



BEYOND SOCIAL TRINITARIANISM

Stanley J. Grenz's Baptist, Trinitarian Innovation

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 - *Stanley J. Grenz was commonly understood as one of North America's leading evangelical theologians of recent years, committed to developing a social doctrine of the Trinity with major significance for his theology and ethics. His own caution regarding social trinitarianism was often overlooked, however, as was his movement beyond the fashionable social models of the Trinity to his own trinitarian proposal, which can best be understood as flowing from his evangelical and baptist self-identity.*
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Stanley Grenz (1950-2005), the North American theologian, studied for his doctorate under Wolfhart Pannenberg in Germany. Following his doctoral studies he briefly served as a pastor until in 1981 he became Professor of Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics at the North American Baptist Seminary, Sioux Falls, USA, and from 1990 Professor of Baptist Heritage, Theology and Ethics at Carey Theological College and Regent College in Vancouver, Canada. Grenz has often been identified as one of the turn-of-the-century's leading social trinitarians. The designation has seemed fitting, categorizing Grenz with others identified with the recent trinitarian resurgence, with chief representatives being Colin Gunton and Miroslav Volf.¹ But

linking Grenz with this renaissance does not tell the whole story of Grenz's trinitarian innovation or agenda. It is not really an accurate description of his reception of social trinitarian innovations and is, indeed, incomplete at best; at worst, it is a highly dubious and misleading representation.

Grenz was a self-identified evangelical which makes the matter more interesting, especially given the particular emphases that have featured in the recent history of evangelical theology, which often has not included the doctrine of the Trinity as a major mark of evangelical identity.² That Grenz was a Baptist rarely receives mention. How might this have led him to reflect on current consensus trends whilst reading scripture carefully and seeking to proclaim the gospel in the contemporary setting, identifying the primary locus of authority as the risen Jesus Christ in the local church setting?³ It may have been his Baptist identity that led him *through* the social trinitarian consensus, of which he had been called an innovator.⁴ If so, as this essay argues, then Grenz's innovation is found not merely in his reception or contribution to social trinitarian thought, but rather in something that began to emerge as he worked for a renewed conception of the gospel, one which he began to erect in the midst of the reigning social trinitarian milieu. To understand what Grenz was seeking to construct, however, it is necessary first to identify what role the 'social Trinity' played in his writings.

'SOCIAL TRINITY' IN GRENZ'S WRITINGS

Grenz's systematic theology, *Theology for the Community of God* (1994), marked the first explicit usage of 'the social Trinity' in his work.⁵ Both the term and concept were used liberally thereafter. The idea, though not the term, was present earlier (1990) as he began to develop the community theme, with God as 'the divine community,'⁶ both drawing on and seeking to advance Pannenberg's work.⁷ One might expect the social Trinity to begin to gain mileage in the 1993 methodological precursor to Grenz's theology text, since Grenz's community theme takes prominence there. Yet while the distinguishable

social Trinity had yet to emerge amidst other significant themes he was developing, Grenz had already begun working with a doctrine of the Trinity which asserted that ‘through all eternity God is the community of love.’ This community of love is Father, Son, and Spirit—‘distinct yet united through the love they share.’ Grenz had already described God as ‘a social reality.’ This divine reality, itself a multiplicity or, indeed, a triunity within the Godhead, finds its foundation in ‘the eternal love relation between Father and Son, a relation of love that is concretized by the third person, the Holy Spirit.’⁸

In Grenz’s *Theology for the Community of God*, a similar emphasis on the doctrine of the Trinity continued, although with an expanded shape. Grenz again declared that the foundation of God’s triunity lies ‘with the eternal relationship between the Father and the Son. They share a fellowship of love, which is concretized in the third person.’ The result, Grenz continued, is that ‘the Holy Spirit is the bond of love between the Father and the Son.’⁹ While this Augustinian feature remained prominent in Grenz’s work, of particular interest is how Grenz read the tradition. He acknowledged that ‘the creeds did not answer the question as to how the three comprise God,’ although he understood that the deity of the Son and Spirit was affirmed by Athanasius on soteriological grounds. He found the Cappadocians asserting ‘trinitarian distinctions’ belonging to God’s eternal nature. In broad brush strokes, he identified the Western tradition as seeing the threeness within the one substance as ‘relational,’ which led Western theologians to posit the joint workings of the Trinity in creation and salvation.¹⁰

Grenz’s understanding of the tradition continued with Pannenberg’s ‘highly developed’ statement of the Trinity, which avoided speaking of the one God above the three persons, preferring to refer to ‘the one God who is the three, and there is no God but the Father, Son, and Spirit.’ These three designations are said to ‘belong to the divine essence throughout eternity.’¹¹ Grenz advanced beyond Pannenberg at this point, understanding that rather than ‘an undifferentiated, solitary oneness... threeness is the way God actually is in his essential being.’ He identified this one God as eternally differentiated within the eternal divine being. The differentiations ‘constitute actual diversity in the one God.’ Yet,

while differentiated ontologically and economically, these trinitarian persons ‘comprise a unity,’ the divine being and essence, which nevertheless ‘entails a diversity.’¹² The divine essence shows itself in the love that binds the trinitarian members together in their very subsistence as the one God whose unity ‘is nothing less than the self-dedication of the trinitarian persons to each other.’¹³ This reciprocal self-dedication of the trinitarian members is the love that builds the unity of the one God.

Grenz looked to both Eastern and Western positions in the *filioque* controversy, each postulating ‘two eternal movements within the one divine reality which give rise to the three persons.’ He affirmed the West’s stronger basis for understanding the eternal inner life of God, whose foundation lies in the relationship between Father and Son, which relationship in turn *is* the Spirit. Yet Grenz also commended the East for the Father’s priority in both eternal movements, in the eternal generation constituting first and second person which then leads to the third.¹⁴

Grenz declared that the statement ‘God is love’ is the foundational ontological assertion about the divine essence, and therefore the foundational attribute of God.¹⁵ As late as January 2005, he continued to affirm that love is ‘the central and only true attribute of God.’ As such, love is relational and ‘requires subject and object between whom emerges a bond.’ According to Grenz, this inner-trinitarian love also maintains God’s freedom, since if God were solitary oneness he would need the world as the object of divine love. But Grenz’s doctrine of the Trinity affirmed Father as subject and Son as object of divine love, who is the Holy Spirit.¹⁶ Ultimately, then, all descriptions of God’s attributes are attempts at describing his fundamental character as love—i.e., God in relationship.¹⁷

Since, for Grenz, questions about God’s essence began with intratrinitarian relations, he ventured to affirm that the ‘traditional discussion of God as a being is no longer helpful.’ This was, in part, a response to postmodernism, but he also meant that theological descriptions of divine reality do not refer to a God ‘beyond’ the three persons. Instead, ‘in describing God we are describing precisely the Father, Son, and Spirit in their eternal relations.’¹⁸ Grenz’s point was later illuminated in *Beyond Foundationalism* (2001),¹⁹ a methodological

work where he exercised dependence upon Pannenberg, who was critical of the theological tradition from Augustine to Barth, arguing that ‘by viewing the trinitarian members as the internal relations within the one God, theologians have made God into a fourth person above the three members of the Trinity’ (p.191).

Grenz moved on, or perhaps reverted, here to an affirmation that ‘only the infinite God is fully person.’ This personhood is displayed to creatures who experience God’s incomprehensibility, will, and freedom when the ultimate divine reality confronts them while actively engaging in human affairs.²⁰ Yet even these, he asserted, were mere ‘attempts to put into human words the ineffable essence of God,’ and in turn were intended to prompt believers to praise God. It is to this end that God relates personally to the world in love, as the triune One whose essence and active character coalesce in a love shared with God’s people.²¹

In his single-volume systematic theology, *Theology for the Community of God*, Grenz considered the revelation and knowledge of God (chapter 1), God as Trinity (chapter 2) and God as relational (chapter 3), concluding the section on theology proper with ‘The Creator God’ (chapter 4). As God is eternal, transcendent, and his nature is love, Grenz understood God as ‘already actualized apart from the world in the eternal relationship between the Father and the Son, which is the Holy Spirit.’ God’s triunity, then, provides the foundation for the freedom of the divine creative act, whose creative principle ‘lies within the divine reality as the second person of the Trinity.’ Thus the basis for the act of creation lies ‘solely in God’s love,’ which is ‘the outflow’ of the intra-trinitarian eternal love relationship.²² Grenz then discussed the differentiated roles of the trinitarian members in creation, roles grounded in the overflow of the Father’s function as ‘ground’ of the trinitarian life. Father and Son are both spoken of as the ‘goal’ of creation, although the Son ‘exemplifies the proper relation of creation to the Creator.’ Finally, the ‘the dynamic [of love] that binds the Father and the Son—the [personal] power of their relationship—is the Holy Spirit... likewise the essence of God, namely, love... by means of which all things exist.’²³

This marks Grenz’s explication of God’s being as he began to pick up the ‘social Trinity’ theme. The idea (not merely the term) continued

to appear in subsequent works,²⁴ though with less significance where Grenz was not directly expounding trinitarian dogma but was simply working from it. In *The Moral Quest* (1997) he continued using the same trinitarian themes and language. With reference to 1 John 4:8, 16, Grenz stated that because God is triune, the divine reality already comprehends both love's subject and object—both lover and beloved—as well as the love they share. Consequently the essence of God lies in the relationship between the Father and the Son (love), a relationship concretized as the personal Holy Spirit, who is the essence of the one God (John 4:24).²⁵

While the social theme continued here, more significant is the thematic search for a transcendent base for the human ethical ideal, which Grenz located in the concept of *imago Dei* (the image of God).²⁶ This theme increasingly became the central premise for Grenz's entire constructive programme,²⁷ and was later employed with a high level of innovation in his volume on trinitarian anthropology, *The Social God and the Relational Self* (2001). This major exploratory work largely assumed that 'God is best viewed as the social Trinity.' Citing Ted Peters, Grenz noted that 'the idea of person-in-relationship seems to be nearly universally assumed.'²⁸ Therefore Grenz worked *from* this basis rather than *on* it, which was not insignificant for his ultimate move away from it. He took the same position in his 2004 essay, 'Jesus as the *Imago Dei*', sketching the twentieth-century development of doctrines of the Trinity and published less than a year before his death. There, however, he asserted that 'the triumph of relationality has by no means been complete,' as there was need to move beyond the trend of the reigning consensus to 'a more appropriate perspective from which to understand the connection between the diversity and unity of God.'²⁹

In Grenz's use of the social trinitarian theme so far, it seems that his interest in the social Trinity may have quite simply been the result of an honest employment of his sources for theology (scripture, tradition and culture), like a pilot following the navigational instruments when not able to see clearly. In this way Grenz moved forward on his journey toward a comprehensive trinitarian ontology. And in his employment of the social Trinity, it seems that more was assumed than asserted,

articulated, or argued for.³⁰ Meanwhile areas of confusion mounted. At least one feature remained consistently part of his construction—the re-materialization of Pannenberg’s conflated reading of the description of the Spirit, both as the love relation between Father and Son and as the Person who shares love with them, which Grenz vigorously utilized. Yet he was explicit about wanting to develop the social Trinity concept beyond Pannenberg.³¹ He was not uncritical of any social trinitarian construct (see his survey of the recent trinitarian canvas, *Rediscovering the Triune God*, 2004). Grenz was highly committed (unlike many recent social Trinitarians) to drawing more intentionally from the Western tradition, and he found, again with his 2004 volume, a more significant role for the doctrine of divine transcendence.

BEYOND THE ‘SOCIAL TRINITY’

While more detail could be given about Grenz’s journey from enthused social trinitarianism to a movement beyond the social Trinity,³² one of the most illuminating scenarios occurred with Grenz’s reading of Colin Gunton, as seen in earlier drafts of the outline proposal for the survey of twentieth-century trinitarian developments, *Rediscovering the Triune God* (2004). Gunton was one of the recent leading English-speaking systematic theologians working with a social model of the Trinity. Gunton’s innovative work, seeking to develop an ontology built on God’s triunity, was well-known.³³ In a total of nine documented outline drafts for the book, ranging from 4 January 2002 to 22 August 2003, Gunton figured prominently in all but the last two. In the first draft Grenz allocated the final main chapter to ‘Colin Gunton: Solving the Problem of the One and the Many.’ In subsequent drafts 2-7, however, Gunton was linked with other significant contributors to the resurgence, never having as prominent a place as in the first draft. Often Gunton was linked with T.F. Torrance (see drafts 2, 3, and perhaps 4, where Grenz intended to ‘mention Torrance’ during his exposition of Gunton); once the outline shifted from individuals to an overarching thematic approach, Gunton was placed with Zizioulas in three drafts: ‘The Retrieval of the Three Persons’ (draft 4, 15 August 2002); ‘The Triumph of the

Cappadocians' with LaCugna and Zizioulas (draft 5, 30 October 2002); and 'The Triumph of Relationality: The Turn Toward the East' (draft 6, 1 November 2002). Gunton was featured with Elizabeth Johnson and Balthasar in the final chapter of draft 7, entitled, 'Return to the Immanent Trinity' (7 November 2002), after which he did not feature again in the outline at all. He was completely absent from the eighth (12 July 2003) and ninth (22 August 2003) proposal drafts.³⁴

Ultimately Gunton received a rather insignificant role in Grenz's survey, yet Grenz never indicated the reason for this change. Colin Gunton died on 6 May 2003, but this did not affect the significance of his work. Perhaps a factor was Grenz's own deep commitment to the systematic enterprise. He had been looking forward to the systematic theology that never came from Gunton. Or perhaps more significant might have been the properly conceived trinitarian ontology that the systematic approach, especially Gunton's, might have yielded. Perhaps Grenz was turned off by Gunton's well-known sustained polemical attack on the 'Western theological tradition' and especially Augustine?³⁵ Coupled with this was Grenz's decreasing interest in the 'social Trinity' for the furtherance of his construction, along with problems in Zizioulas's work³⁶ and the stream of scholarship Zizioulas deeply affected, and perhaps even directed. All this may have caused Grenz to question Gunton's project. With the shift in his conception of twentieth-century developments (seen in his proposed outline draft of early November 2002), where 'the return to the immanent Trinity' was the final feature in the recent trinitarian saga, Gunton's role completely faded from Grenz's purview. In the published version of *Rediscovering the Triune God*, Gunton received cursory mention in a mere four sentences of the entire book.³⁷

Consistent with this, as Grenz's explorations progressed in and around *The Matrix of Christian Theology* series, with fastidious revision occurring before and during the construction of volume 2, he began to move him beyond the so-called 'social Trinity.' As late as 2003 he displayed ambiguity when using 'relationality' and 'community' synonymously regarding the triune God.³⁸ The next year, however, with the trinitarian survey standing as the prequel to *The Matrix* volume on

theology proper, Grenz's final emphasis was on transcendence, which he found progressively displayed in the works of the last notable theologians of the twentieth century. Increasingly Grenz was leaning, theologically, Westwards. He never left the *filioque*. He considered that a number of contemporary social trinitarians were flying dangerously close to collapsing God into creation's course. Grenz's posthumously published exploration of the divine being virtually neglected the social Trinity altogether.³⁹ He stopped using the term for his own constructions shortly after his 2001 publications, although his conception of a relational model of the Trinity remained.⁴⁰ Indeed, the three proponents of transcendence in Grenz's 2004 survey (Elizabeth Johnson, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Thomas Torrance) were all commonly understood as developing some kind of relational trinitarianism,⁴¹ but with different emphases from previous advocates of divine relationality.⁴² Grenz continued to speak of God as 'the divine community characterized by love,'⁴³ but in the last decade of the twentieth century and the early twenty-first century his understanding of divine relationality moved toward greater particularity than his earlier approach.

CONCLUSION

What is clear from the above survey is that the 'social Trinity' had a surging appearance in Grenz's writings, followed by a steady employment, and then a notable paucity. Grenz's model was in flux. He was working towards a better conception that aimed to take the very best from the relational turn in trinitarian theology. No social trinitarian thinker escaped his criticism at various points. His aim was to integrate the insight of others into a much better trinitarian ontology that would more effectively present the gospel message in the contemporary context. He aimed for this as a construction that would be solidly informed by scripture whilst holding Jesus Christ at the centre. He intended rigorous exegesis and robustly theological readings of the Bible to inform his construction, which was to remain radically Jesus-centred. He therefore never moved away from the *personal* relationship that God entered into with humans in Christ. This was perhaps the hallmark theme

of twentieth-century evangelicalism. It seems to be the reason for the increasing *imago Dei* theme, especially in Grenz's later work, which seemed to be driven by an explicit Jesus-centred trinitarian theology.

Therefore, rather than acknowledging Grenz as one of the recent leading social trinitarian thinkers, it is more appropriate to acknowledge him as a thoroughly evangelical, unabashedly Baptist, trinitarian innovator. His principal aim was to enunciate a trinitarian theology that would hold out for the world the hope inherent in the triune God's action in and for creation. For Grenz, this is displayed equally in the Spirit-inspired pages of scripture and in the face of Jesus Christ who is himself revealed by the Spirit speaking through scripture. Grenz's attentive reading of scripture sought to dislodge the gospel's articulation from epistemologies that he deemed restrictive and instead to read in ways conducive to more appropriate, rigorous exegesis - reading of scripture that aimed to hear 'the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.'⁴⁴ Grenz was an acute reader of theological developments, which themselves indicated potential ways in which the Spirit speaks to the church in the present situation, and he was eager to build on earlier work. Grenz's innovation took him through social trinitarianism, but did not leave him there as he sought more faithfully to articulate the gospel of the triune God in his own day.

- 1 See J. Scott Horrell, 'Toward a Biblical Model of the Social Trinity: Avoiding Equivocation of Nature and Order,' *JETS* 47 (2004), p. 404n17; Roger E. Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming: The Postconservative Approach to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), pp. 231-33; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, 'The Triune God of the Gospel,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, ed. T. Larsen and D.J. Treier (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), p. 27; and Paul M. Collins, *The Trinity: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2008), p. 32. This was perceived to have been influenced by Cappadocian trinitarianism, John Zizioulas's communion ontology, or Pannenberg's social model of the Trinity.
- 2 See Alister McGrath, 'Trinitarian Theology,' in *Where Shall My Wond'ring Soul Begin? The Landscape of Evangelical Piety and Thought*, ed. M.A. Noll and R.F. Thiemann (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 52-55; and Jason S. Sexton, *Evangelicals and the Trinity: Tracing the Return to the Center of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, 2013), forthcoming.
- 3 See Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 471; *The Moral Quest: Foundations of Christian Ethics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997), p. 271; and Jason S. Sexton, 'Stanley Grenz's Ecclesiology: Telic and Trinitarian,' *Pacific Journal of Baptist Research* 6 (

- 2010), pp. 23-25. See the Baptist distinctive of Christocentrism in Nigel G. Wright, *Free Church, Free State: The Positive Baptist Vision* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), pp. 14-15.
- 4 For another Baptist trinitarian innovation, see Paul S. Fiddes in *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2000), 34-50, 78-85.
- 5 See Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, pp. 72, 76, 78, 80, 101, 112, 187, 305, 350, 483, 489, 501.
- 6 Stanley J. Grenz, *Sexual Ethics: An Evangelical Perspective*, rev. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), p. 48.
- 7 This is explicitly stated in Stanley J. Grenz, 'The Irrelevancy of Theology: Pannenberg and the Quest for Truth,' *Calvin Theological Journal* 27/2 (November 1992), p. 311.
- 8 Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), pp. 186-87. Here Grenz cited Augustine, *De trinitate*, 15.17.27-29, 31; and 15.19.37. For an exposition on Augustine's point, see Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 251-72.
- 9 Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, p. 71. As above, here he also cites Augustine, *De trinitate*, 15.17.27-29, 31; and 15.19.37.
- 10 Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, pp. 60-62.
- 11 *Ibid.*, pp. 65-67.
- 12 *Ibid.* See also Grenz's later designation, that if God were 'an undifferentiated unity, the incarnation would unavoidably link the deity with the fate of the world in some mythological sense,' in Stanley J. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), p. 197.
- 13 Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, pp. 68-69.
- 14 *Ibid.*, pp. 70-72.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 72. This does not posit love as an immaterial substance apart from God, but maintaining God as transcendent, whereas love is merely descriptive of the eternal God. See also Stanley J. Grenz, *The Named God and the Question of Being* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), pp. 335-40.
- 16 Stanley J. Grenz, 'What Does It Mean to Be Trinitarian in Doctrine?' from 'What Does it Mean to be Trinitarians?' Pt 1, Bible and Theology Lectureship, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, MO, 18 January 2005 (unpublished), pp. 2-3.
- 17 Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, pp. 74-77.
- 18 *Ibid.*, pp. 77, 80.
- 19 Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).
- 20 Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, pp. 84-85, 87. While it may seem that Grenz is articulating Hegel's notion of person, the position clearly belongs to Grenz, as seen in his lecture, 'What Does It Mean to Be Trinitarian in Prayer?' from 'What Does it Mean to be Trinitarians?' Part 2, Bible and Theology Lectureship, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, MO, 19 January 2005 (unpublished), pp. 5-6. Here Grenz spoke of the nature of prayer conceived scripturally, addressed to 'the God who remains "Person"... He remains living and sovereign, and confronts as person alive in love and wrath.' This is close to what Grenz borrowed from Zizioulas's reading of the Cappadocians, which defined trinitarian communal ontology thus: 'the three members of the Trinity are "person" precisely because they are persons-in-relationship; that is, their personal identities emerge out of their reciprocal relations,' yielding an attendant ontology

- of personhood accounting for human existence and personhood as 'persons-in-relation after the pattern of the perichoretic divine life disclosed in Jesus Christ' (Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001], p. 332).
- 21 Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, pp. 67, 90-91, 95-97.
- 22 *Ibid.*, pp. 99-101.
- 23 Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, pp. 101-6.
- 24 See the term used in Stanley J. Grenz and Denise Muir Kjesbo, *Women in the Church Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995), p. 155; Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 168; and Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *Who Needs Theology? An Invitation to the Study of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), p. 117. Significant components of Grenz's social Trinity are evinced in Stanley J. Grenz and Roy D. Bell, *Betrayal of Trust: Confronting and Preventing Clergy Sexual Misconduct*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), pp. 71, 106-7; Stanley J. Grenz, *Welcoming But Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), p. 106; and Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-theological Era*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), p. 330.
- 25 Grenz, *Moral Quest*, pp. 284-85.
- 26 *Ibid.*, pp. 238-39. This concept in Grenz's work came to be utilized (1) for his epistemological accessing of the Trinity, via the divine economic actions, and (2) in his trinitarian sketches, which are always open to revision, yet anchored in God's immanent life. This was adopted from other theologians (Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God*, pp. 48, 196, 162, 212, 222), but synthesized in his own terse manner as what might be called the Grenz *grundaxiom*, affirming 'that any truly helpful explication of the doctrine of the Trinity must give epistemological priority to the presence of the trinitarian members in the divine economy but reserve ontological primacy for the dynamic of their relationality within the divine life.' The economic Trinity is prioritized epistemologically while the immanent Trinity is prioritized ontologically (p. 222).
- 27 See Jason S. Sexton, 'The Imago Dei Once Again: Stanley Grenz's Journey Toward a Theological Interpretation of Gen 1:26-27,' *JTI* 4 (2010), pp. 187-206; and see Stanley J. Grenz, 'Jesus as the Imago Dei: Image-of-God Christology and the Non-Linear Linearity of Theology,' *JETS* 47 (2004), pp. 617-28.
- 28 Ted Peters, *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), p. 37, cited in Grenz, *The Social God*, p. 5.
- 29 Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God*, p. 163.
- 30 The notion of theological 'consensus' played a significant part in Grenz's work (e.g., see Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, p. 193).
- 31 Grenz, 'The Irrelevancy of Theology,' pp. 310-11
- 32 See Jason S. Sexton, 'The Role of the Doctrine of the Trinity in the Theology of Stanley J. Grenz', PhD thesis, University of St Andrews, 2012, esp. chapters 4-5.
- 33 For a brief statement about Gunton's agenda and how 'more than any other' he was attempting to offer the Christian answer to rival ontologies, see Stephen R. Holmes, "'Something Much Too Plain To Say': Towards a Defence of the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity', *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 43 (2001), pp.151-2.
- 34 These proposals are part of Grenz's unpublished records for the ms., 'Rediscovering the Triune God'.
- 35 See this accounted for in John Webster, 'Systematic Theology after Barth', in *The*

- Modern Theologians*, ed. David F. Ford with Rachel Muers, 3rd edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp.259-60, which may have been a significant factor in the importance Grenz placed on the Western tradition, especially Augustine.
- 36 See the strident argument made for the deep influence of John Zizioulas on Gunton at the British Council of Churches Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine in Stephen R. Holmes, 'Towards the *Analogia Personae et Relationis*: Developments in Gunton's Trinitarian Thinking', in *The Theology of Colin Gunton*, ed. Lincoln Harvey (London: T&T Clark, 2010), pp.39-44.
- 37 Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God*, pp.145-7.
- 38 Stanley J. Grenz, 'The Doctrine of the Trinity: Luxuriant Meadow or Theological Terminus?' *Crux* 39 (2003), p.17. For Grenz, relationality and community would break off into two distinctly separate emphases: (1) relationality, describing the way God is as 'Person', and the way persons are towards one another; (2) community, either referring to God's life *in se* or to God's working in salvation history (Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, pp.67-70) in order to bring about community in the highest sense, in which believers will participate.
- 39 Grenz looked earlier to Moltmann and LaCugna's description of *perichoresis* (Stanley J. Grenz, 'Is God Sexual? Human Embodiment and the Christian Conception of God', *Christian Scholars Review* 28 (1998), p.35 n39; and Grenz, *The Social God*, p.317) to show how the personhood of the three trinitarian persons is relationally determined: 'By avoiding any hint of dividing God into three and yet maintaining the personal distinctions within God, the appeal to perichoresis preserved both the unity of the one God and the individuality of the Trinitarian persons' (Grenz, *The Social God*, p.317). Yet by the 2005 posthumously published *Matrix* volume (Grenz, *The Named God*, pp.320-40), *perichoresis* is not employed at all as the basis for understanding trinitarian oneness.
- 40 The only exception might be in 2005 when Grenz explained that the foundation for the divine purpose of humans living in community as the divine image was akin not to the individualist models of the *imago Dei* but to the communitarian model, whose foundation is 'God as the social Trinity - the divine community characterized by love', with the application being that we 'are the divine image only in community - as we show forth the character of God through our relationships' (Stanley J. Grenz, 'Humanity: Personal Identity and the Quest for Home', Session 2 of 'Getting Back to Basics: Truth, Humanity, Church and Scripture', Critical Concerns Course, Emergent Conference, San Diego, CA, 1 February 2005 [unpublished], pp.5-6). Of course, this communitarian model of the *imago Dei* is only appropriate for Grenz when filled out with the necessary understanding of its eschatological dimension which the present redeemed community anticipates. Significantly, the 'social Trinity' is replaced elsewhere in Grenz's lecture notes for the 2005 Emergent Conference as 'the divine community of love'.
- 41 Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God*, pp.220-1.
- 42 See the discussion in Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God*, pp.132-3.
- 43 See Stanley J. Grenz, 'Church', Session 3 of 'Getting Back to Basics: Truth Humanity, Church and Scripture', p.3, and earlier in 2003 where God, the fellowship of Father, Son and Spirit united together in perfect love, is spoken of as 'community' (Grenz, 'The Doctrine of the Trinity', p.17).
- 44 'The Westminster Confession of Faith', 1.10 in *The Creeds of the Churches*, ed. John H. Leith, 3rd edn (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), p.196, cited in Grenz, *Theology for*

the Community of God, p.380 n2. Grenz went on to argue that ecclesial authority comes from an external principle (the Bible) and an internal one (the witness of the Holy Spirit), that 'Scripture is authoritative in that it is the vehicle

through which the Spirit chooses to speak' (p.380). See 'Word and Spirit in the Anabaptist, Pilgram Marpeck', in Malcolm B. Yarnell III, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2007), pp.82-90.