Copyright Statement

The digital copy of this thesis is protected by the Copyright Act 1994 (New Zealand).

This thesis may be consulted by you, provided you comply with the provisions of the Act and the following conditions of use:

- Any use you make of these documents or images must be for research or private study purposes only, and you may not make them available to any other person.
- Authors control the copyright of their thesis. You will recognise the author’s right to be identified as the author of this thesis, and due acknowledgement will be made to the author where appropriate.
- You will obtain the author's permission before publishing any material from their thesis.

To request permissions please use the Feedback form on our webpage. http://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/feedback

General copyright and disclaimer

In addition to the above conditions, authors give their consent for the digital copy of their work to be used subject to the conditions specified on the Library Thesis Consent Form.
REVISIONING EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY: AN EXPLORATION, EVALUATION AND EXTENSION OF THE THEOLOGICAL METHOD OF STANLEY J. GRENZ

Brian S. Harris
B.Soc.Sc B.Th B.Th(Hons) M.Th

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Theology, The University of Auckland, 2007
ABSTRACT

In spite of the rapid growth of evangelicalism there is a paucity of reflection on its theological method. The transition from modernity to postmodernity, with the accompanying call for a postfoundationalist rather than a foundationalist method, has provided additional challenges to evangelicalism. Canadian theologian Stanley J. Grenz has proposed a model for evangelical theological construction that utilizes scripture, tradition and culture as the sources for theology, and the Trinity, community and eschatology as its focal motifs. He supplements these with the belief that the Spirit guides the church, and that the community of faith will therefore be pneumatologically guided as it communally attempts to discern truth in a changed context. Grenz believes that his theological method moves beyond foundationalism as it appeals to a trio of interacting sources, rather than to the single source of scripture.

In exploring and evaluating Grenz’ theological method, this thesis tests the research proposition “that Stanley Grenz’ theological method effectively revisions evangelical theology.” To ascertain the validity of the proposition, it utilizes four evaluative questions which explore the originality, theological coherence, appropriateness and effectiveness of Grenz’ method for evangelical theology. The application of his model in his text, Welcoming but Not Affirming, serves as a test case to determine the implications of his method.

Concluding that Grenz’ model makes only a modest contribution towards revisioning evangelical theological method, the concluding chapters of the research explore ways to supplement Grenz’ model to allow a stronger affirmation of the research proposition. Utilizing Wolterstorff’s concept of control beliefs, it proposes that Grenz’ model would be more effective if he added a control belief to guide his theological construction, and motivates for adopting the control belief the gospel liberates. In addition, it argues that Grenz’ three focal motifs for theology need to be preceded by the gathering motif of the cross, arguing that if seen outside of this gathering motif, the motifs of Trinity, community and eschatology lack adequate substance.

Noting the often acrimonious context in which theological revisioning takes place, the research ends with a plea for the empowerment of imagination in theological construction.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have supported and encouraged me as I have worked on this research project. Special thanks are due to:

1) My wife Rosemary, and our children Nick, Amy and Jett. They have coped with a husband and father who has been less present than he would have liked to be. They bring great joy into my life.

2) My supervisors, Dr Martin Sutherland and Dr Nicola Hoggard-Creegan. Their wise counsel, enthusiasm and confidence in this project have been a source of encouragement and inspiration. I have learnt much from them. Without them, this project would not have been possible.

3) My work colleagues at the Baptist Theological College of Western Australia. Especial thanks are due to Dr Michael Parsons, Head of the Department of Christian Thought and History at the College, for pointing me towards numerous articles and texts, and for arguing back in a way that helped me to clarify my thinking.

4) Staff at the Carey Baptist Theological College in Vancouver, Canada, for being willing to interact with me about the work of their late colleague, Stan Grenz. Especial thanks to Dr Jonathan Wilson, Grenz’ successor at Carey, for his interest in this project.

5) The School of Theology at the University of Auckland, who have been efficient, courteous and helpful at every stage of this research journey. Their provision of a research grant was also most helpful.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## PART ONE: INTRODUCING THIS RESEARCH, EVANGELICALISM AND THE WORK OF STANLEY J. GRENZ

1. Introductory Considerations  
   1.1 Why this Thesis? A Narrative Introduction  
   1.2 The Goals and Purpose of this Research  
   1.3 About Stanley J. Grenz  
   1.4 Research Proposition and Four Evaluative Questions  
   1.5 Research Method and Outline  
   1.6 Chapter Summary  

2. Exploring Evangelical Theology  
   2.1 Introduction  
   2.2 The Growth of Evangelicalism  
   2.3 Divisions within Evangelicalism  
   2.3.1 Case Study 1: Changes to the Southern Baptist Convention’s ‘The Baptist Faith and Message’  
   2.3.2 Case Study 2: The Attempt to Expel Clark Pinnock from the Evangelical Theological Society  
   2.4 The Debate over the Historical Roots of Evangelicalism  
   2.5 The Struggle to Articulate Evangelicalism’s Characteristics and Theology  
   2.6 Moving Beyond Modernity and Foundationalism: A Current Challenge for Evangelical Theological Method  
   2.7 Chapter Summary  

3. An Exploration of the Work of Stanley J. Grenz  
   3.1 Introduction  
   3.2 Towards Revisioning Evangelical Theology  
   3.3 Exploring Revisioning Evangelical Theology  
   3.4 Towards Theology for the Community of God  
   3.5 Theology for the Community of God  
   3.6 Grenz and Egalitarian versus Complementarian Views on the Role of Women  
   3.7 A Primer on Postmodernism  
   3.8 The Moral Quest  
   3.9 Sexual Ethics and Welcoming but Not Affirming  
   3.10 Renewing the Center  
   3.11 Beyond Foundationalism  
   3.12 The Matrix of Christian Theology  
   3.13 Chapter Summary  

## PART TWO: AN EXPLORATION AND EVALUATION OF THE THEOLOGICAL METHOD OF STANLEY J. GRENZ  

4. An Exploration and Evaluation of Grenz’ Choice and Use of Scripture as a Source for Theology  
   4.1 Introduction  
   4.2 The Relationship Between the Sources of Theology, the Work of the Spirit and the Community of Faith  
   4.3 Scripture as Theology’s Norming Norm  
   4.4 Responses to Grenz’ Views of Scripture  

iv
4.5 Four Evaluative Questions

4.5.1 Does Grenz’ revisioning of the role of scripture make an original contribution to evangelical theological construction?

4.5.2 Does Grenz’ revisioning of the role of scripture reflect a theological method that is coherent and credible?

4.5.3 Does Grenz’ revisioning of the role of scripture contribute to the revisioning of evangelical theology?

4.5.4 Is Grenz’ revisioning of the role of scripture effective?

4.6 Conclusion

5. An Exploration and Evaluation of Grenz’ Choice and Use of Tradition and Culture as Sources for Theology

5.1 Beyond Sola Scriptura

5.2 Tradition as Theology’s Hermeneutical Trajectory

5.3 Culture as Theology’s Embedding Context

5.4 Scripture, Tradition and Culture as Conversation Partners for the Spirit Directed Community

5.5 Four Evaluative Questions

5.5.1 Does Grenz’ use of tradition and culture make an original contribution to evangelical theological construction?

5.5.2 Does Grenz’ use of tradition and culture as theological sources reflect a theological method that is coherent and credible?

5.5.3 Does Grenz’ use of tradition and culture as sources in theological construction contribute to the revisioning of evangelical theology?

5.5.4 Is Grenz’ use of tradition and culture in theological construction effective in revisioning evangelical theology?

5.6 Conclusion

6. An Exploration and Evaluation of Grenz’ Choice and Use of Focal Motifs in Theological Construction

6.1 Introduction

6.2 The Trinity as Theology’s Structuring Motif

6.3 Community as Theology’s Integrative Motif

6.4 Eschatology as Theology’s Orienting Motif

6.5 Four Evaluative Questions

6.5.1 Does Grenz’ use of the three focal motifs make an original contribution to evangelical theological construction?

6.5.2 Does Grenz’ use of the three focal motifs reflect a theological method that is coherent and credible?

6.5.3 Does Grenz’ use of the three focal motifs genuinely revision evangelical theology?

6.5.4 Is Grenz’ use of the three focal motifs effective in revisioning evangelical theology?

6.6 Conclusion

7. Grenz’ Method in Practice: An Exploration and Evaluation of the Use of Grenz’ Method in Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality

7.1 Introduction

7.2 Welcoming but Not Affirming

7.3 General Issues

7.4 Methodological Issues

7.4.1 Scripture

7.4.2 Tradition

7.4.3 Culture
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.4.4</td>
<td>Trinity</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4.5</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4.6</td>
<td>Eschatology</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>Four Evaluative Questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5.1</td>
<td>Does Grenz' method as applied in <em>Welcoming but Not Affirming</em> make an original contribution to evangelical theological construction?</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5.2</td>
<td>Is Grenz' theological method, as applied in <em>Welcoming but Not Affirming</em>, coherent and credible?</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5.3</td>
<td>Does Grenz' method, as reflected in <em>Welcoming but Not Affirming</em> genuinely revision evangelical theology?</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5.4</td>
<td>Is Grenz' method, as applied in <em>Welcoming but Not Affirming</em>, effective in revisioning evangelical theology?</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>PART 3: EXTENDING THE THEOLOGICAL METHOD OF STANLEY J. GRENZ: A CONSTRUCTIVE PROPOSAL</strong></td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Beyond Grenz: Towards a Genuinely Revisioned Evangelical Theology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>Question One</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2.1</td>
<td>Proposal One: Adopt the control belief <em>the gospel liberates</em></td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2.1.1</td>
<td>Rationale for adopting <em>the gospel liberates</em> as a control belief</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2.1.2</td>
<td>Implications of adopting the control belief <em>the gospel liberates</em></td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2.2</td>
<td>Proposal Two: Adopt the cross as theology's gathering motif</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2.2.1</td>
<td>Rationale for adopting the cross as theology's gathering motif</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2.2.2</td>
<td>The cross and convertive piety</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>Question Two and the Embrace of Theological Imagination as a Creative Space</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Conclusion and Summary of Findings</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Summary of findings from four evaluative questions

ABBREVIATIONS

BFM: The Baptist Faith and Message
ETS: Evangelical Theological Society
UFMCC: Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Church

CONVENTIONS FOLLOWED

Apostrophes after z: This most frequently applies to Grenz’ name. In this research the s is not added unless material is being quoted, in which case the decision of the original author is retained.

Bibliography: I have limited myself to works actually cited in this research. While it would have been possible to list literally hundreds of additional texts and articles that have in some way been formative for this project, it is not possible to be fully objective as to where such a record should start or end, so I have opted for the formula of listing only that which is referred to.

Bibliographic style: The Turabian Bibliographic style, as implemented by Endnote 7, is used.

Capitalization: The capitalization of certain terms (e.g. scripture) is discretionary. Where discretionary, capitals are not used in this research unless material is being quoted, in which case the decision of the original author is retained.

Gender inclusive language: Where practical, gender inclusive language is used. While recognising the dangers of ascribing gender to God, the schema of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is followed, rather than alternate suggestions (e.g. Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier). Where material is quoted, the decision of the original author is retained.

Quotations: Quotations of 40 words or longer are indented.