that is identity shaping and which also cultivates true belongingness.⁸⁰ 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 as a 'narrative people' whose members have their personal and communal identities constructed by the biblical narrative.⁸¹ 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.'⁸² 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.'⁸³ 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.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Grenz, *TCG2*, 479-85, 498-501.

⁸⁰ 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.

⁸¹ Grenz, 'Restoring a Trinitarian Understanding of the Church,' 231.

⁸² 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.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁸⁴ 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.’⁸⁵ This narrative constitutes the church as a true community made up of many stories,⁸⁶ and embodying the ultimate story displayed in the covenant community’s confessional marks and rites.⁸⁷

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’.⁸⁸ 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.’⁸⁹ Consequently, this brought Grenz to see the church as missional with respect to its traits.⁹⁰ 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

⁸⁵ 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.

⁸⁶ Grenz, ‘Ecclesiology,’ 257; and Grenz, *TCG2*, 500.

⁸⁷ Grenz, *TCG2*, 516-18.

⁸⁸ Medley, ‘An Evangelical Theology for a Postmodern Age,’ 84.

⁸⁹ Grenz, *RTC2*, 319-21, 327.

⁹⁰ 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 Kärkänen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology*, particularly the third section on ‘contextual ecclesilogies’ which avoided altogether recent work on the missional church (see Grenz ‘Peer Review,’ 2). Kärkänen yielded all discussion of missional theology to the chapter on Newbiggin.

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).'⁹¹

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.⁹² 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.⁹³ 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.⁹⁴ With this, he saw a 'deeper dimension of incorporation into the narrative community.'⁹⁵

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

⁹¹ Grenz, RTC2, 328-9; Grenz, 'Ecclesiology,' 265-6.

⁹² Grenz, 'Getting Back to Basics,' Session 3, 5.

⁹³ Grenz, 'Baptism and the Lord's Supper,' 89-95.

⁹⁴ Grenz, RTC2, 516-18; Grenz, *The Baptist Congregation*, 29-32.

⁹⁵ Grenz, 'Baptism and the Lord's Supper,' 93.

⁹⁶ Grenz, TCG2, 529.

Above all, it symbolizes union with Christ in his death and resurrection.⁹⁷ 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.⁹⁸ 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.⁹⁹

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

⁹⁷ Grenz, 'But We Are Baptized,' 19-24.

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

⁹⁹ 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.¹⁰⁰

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.'¹⁰¹ 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.¹⁰² 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.'¹⁰³ Incidentally, the concept of 'acts of belonging'¹⁰⁴ 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.¹⁰⁵ 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.'¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁰ 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).

¹⁰¹ Grenz, 'Theology, Church and Ministry,' Part 3, 11-12.

¹⁰² Grenz, *TCG2*, 537-8.

¹⁰³ *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).

¹⁰⁴ Grenz, 'Getting Back to Basics,' Outline, 10.

¹⁰⁵ 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.

¹⁰⁶ 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.¹⁰⁷ 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.'¹⁰⁸ Grenz used the term occasionally in his later writings, with seemingly this same meaning.¹⁰⁹ 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.¹¹⁰ 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.¹¹¹ 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.¹¹² With an

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

¹⁰⁸ '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).

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

¹¹⁰ Grenz, *TCG2*, 452-3, 472-9.

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

¹¹² 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.¹¹³ 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.¹¹⁴ As such, the church becomes the eschatological covenant community of love,¹¹⁵ 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.’¹¹⁶

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).’¹¹⁷ 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.¹¹⁸ 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.’¹¹⁹

¹¹³ Grenz, RTC2, 331.

¹¹⁴ Grenz, TCG2, 474-6.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 486.

¹¹⁶ Grenz, ‘Theology, Church and Ministry,’ Part 1, 7.

¹¹⁷ Grenz, RTC2, 254.

¹¹⁸ Grenz, TCG2, 479. In his own adaptation of this feature, Grenz has somewhat modified Pannenberg’s emphasis.

¹¹⁹ 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.'¹²⁰ As such, 'his ecclesiology stands methodologically within and from the being and action of the triune God, the divine community.'¹²¹ Grenz asserted that 'the triunity of God ought to inform all systematic theology,'¹²² 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.¹²³

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.'¹²⁴ 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.

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

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 447.

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

¹²³ Grenz, 'Restoring a Trinitarian Understanding of the Church,' 231-2.

¹²⁴ 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).'¹²⁵ 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.'¹²⁶ 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.¹²⁷ 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.¹²⁸

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.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Grenz, 'Theology, Church and Ministry,' Part 1, 8.

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

¹²⁷ Grenz, 'Getting Back to Basics,' Session 3, 3.

¹²⁸ Grenz, 'Restoring a Trinitarian Understanding of the Church,' 232-3.

¹²⁹ 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,¹³⁰ 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,¹³¹ all of this is brought about from union with Christ, who both himself is, and fulfils the human vocation as, the image of God.¹³²

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.¹³³ 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.

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¹³⁰ 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.

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

¹³² 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.

¹³³ 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.