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REVISIONING EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY: AN EXPLORATION, EVALUATION AND EXTENSION OF THE THEOLOGICAL METHOD OF STANLEY J. GRENZ

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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.
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ABBREVIATIONS

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

CONVENTIONS FOLLOWED

Apostrophe s 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.
PART ONE

INTRODUCING THIS RESEARCH, EVANGELICALISM AND THE WORK OF STANLEY J. GRENZ
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTORY CONSIDERATIONS

1.1 WHY THIS THESIS? A NARRATIVE INTRODUCTION

The proposition tested in this research is, "that Stanley Grenz' theological method effectively revisions evangelical theology."

Most research originates from a few key events, observations and ideas. Below I detail something of my journey in arriving at this proposition.

In 1997 I was asked to lecture an "Introduction to Theology" course for undergraduate students at the Bible College of New Zealand. The question of a suitable text arose and I quickly unearthed a few of the tried and trusted tomes of evangelical theology.

There was Millard Erickson's ever popular Christian Theology. Viewed as almost above critique by conservative evangelicals it was a tempting place to both begin and end my search. Detailed and thorough it waltzes through the traditional compendium of systematic theology with ease and grace. But it also has a certain "as it was in the beginning, is now and evermore shall be" air about it. Erickson's conclusions sometimes seem a little too tidy given the complexity of the issues being discussed.

Newer on the market, and into a second edition within a few years, was Alister McGrath's offering. Though also bearing the somewhat unimaginative title Christian Theology, McGrath more modestly acknowledges via his sub title that this is merely An Introduction. While appreciating McGrath's significantly stronger focus on historical theology, the text's excessively light treatment of pneumatology disturbed me. While not convinced by the flourishing new array of texts by Pentecostal theologians, Clark Pinnock's Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy

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1 Millard J. Erickson, Christian Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985).
3 Dealt with as a subsection of "The Doctrine of God" and completed in a little over 9 pages. Ibid., 279-288.
Spirit had persuaded me that no publication as dismissive of the work of the Spirit (however unintentional) would do. 3

Favoured by the more conservative wing of the evangelical movement is Wayne Grudem’s Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine. 6 Its growing popularity suggests that it may well prove to be the successor to Erickson’s Christian Theology. However, Grudem’s definition of systematic theology as “any study that answers the question, ‘What does the whole Bible teach us today?’ about any given topic” and his elaboration that “Systematic theology involves collecting and understanding all the relevant passages in the Bible on various topics and then summarizing their teachings clearly so that we know what to believe about each topic” seems both superficial and dated. 7 Evangelical theology has made progress since the days of the supposedly scientific propositionalism encouraged by “The Princeton Theologians,” so this seems a regressive step. 8 Although it is acceptable to debate and dispute the appropriate sources of theology, any approach that finds no real place for tradition, culture or context, seems naïve and likely to be unwittingly influenced by the very sources it denies.

And so I came to Stanley J. Grenz’ Theology for the Community of God. 9 The title sounded a little different for what at first glance seemed a fairly routine compendium of theology written from an evangelical perspective. Closer inspection suggested that this work was in a different category to its contemporaries. Grenz clearly believes that theology should have an integrating motif, and flowing from both his trinitarian understanding of God and his awareness of people as imago Dei has come the linking theme of community. At its simplest, Grenz suggests that because God is a triune being living in the perfect community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, those who would reflect the image of God will also live together in community in a way that serves as a sign and pointer to the eschatological future of God. His eschatological emphasis shaped by both Jürgen Moltmann and more particularly his doctoral mentor, Wolfhart Pannenberg, sees the work both point toward God’s telos for humanity, as well as back from the telos to inform present practice.

6 Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994).
7 Ibid., 22.
8 For a brief discussion of this approach, see Stanley J. Grenz, Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 70-80. For a longer treatment, with selections from their writing, see Mark A. Noll, ed., The Princeton Theology 1812-1921: Scripture, Science, and Theological Method from Archibald Alexander to Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001; reprint, 2001).
Thus, as he explains more fully in his later co-authored publication *Beyond Foundationalism*, the Trinity serves as the structuring motif for his theology, community as his integrating motif and eschatology as his orienting motif.\(^9\)

In an article comparing the theological method used in the systematic theologies of Grenz,\(^11\) Grudem\(^12\) and Garrett,\(^13\) John Morrison while predictably noting that his “own theological conclusions would set most closely with what Grudem says” acknowledges that, “One may not agree with all aspects of what Grenz includes and concludes theologically, but his methodology makes his work the one truly systematic evangelical theology available today.”\(^14\) Morrison bases his conclusion on Grenz’ consistent use of the integrating motif of community in his theology. He notes that, “Grenz’ community theme and narrative communitarian method are centrally and methodologically presented in his doctrine of God, particularly God’s triunity.”\(^15\)

In short, my search for a suitable text for students embarking on their study of theology had alerted me to the writings of Stanley J. Grenz.

My interest was furthered when I began a similar search for a suitable text for an introductory course in ethics I was due to lecture at Carey Baptist College, Auckland.\(^16\) Again, Grenz surfaced as a key thinker. His *The Moral Quest: Foundations of Christian Ethics* both impressed me and served as a helpful resource.\(^17\)

However, it was when I read Grenz’ *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century* that I sensed that I was onto something a little more significant than a fresh

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11 Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*.
12 Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*.
14 John D. Morrison, "Trinity and Church: An Examination of Theological Methodology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40, no. 3 (1997): 454. I suggest that the conclusion is predictable as Morrison is an associate professor of theological studies at Liberty University. While tidy classification of institutions can be trite, Liberty is usually considered part of the “fundamentalist” block.
15 Ibid.: 456.
16 Not to be confused with Carey Theological College, Vancouver, where Grenz was the Pioneer McDonald Professor of Theology and Ethics. The fact that both are Baptist Colleges with similar names did, however, seem rather novel.
voice or a slightly modified approach. In what seems an accurate summary, Grenz describes *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* as “my programmatic book.” In it, he outlines an approach to theology that is both true to its evangelical heritage and relevant to the postmodern era. He calls for a “revisioning” within the evangelical tradition of seven key areas:

1. Evangelical identity
2. Evangelical spirituality
3. The theological task
4. The sources for theology
5. Biblical authority
6. Theology’s integrative motif
7. The Church

Many of his ideas excited and enthused me. Often they seemed embryonic and capable of creative and significant development. Whilst many were not new, and at times better articulated by other authors, the overall cluster of concerns together with Grenz’ conviction that theology revisioned in this way would be acceptable to evangelicals and that it would offer them a trajectory into the future, marked this as a significant work.

I asked myself some of the key questions that undergird this research. Has Stanley Grenz revisioned evangelical theology? Is his revisioning likely to be effective? What is the basis for his revisioning? If his proposals do not adequately revision evangelical theology, would it be possible to extend his thinking or clarify his proposals in such a way that the revisioned theology would be more effective? Slowly the research proposition “that Stanley Grenz’ theological method effectively revisions evangelical theology,” was birthed.

I conceptualised a research project that would explore and evaluate the thought of Stanley Grenz. In essence it would be about that brand of theology going under the broad heading of “evangelical” and its attempt to revision itself into a position of relevance for a changed context, more specifically, a postmodern context. If the exploration and evaluation led to the conclusion

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19 In Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era*, 8.
20 Even at this early stage I suspected that it was related to his theological method, but was also aware of the interplay between method and changed context. Much of his work addresses the need for a new paradigm as a result of the shift from modernity to postmodernity. To the extent that his method assigns a prominent role to context, the two are not mutually exclusive.
that the research proposition could not be upheld, I could then see if by extending or clarifying Grenz' proposals an affirmation of the proposition could be endorsed. In the light of this, two possible titles self selected, both springing from Grenz' book, albeit with a modified sub title: "Revisioning Evangelical Theology: An Exploration and Evaluation of the Theological Method of Stanley J. Grenz," or, if required, "Revisioning Evangelical Theology: An Exploration, Evaluation and Extension of the Theological Method of Stanley J. Grenz." As the research progressed, it became clear that the second title would be more appropriate.

A final narrative note is needed. When I commenced this research Grenz was alive, and willing to interact with me about his work. His emails were enthusiastic and affirming of this project. I was due to meet with him in April 2006. He died suddenly of a brain haemorrhage on the 12 March 2005, aged 55. He was at a productive and creative stage of his career. It was with a deep sense of sadness that I recognized the need to refocus my research from interacting with a living and prolific theologian, to having to evaluate the work of a theologian whose project had abruptly been brought to an end.

1.2 THE GOALS AND PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH

This research has three main goals.

The first is to explore evangelical theological method. The rapid growth of evangelicalism justifies this examination. Evangelicals are now the largest numerical block within Protestantism. In addition, Pentecostalism, another rapidly growing movement within Christianity, is closely linked to (though not identical to) the evangelical movement. Because evangelicalism has only recently "come of age," critical examination and critique of its method is underrepresented in theological research.21 This research aims to make a contribution toward redressing this imbalance. In addition, the examination of a specific method helps to establish criteria by which the theological method of other evangelical theologians can be evaluated.

21 After noting that "Three religious movements in the world today can claim to be global faiths: Roman Catholicism, Islam and evangelicalism," Lewis goes on to add that it is "surprising that the evangelical movement is so little studied and poorly understood." Donald M. Lewis, "Introduction," in Christianity Reborn: The Global Expansion of Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century, ed. Donald M. Lewis (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), 1.
If evangelical theology is to dialogue with other branches of Christianity, it needs to be aware of the particular contribution it can make. Historically the movement has seen itself as embattled and threatened, and has consequently either retreated into its own ghetto, or, when it has emerged, has tended to adopt a defensive stance. This research helps to ascertain the kind of revisioned evangelical theological method that will be required if evangelical theologians are to make a contribution to the broader ecumenical dialogue.

This is especially pertinent as evangelical theology appears to be at a crossroad. This is partly as a result of its changed context, which relates both to its numerical strength and to the changes resulting from the shift from modernity to postmodernity. By highlighting a theological method constructed with this changed context in mind, the research aims to facilitate reflection on issues that arise from this transition.

The second major goal is to explore evangelical theological method through the contribution of a particular evangelical theologian, Stanley Grenz. Though evangelicalism has been a growing force within Christianity it has produced few theologians whose work is sufficiently rigorous or comprehensive to justify serious research. Grenz is one of the exceptions to this statement, and it is therefore important that his work receives attention.

Although Grenz is one of evangelicalism's most creative voices, his work has only recently started to attract significant attention. Until now the focus has been on evaluating and critiquing specific aspects of his work. There is a need to review his work holistically. While the focus of

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22 The old adage is that attack is the best form of defence, and this perhaps explains the somewhat aggressive and negative tone evangelicals have sometimes adopted when talking about other understandings of Christianity. However, Hunter suggests that a “de-ghettoization of evangelical theology” is now taking place. James D. Hunter, Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 46.


24 Thus Stackhouse complains: “Evangelicals can and do explore Ruether, or Hartshorne, or Zizioulas, or Gutiérrez in order to enrich their evangelicalism. But which liberals, neo-orthodox, Roman Catholics, or what-have-you take the evangelical tradition seriously as a resource even to enrich their own perspectives?” John G. Stackhouse, "Evangelical Theology Should Be Evangelical," in Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method, ed. John G. Stackhouse (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 40.

25 For example, while Reclaiming the Center is largely a critique of Grenz' theology, the strong focus is on his Renewing the Center. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor, eds., Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), Grenz, Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era.
this research is on Grenz' theological method and therefore intentionally focuses on works which clearly reflect his method, the scope is wider, and also incorporates observations on Grenz' development as a theologian. The literature review provides a broad sweep of Grenz' work, thereby establishing a useful base from which further research can be birthed.

Because of Grenz' sudden death in March 2005, his theological project, though clearly conceptualized, has been left incomplete. An overview of his work and method helps highlight questions raised by his work that he had insufficient time to answer. This research brings to light both the gains made by his approach, and the issues left unresolved.

The third goal is to further the quest for a revisioned evangelical theology. The focus on Grenz' theological method, coupled with the attempt to ascertain if his method successfully revisions evangelical theology, unearths a range of issues that need to be addressed by evangelical theologians. Having used Grenz as a window into understanding evangelical theological method, the research aims to supplement Grenz' model in such a way that a contribution towards a genuinely revisioned evangelical theology is made.

In summary, this research aims to investigate evangelical theological method by exploring the method of a particular evangelical theologian, Stanley Grenz, and to utilize the findings to suggest a model for evangelical theological construction.

1.3 ABOUT STANLEY J. GRENZ

At this stage it seems reasonable to provide some background on the theologian being researched. Five streams converge when one tries to come to an understanding of what made Grenz who he was. The first is a warm hearted piety, the second a deep understanding of theology, the third a profound commitment and insight into the local church, the fourth, a commitment to engage with contemporary culture and the fifth, a resurgence of interest in theology within the broader Baptist community.

26 Unless otherwise stated, information in section 1.3 has been sourced from Grenz' website, www.stanleyjgrenz.com, (accessed 25 November 2003).
Stanley Grenz was born on the 7th of January 1950, in Alpena, Michigan, the youngest of the three children of Rev. Richard and Mrs Clara Grenz. He readily acknowledges the impact that the warm-hearted pietism found in the association of Baptist Churches of which his father was a pastor, as well as his father’s relationally based theology, made on his thinking. In his article *Concerns of a Pietist with a PhD*, Grenz recalls eighteen people standing as a sign of their commitment to a challenge he had made in a sermon, and being so moved by the response that he was unable to lead the dedicatory prayer. He writes:

This incident was a vivid reminder to me of how deeply steeped I am in the warm-hearted, relational, pietistic conception of the Christian faith that I saw as a child in my father’s ministry and imbued in the churches he served.27

His upbringing reflects the conservative values and attitudes characteristic of evangelicalism in the 1950’s and 1960’s. They help explain the somewhat ambivalent attitude he had to his own theological project. Though hailed as the theologian best representing the Emergent church movement,28 Olson claims that Grenz was deeply concerned at “their all too easy and quick abandonment of theological tradition in favour of theological or ecclesiastical innovation” and notes the traditionalist side to Grenz.29 Grenz wrote that the reason he classified himself as a “postmodern evangelical” was not by choice but because the postmodern context was the one in which he found himself.30

He graduated with a B.A. (with distinction) from the University of Colorado at Boulder in 1973, having majored in philosophy and mathematics. In 1976 he received the M.Div. (with honours) from Denver Seminary (then known as the Conservative Baptist Theological Seminary), and the D.Theol. (magna cum laude) from the University of Munich in 1980 for a dissertation entitled “Isaac Backus – Puritan and Baptist: His Place in History, his Thought, and their Implications for Modern Baptist Thought.” His supervisor for the dissertation was the noted German theologian, Wolfhart Pannenberg, and many of Grenz’ earlier articles focus on the work of his Doktorvater.

30 "The Spirit invites us to engage in the theological enterprise cognizant of the context in the midst of which Christ calls us to be his people, which for many of us is the emerging postmodern society. In this limited sense and if defined in this manner, I would count myself a postmodern evangelical." Stanley J. Grenz, "An Agenda for Evangelical Theology in the Postmodern Context," *Diadaskalia* 9, no. 2 (1998): 2.
During this period Grenz says that he gravitated toward a more cognitive approach to faith and theology as an intellectual discipline, without completely losing touch with the underlying pietism ingrained from childhood. He cites two events as being especially significant in triggering his embracing of community as the key integrating motif for theology. In the mid to late 1980’s he read Robert Bellah’s study on the effects of individualism on American culture and was intrigued by the issues it raised. In 1987-1988 he returned as a Fulbright Scholar to Munich, Germany, to write a book on his Doktorvater, Pannenberg. During this time he became uneasy about the “scholastic” approach to theology, feeling it lacked true piety. He returned to America determined to incorporate into his teaching and writing the pietistic aspects of faith and to especially highlight the importance of corporate relationality. This, coupled with an awareness that the triune God lives in a perfect community of Father, Son and Spirit, became the motivation for his motif of “community.”

Grenz was ordained at the Northwest Baptist Church, Denver, Colorado, on the 13th June 1976. Though the bulk of his career was spent as an academic, he served in several local church contexts, in positions that included being youth director, assistant pastor, interim pastor and pastor. The strong link to the local church reflected his commitment to his claim that theology is in the first instance “for the community of God.” Indeed, Grenz sang in the choir at his local church and occasionally played either the guitar or trumpet in the church worship team, an arrangement aided by his wife Edna (Sturhahn) Grenz working at the church as the Minister of Worship. He dedicated his book The Social God and the Relational Self to the Senior Pastor of his church, to mark the occasion of his retirement.

32 Coupling Bellah’s insights together with the Trinity helped to ensure that Grenz’ motivation was not purely anthropocentric, but initially flowed from a theocentric conviction. See Stephen Ibbotson, "Community and Relationships: A Theological Take. An Interview with Stanley Grenz," Talk: The Mainstream Magazine 1, no. 3 (2002).
33 From 1980-1981, Adjunct Professor of Theology at the University or Winnipeg and Winnipeg Theological Seminary; from 1981-1990, Professor of Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics at North American Baptist Seminary, Sioux Falls; from 1990-2002 Pioneer McDonald Professor of Baptist Heritage, Theology and Ethics at Carey Theological College and Regent College, Vancouver; from 2002-2003 Distinguished Professor of Theology, Baylor University and Truett Seminary, Waco; from 2003 – 2004, Pioneer McDonald Professor of Theology at Carey Theological College, Vancouver.
34 First Baptist Church, Vancouver.
35 The Senior Pastor was Bruce Milne, who though not of Grenz’ stature in academic circles, is a respected and published theologian. Paradoxically Milne’s best know work, Know the Truth, has a decidedly non-postmodern tone and is a good example of the propositional approach to theology that Grenz sees as restrictive. Bruce Milne, Know the Truth: A Handbook of Christian Belief (Leicester: IVP, 1982).
Grenz was also actively involved in the Baptist denomination of which he was part. From 1989-1990 he was president of the National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion, and was significantly involved in the work of the Baptist World Alliance, serving on its ethics commission from 1986-2000, its theological education committee from 1990, and its doctrine and interchurch cooperation commission from 2000 until his death.

Grenz' commitment to interacting with popular culture became something of a hallmark, with audiences anticipating lectures to be interspersed with clips from Star Trek or references to The X-Files or Alanis Morisette. This was consistent with Grenz' selection of culture as the "embedding context" for theology. His article What Does Hollywood have to do with Wheaton? The Place of (Pop) Culture in Theological Reflection elaborates on his stance.

Grenz was well aware of the importance of context in theological construction. An aspect from his own context that helps us to understand his creative theological contribution is the resurgence of interest in theology within the broader Baptist community. Moody writes of the "renaissance of Baptist theology that has been building for decades" while Freeman tracks the factors that led to the emergence of 14 prominent Baptist theologians, all born in the "twenty-something" era. This flourishing of theology amongst Baptists led to the overturn of the stereotypical old joke that "a Methodist is just a Baptist who learned to read" and helped create a climate within Baptist churches where scholarship was valued. This shift in ethos provided a context within which the younger Grenz could embark on his theological studies.

These then are five streams that help us to understand Grenz:

1) His growing up as a pastor's child, being shaped by the warm-hearted piety and depth of relationships he experienced in the churches where his father was pastor.
2) His theological training, which saw an interaction between American conservative evangelical theology and the broader tradition represented by Pannenberg in Munich.
3) His significant involvement in both his local church and denomination.

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36 Grenz and Franke, Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context, 130-166.
4) His commitment to interacting with contemporary culture.
5) The resurgence of interest in theological studies within the Baptist community.

1.4 RESEARCH PROPOSITION AND FOUR EVALUATIVE QUESTIONS

In testing the proposition "that Stanley Grenz' theological method effectively revisions evangelical theology," it is only fair that the criteria used relate back to Grenz' own agenda. This agenda is modestly stated in *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* where Grenz writes that:

The intent of this volume is to spark interest and discussion among thinkers who share with me the label "evangelical" as to how we should rethink key aspects of our theological agenda. Such rethinking – what I have called "revisioning" – needs to articulate the biblical, evangelical vision in a manner that both upholds the heritage we embrace and speaks to the setting in which we seek to live as God’s people and share the good news of the salvation available in Jesus Christ our Lord.  

As Grenz' work developed, the scope of the project broadened and became more ambitious. *Renewing the Center* calls "for a critical appropriation of postmodern insights in the evangelical theological task," while in *Beyond Foundationalism* Grenz and Franke express the hope that they will foster the "type of postmodern and post-divisive theological endeavour anticipated by Murphy." The method devised was intended to find full expression in his proposed six volume *The Matrix of Christian Theology*, two volumes of which were written before his untimely death. 

Given Grenz' broad agenda to devise a theological method appropriate for those who share the label evangelical and yet which could lead to a postmodern and post-divisive theology, it is appropriate to test our research proposition around four key questions which logically flow from the claim "that Stanley Grenz' theological method effectively revisions evangelical theology."

41 Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era*, 21.
Question one: Does Grenz' method make an original contribution to evangelical theological construction?

The thesis proposition suggests that "Stanley Grenz" has effectively revisioned evangelical theology. The implication is that Grenz' work is original and that he is not simply parroting the insights of others. It means that the originality of his thinking must be tested. We must be realistic about this. No theologian operates in a vacuum. We would expect all serious theologians to be influenced by both the theological giants of the past and the present. Indeed, originality in theology is often viewed with suspicion and as a herald of heresy. Calvin's warning against the "lust to fashion constantly new and artificial religions" is memorable. What we need to look for is both continuity and discontinuity of thought. Originality is evident when a theologian's work is usually the same as every other theologian's, but where aspects take a new turn or suggest a new direction. Sometimes it is not that the ideas are new, but that their synthesis is.

In addition, because the thesis is specifically oriented toward the evangelical community, originality could mean "original within this community." If, for example, Grenz is able to make accessible the work of theologians previously overlooked or rejected by the evangelical community, and to incorporate their thought within his own, it would seem reasonable to rate this as making an original contribution to this community.

Question two: Is Grenz' theological method coherent and credible?

The thesis proposition claims that Grenz' "theological method" is effective. While it may seem to be unnecessarily pedantic, it is reasonable to ask if Grenz is a theologian. Some claim that he

45 König speaks of the validity of this approach when he writes of "a certain passivity in the theologian and in theology itself. Theology is not so much creative, original work, as the reproduction of what has already been produced, a reaction to what is already done..." Adrio König, "Theology," in Introduction to Theology, ed. I.H. Eybers, A. König, and J.A. Stoop (Pretoria: NGKB, 1978), 19.
46 Jay Robertson writes, "While some elements of Grenz’s proposal have appeared previously in the writings of various theologians, they have not claimed to be evangelical." Jay T. Robertson, "Evangelicalism's Appropriation of Nonfoundational Epistemology as Reflected in the Theology of Stanley J. Grenz" (PhD, Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002), 184.
abandons theology for sociology.⁴⁸ Has he devised a method that helps one to understand the sociology of evangelical theology, or is his a distinctly theological contribution? This is not an easy question to answer. Increasingly scholars are aware of the interdisciplinary nature of all academic work. Grenz writes on a wide range of topics, and seems as comfortable discussing scientific method as theological method.⁴⁹ He makes extensive use of the social sciences and in his effort to ensure that evangelical theology is relevant to the postmodern condition he frequently interacts with leading postmodern philosophers.

This is not to suggest that Grenz should be criticised for adopting an interdisciplinary approach. To the contrary, such an approach is likely to be a pre-requisite for any theological method attempting to find a place in a postmodern era. Grenz himself suggests that the sources for theological construction should be scripture, tradition and context. We need to see signs of the contribution of each of these sources to conclude that Grenz has met his own standard for theological construction and to assess the theological integrity of Grenz' contribution.

The research proposition focuses on the question of Grenz' theological "method." Grenz develops a method for theological construction that he considers to be appropriate for theological engagement in a postmodern context. The component parts of the method, the overall model constructed, and Grenz' application of his method, therefore all need to be evaluated for their coherence, appropriateness and credibility. We need to look for consistency in the application of his method if we are to conclude that it is coherent and credible. If, for example, he uses the three sources he proposes for theological construction in some instances, but ignores or mutes them in others, that would be inconsistent. It might be credible if he can provide a convincing justification for having done so, but it would raise questions as to the coherence of the method.

The intention of this research is not to embark upon a detailed critique of every theological claim made by Grenz. There are those who, for example, suggest that Grenz' understanding of the Trinity is defective.⁵⁰ While it is tempting to investigate such claims, they will only be followed

⁴⁸ For example, even while largely supportive of Grenz, David Neff expresses surprise that Grenz "is strangely silent on the Bible, yet does not hesitate to turn to sociological theory" and finds it "curious that no attention is paid to the Christian account of how we know what we know about God." David Neff, "Gen-X Apologetics: Passing on the Faith to Those Raised on Star Wars Spirituality," Christianity Today, no. 26 April (1999): 93.
⁴⁹ See e.g. Stanley J. Grenz, "Why Do Theologians Need to Be Scientists?," Zygon 35 (2000).
⁵⁰ See e.g. Peter R. Schemm Jr., "North American Evangelical Feminism and the Triune God: A Denial of Trinitarian Relational Order in the Works of Selected Theologians and an Alternative Proposal" (PhD,
through when they are relevant to the question of the theological method that Grenz proposes. If the argument over detail is not relevant to the broader method being suggested, the claim will not be pursued. Not that this issue is of no relevance. If there is a broad distrust of the detail of Grenz' theological claims, it would be difficult for him to be effective in revisioning a future evangelical theology.

Question three: Does Grenz' method genuinely revision evangelical theology?

The research thesis postulates that Grenz' theological method effectively "revisions evangelical theology." Revisioning is at the heart of Grenz' theological agenda. One of the key works investigated in this research is entitled Revisioning Evangelical Theology, with its bold subtitle suggesting that this work sets A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century. It is a claim that must be investigated. Is this a genuinely revisioned evangelical theology or is it a shuffling of the deck chairs on the Titanic?

Grenz is clear that it is evangelical theology he wishes to revision, and speaks of his loyalty and indebtedness to the movement. However, a critical question is if the theological method he proposes can, with justification, continue to claim to be evangelical. Given that evangelical theologians often create boundaries that define who is "in" and who is "out" of the circle of evangelical truth, it is probable that some will dispute Grenz' claim to be an evangelical. A more fundamental question is not if Grenz is able to revision evangelical theology but if evangelical theology can be revisioned, regardless of the theologian suggesting the revisioning. Underneath lies the question of whether evangelical theology is essentially fixed and static, or if it is capable of being shaped and moulded. An image of continuity and discontinuity is appropriate. To effectively revision evangelical theology Grenz needs to have enough areas of continuity to

Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2001), 118-134. Though Schemm's opposition to an egalitarian understanding of the relationship between the members of the Trinity is itself controversial, it is an example of the way in which distrust of a theological position can grow.

51 Grenz, Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century.
52 Perhaps the analogy is unfair. It is a moot question if evangelical theology in its present form is, like the Titanic, doomed.
53 See Grenz, "Concerns of a Pietist with a Ph.D."
55 Indeed, Don Carson is dismissive of Grenz' attempt to revision an evangelical understanding of the authority of scripture, writing scathingly, "I cannot see how Grenz's approach to Scripture can be called
justify the retention of the label evangelical, while he must also demonstrate sufficient areas of discontinuity to justify the claim that revisioning has taken place.

Question four: Is Grenz’ method effective in revisioning evangelical theology?

The research proposition suggests that Grenz’ revisioning is “effective.” This stands as both an overall claim to be tested (based on the three areas above) while also assessing some additional areas. Some criteria we will use include that:

1) Grenz’ theological method gains broad acceptance within evangelical circles. It is hard to rate his work as effective if it fails to find acceptance within the community he seeks to influence. Effectiveness in this regard could be shown by Grenz’ work often serving as a reference point for evangelical theologians, or by how widely his ideas are disseminated within the evangelical movement, or how often one detects his thinking influencing (acknowledged or unacknowledged) the evangelical movement. Though influence is a reasonable criteria of effectiveness, this could be difficult to establish, if only because Grenz’ contribution is so recent. It will probably only be possible to fully assess his contribution a decade or so after his death. This must be left to another researcher. However, it should be possible to reach some tentative conclusions in this regard.

2) Grenz’ theological method helps to address some of the perceived weaknesses within evangelical theology. In the first instance, these need to be areas that Grenz perceives as weaknesses. It could also include weaknesses identified by others, sometimes outside of the evangelical block.

3) Grenz’ theological method points towards a contextually relevant path for evangelical theology. Two aspects of context will be taken as key criteria, first that the method is appropriate for a postmodern context, and second that it is helpful for the increasingly diverse body of people who attach the label evangelical to their belief system.

These then are the four key evaluative questions that we will pose to test the proposition “that Stanley Grenz’ theological method effectively revisions evangelical theology.”


Postmodern because Grenz repeatedly asserts that this is the context for which he is trying to shape his theology. To cite just one example, in Beyond Foundationalism, Grenz and Franke write: “We hope that our efforts will foster conversation about and participation in the task of theology in a manner that is responsive to the postmodern situation.” Grenz and Franke, Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context, 26-27.
1.5 RESEARCH METHOD AND OUTLINE

Research methodology is not neutral. Padgett summarizes the dilemma when he writes, “All of our knowing arises from our location, our point of view and our cultural context. Even the natural sciences are located in culture, language and history. None of us has a God’s eye view, a ‘view from nowhere.’”57 In light of this, Padgett advocates an epistemological approach that utilizes other perspectives to inform and illuminate areas being investigated. This approach, which he calls “dialectical realism,” intentionally makes use of “contrasting, alternative points of view on that object.”58 Introducing contrasting and alternate points of view presupposes understanding ones own starting point. Kretzschmar has noted that, “While it is doubtful whether it is possible, or even desirable, to abstract oneself from one’s social and theological background, it is important to be aware of it in order to guard against excessive and unavoidable prejudice.”59

The narrative introduction to this research was intentionally designed to signpost my starting point and possible bias. Lecturing at evangelical institutions such as the Bible College of New Zealand and the Carey Baptist Theological College in Auckland, helps to locate me within the evangelical family, though within the Southern rather than the Northern Hemisphere. Elsewhere I have explored the relevance of Grenz’ revised theology for the Australasian (as opposed to North American) context, suggesting that the weakened state of the church in Australasia leads to a receptiveness to a revisioned form of evangelicalism.60 Given these markers, I would identify myself as an evangelical in search of theological alternatives that still fall under the evangelical umbrella. As this is the target audience for whom Grenz writes, I am predisposed to be sympathetic to his approach and project. The fact that both Grenz and I align ourselves with the Baptist denomination provides another area of overlap likely to incline this research in an affirming direction.61 The safeguard is to intentionally interact with alternate responses to Grenz, primarily from within the evangelical tradition, but also to some from without.

58 Ibid.: 185.
The focus on voices within the evangelical community is justified by the research proposition, "that Stanley Grenz' theological method effectively revisions evangelical theology." This is a study about an evangelical (and to a lesser extent, Baptist) theologian and about evangelical theology. It is undertaken by an evangelical living in the Southern Hemisphere in the early years of the third millennium. It analyses the likely acceptance by and appropriateness of this method for evangelicals. While voices from outside this community should be heard, it is appropriate to privilege those within this tradition. The "dialectical realism" called for by Padgett should be met by listening to and exploring a range of views, whilst not losing sight of the audience targeted by Grenz' theological method.

Inherent in the thesis that Stanley Grenz' theological method effectively revisions evangelical theology are three areas for study, namely Grenz' theological method, evangelical theology and the particular revisioning of evangelical theology suggested by Grenz. In section 1.4 I suggest that the four key evaluative questions to be used to assess the validity of the thesis proposition are:

1) Does Grenz' method make an original contribution to evangelical theological construction?
2) Is Grenz' theological method coherent and credible?
3) Does Grenz' method genuinely revision evangelical theology?
4) Is Grenz' method effective in revisioning evangelical theology?

The research proposition is investigated in three distinct phases.

Part one is exploratory. This opening chapter begins by introducing the research proposition, the theologian studied and by providing an outline of the method and direction of the investigation. Chapter 2 explores the context in which Grenz practices theology. As Grenz' work cannot be understood outside of the community of faith which has shaped and nurtured him, and for which he clearly intends to write, it is important that we outline some of the key issues facing evangelical theology. This is a valid area for study on its own, so it has been necessary to be highly focused in the coverage provided. Material is prioritised according to its helpfulness in

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61 Grenz self-identifies himself by writing: "My entire life, then, I have seen myself as a Baptist and as an evangelical." Grenz, Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century, 10.
62 From time to time throughout the research the relevance of the "Baptist" part of Grenz' label is explored. Myles Werntz has helped unpack some of the particularly Baptist aspects of Grenz' contribution. Myles Werntz, "Stan Grenz among the Baptists," Princeton Theological Review 12, no. 1 (2006).
investigating the research question. This usually involves investigating points of dispute within the movement, which may give the impression that the movement is highly fractious and more divided than it actually is. Chapter 3 surveys Grenz' written work. Though a broad coverage is provided, the focus is on articles and books that either directly or implicitly impinge on the question of theological method.\textsuperscript{64} As Grenz is a prolific author, it has been necessary to be selective as to which articles and books to review.

The review of Grenz' written work concludes Part 1 of the research, which is devoted to the initial exploration of the research proposition and its context.

Part 2 begins the exploration and evaluation of Grenz' method. The four key criteria of originality, theological and methodological coherence and credibility, genuine revisioning of evangelical theology and effectiveness, are the chief evaluative tools. In evaluating Grenz we examine some of the key themes that emerge from his theology, particularly those that are closely related to theological method. We also examine the impact of Grenz' thought on the evangelical community, and assess the reviews of his work and the level of interaction with his thought.

Chapter 4 begins the evaluative process by exploring the use Grenz makes of the first of the three sources he suggests for theological construction, scripture. Grenz' proposals regarding scripture have proved controversial, and responses to his work are examined. The chapter closes by posing the four key questions used to test the validity of the thesis proposition as they relate to Grenz' use of scripture as a source for theological construction.

Chapter 5 explores the remaining two sources Grenz proposes for theological construction, tradition and culture. Grenz' understanding of the way in which tradition and culture can serve as conversation partners in theological construction is examined, as are responses to Grenz' proposal. The four key questions are used to test the validity of the thesis proposition as they relate to Grenz' use of tradition and culture in theological construction.

Chapter 6 explores the three focal motifs Grenz suggests for theology, namely Trinity, community and eschatology. It is Grenz' handling of these focal motifs that is of interest, as is the

\textsuperscript{63} Padgett: 185.
\textsuperscript{64} While I would not dispute that all theological statements have implicit methodological assumptions, there is a limit to what can be covered with a 100 000 word restraint.
response his proposals have elicited. The chapter concludes with the four key questions as they relate to Grenz’ use of focal motifs in his theological construction.

To enhance the comparison of Grenz to other evangelical theologians, in chapters 4, 5 and 6 I compare Grenz’ treatment of the relevant topic to that of three other significant evangelical theologians in their major work on systematic theology, viz Erickson, Grudem and McGrath. While it is never possible to reach full agreement as to who is totally representative, the fact that each are highly regarded in evangelical circles, has published a full and influential systematic theology and has a slightly different focus to each other, makes this a sound selection.

As Grenz is both a theologian and an ethicist, it is possible to examine the outworking of his theological method in his ethical construction. An area of particular interest to Grenz is the area of sexual ethics, and given the radically changed context in which reflection on human sexual behaviour now takes place, it provides an excellent area in which to test Grenz’ method. Grenz’ book on homosexuality, *Welcoming but Not Affirming* is examined in detail as it provides a case study of the method in practice. Given that the topic of homosexuality is emotionally charged, asking the four key questions outlined in 1.4 provides a rigorous test of the thesis proposition that Grenz’ theological method effectively revisions evangelical theology.

A methodological point needs to be clarified at this stage. The appropriateness of testing a *theological* method with a case study in *ethics*, can be queried. The debate as to whether theology and ethics should be seen as integrally related or as two distinct specialities is valid. While recognising the concerns of those who prefer to work with the disciplines separately, in this research I have chosen to treat them seamlessly. I think this is justified for two reasons:

1) Most importantly, Grenz treats the disciplines seamlessly. His expressed conviction is that whenever theology fails to flow over into ethics, it falls short of its calling. His publications move back and forth between those that can be classified as theology and

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66 Grenz outlines some of the resulting schisms in the book. Ibid., 1.
those that can be classified as ethics, but often the lines are blurred. His ethical construction is clearly shaped by his theological method.

2) Devising a postfoundationalist theology for a postmodern context presupposes an interdisciplinary approach. Neatly dividing the theological enterprise into clear compartments reflects the systematising mindset of the modern era. Any theological method that does not allow for the free flowing interchange between theological disciplines is unlikely to be successful in revisioning theological method for a postmodern era. The greater the interchange, the less clear the borders between disciplines.

In light of this, my decision to choose *Welcoming but Not Affirming* as the test case for Grenz’ theological method is understandable. The selection meets Grenz’ own standard of requiring a revisioned theological method to genuinely inform and guide the life and practice of the community of God.

This study makes up chapter 7 of the thesis.

Part 3 of the research is made up of chapters 8 and 9. The research was undertaken with the awareness that two possible titles might be required. The first, “Revisioning Evangelical Theology: An Exploration and Evaluation of the Theological Method of Stanley J. Grenz” could be adopted if the research proposition was affirmed. In the event that it was not, an alternate title might be required, namely “Revisioning Evangelical Theology: An Exploration, Evaluation and Extension of the Theological Method of Stanley J. Grenz.” As the research progressed, it became clear that the second option would need to be adopted. Consequently, chapter 8 collates the evidence that leads to the conclusion that the research proposition in its original format can only be affirmed with reservations. It then engages with Grenz’ method, suggesting ways in which it can be clarified and enhanced, so that the proposition can be upheld. Chapter 8 is therefore a chapter of evaluation as well as an exercise of extending and clarifying Grenz’ method.

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Chapter 9 provides a summary of the research and of its findings and suggestions.

1.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has introduced the research proposition "that Stanley Grenz' theological method effectively revisions evangelical theology." After a narrative introduction which explores the birthing of this research, the goals and purpose of this research are outlined, before Grenz' background and the influences that impacted upon him are discussed. To test the research proposition "that Stanley Grenz' theological method effectively revisions evangelical theology," four key evaluative questions are proposed and discussed. The chapter concludes with an outline of the research.
CHAPTER TWO

EXPLORING EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

The irony of evangelicalism is that while it contains an essentially contested family of theologies, it has been poorly suited to affirm pluralism of any kind. The evangelical impulse is to insist that only one religious tradition can be true, but evangelicalism itself contains several disparate traditions. Gary Dorrien.1

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Before thinking of “revisioning” evangelical theological method, we need to reach some understanding of what evangelical theology is, and of the context in which evangelical theologians work. The two cannot be neatly separated from each other, which makes the task more complex.2 The goal of this chapter is to survey the current state of evangelicalism, providing insight into its sociology, history and theology, thereby sketching the necessary background to enable an informed decision to be made as to whether the proposition “that Stanley Grenz’ theological method effectively revisions evangelical theology,” can be upheld.

Section 2.2 discusses the rapid growth of evangelicalism in the twentieth century, and some of the ambivalence within the movement about its growth. Growth has allowed for greater diversity, and this has resulted in some significant tensions. Section 2.3 examines two case studies of recent conflict within evangelicalism. They have been chosen as they provide insight into both the sociology of the movement and some of its theological concerns. Section 2.4 explores the debate as to the historical origins of evangelicalism. The debate is relevant to an exploration of the revisioning of the movement’s theological method, as determining the historic heirs of the movement helps to ascertain which changes are likely to be sanctioned as consistent with evangelicalism’s history. It is a debate Grenz actively participates in. Section 2.5 explores the characteristics and theology of evangelicalism. The relevance of this to an attempt to revision the movement’s theology is clear. Section 2.6 introduces the debate as to whether evangelical

2 Hunter suggests that while theology is the most important pillar upon which evangelicalism is built, it cannot be separated from three other dimensions of what he calls “the Evangelical cultural system.” The first revolves around the evangelical view of work, morality and the self, the second, its ideal of the family and the third, its political culture. James D. Hunter, Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 15.
theological method has been too closely wedded to modernity and foundationalism. This is a topic on which Grenz held clear views. His theological method was developed to help evangelical theology to move beyond foundationalism and to be relevant to a postmodern era. Section 2.7 concludes the chapter and summarizes its relevance to the proposition "that Stanley Grenz' theological method effectively revisions evangelical theology."

2.2 THE GROWTH OF EVANGELICALISM

The significant numerical growth of evangelicalism is part of the backdrop to be considered when evaluating proposals to revision the movement’s theology. Alister McGrath, in assessing the rapid growth of evangelicalism, claims that it is now "the largest and most actively committed form of Christianity in the West."3 David Barrett, research professor of missiometrics at Regent University, Virginia,4 is usually cited as the evangelical world’s leading statistician. While Barrett would readily acknowledge the difficulty in providing definite figures, he calculates that in 1900 there were 77,930,000 Christians who could best be classified as evangelicals. They made up approximately 5% of the world’s population which in 1900 was 1,619,626,000. By 1998 the number of evangelicals had risen to 638,042,000, and constituted 11% of a global population of 5,929,840,000.5 Clearly this represents substantial growth. As about 30% of the world’s population would classify themselves as Christian, it means that Barrett considers over a third of all Christians to be evangelicals.

Although one can quibble with Barrett’s methods and figures, the basic growth trend is clear.6 J.I. Packer, Grenz’ colleague at Regent College, spells out some of the implications of the change when he writes of the,

mutation of the former self-image of evangelicals as the marginalized faithful remnant within liberal-led Protestantism into a sense of being truly the core of God’s church on earth. Evangelicalism is more and more viewing itself as the

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4 Not to be confused with Regent College, Vancouver, with which Grenz was closely associated.
6 Barrett himself is not consistent. See David B. Barrett and Todd M. Johnson, "Annual Statistical Table on Global Mission: 2002," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 26, no. 1 (2002): 22-23. Different criteria for defining “evangelical” see different figures being given. However, regardless of the actual numbers quoted, the significant numerical growth of the movement is beyond dispute, and is the relevant point.
main stream in relation to which nonevangelicals, whether so by adding to the biblical faith or subtracting from it, are deviating eddies…  

Sociologist James Hunter also speaks of the changing status of evangelical theology when he speaks of its “de-ghettoization.”

Ambivalence characterises the response of evangelicalism to its growth. While there is pride in the movements “de-ghettoization,” some believe that growth has come at the cost of fidelity to its core values. John Carpenter argues that in spite of significant numerical growth after each of the so-called “awakenings” in American religious history, each saw the standard of morality and spirituality (defined against the standards of the Puritans) slip backward. He complains that:

Some polling data purport to show that evangelical moral behavior, as seen by divorce rates and what used to be seriously called ‘fornication,’ is little (or no) better than the average population. Meanwhile, some evangelical writers and speakers seem to be getting a lot of mileage out of denouncing ‘legalism’ as if the major fault was moral rigorism.

David Wells paints a comparably gloomy picture in his books No Place for Truth and God in the Wasteland.

Growth had led to increasing diversity. If there ever was a theological consensus amongst evangelicals, success has allowed the indulgence of internal squabbles and conflicts. In justifying the title of the text, The Futures of Evangelicalism, Craig Bartholomew writes, “The title ‘The Futures of Evangelicalism’ deliberately evokes the possibility of diverse futures for

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8 Equating evangelicalism with Protestant orthodoxy, he later expands: “As a religious tradition conforms to the modern paradigm, it gains a legitimacy and respectability. The response of Protestant orthodoxy to the increasing dominance of these cultural realities (and particularly to their influence within Protestantism) was a retreat to a sociocultural ghetto. Isolated and insulated, it was able to maintain a certain version of theological orthodoxy alive and protected. But in many ways, the history of Evangelicalism in the latter half of the twentieth century has been the history of its passage out of this ghetto.” Hunter, 46,48.


evangelicalism" and goes on to speak of "evangelicalism and its possible futures." One possibility is for a seriously splintered future.

2.3 DIVISIONS WITHIN EVANGELICALISM

I have chosen two case studies as representative of the internal conflict within evangelicalism. The first is the conflict within the Southern Baptist denomination, as represented by the amendments made to their statement of faith, "The Baptist Faith and Message." The second study is of the failed attempt to have Clark Pinnock (and the successful attempt to have John Sanders) expelled from the Evangelical Theological Society. Both emphasize the tensions within North American Evangelicalism. As this is the context within which Grenz worked, this is appropriate. If Grenz has effectively revisioned evangelical theological method, it has been with this sector of evangelicalism as his daily reference point.

2.3.1 Case Study 1: Changes to the Southern Baptist Convention's "The Baptist Faith and Message"

In recent decades the largest Baptist grouping in the USA, the American Southern Baptist Convention, has faced serious division and conflict. On June 14th, 2000, the approximately 11

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13 Baptists are reluctant to tie themselves to confessions of faith or credal statements, preferring to see themselves as "people of the book" following the teaching of scripture rather than any particular confession. In practice this proves difficult, so denominations like the Southern Baptists allow themselves to be guided by "unofficial" statements of faith. For the Southern Baptists this is "The Baptist Faith and Message." "The Baptist Faith and Message," (Southern Baptist Convention, 2000).
14 This should be qualified by noting that Grenz lived in Vancouver, Canada, and that the Canadian evangelical scene is more ironic than in the USA. However the two are in constant interaction, the USA scene holding the significant numerical dominance.
15 One could argue about how long the conflict has lasted, but most date it to 1979 when fundamentalists gained control of the governing body of the Southern Baptist Convention. This led to the "purging" (via the removal of "liberals") of Southern Baptist Seminaries in the 1980's and 1990's. One of the most blatant examples was the firing of the President of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Russell Dilday, on 9 March 1994. At the time Southwestern claimed to be the world's largest theological seminary. On the 8 March 1994 Dilday had received a glowing evaluation of his work from the Board of Trustees of Southwestern. The next morning they offered him a generous retirement package in return for his resignation. When he refused they voted to fire him, citing a need for a new style of leadership for the new millennium. Dilday returned to his office to find that he had been locked out and had also been denied access to the Southwestern computer system. Dilday then moved to the more independent Baylor University (also in Fortworth, Texas). Earlier (1993) the appointment of the youthful but ultra conservative Albert Mohler as President of the Southern Baptist Seminary marked a decisive victory for the
000 messengers\textsuperscript{17} at the Southern Baptist Annual Convention overwhelmingly agreed to amendments to the “Baptist Faith and Message” (BFM).\textsuperscript{18} Originally adopted in 1925 during what came to be known as the Modernist-Fundamentalist controversy, the BFM was first amended in 1963 in response to controversy over the understanding of biblical authority and inspiration. A statement on the family was added in 1998. At their convention in 2000, Southern Baptists made substantial changes to the 1963 version. The changes highlight some of the doctrinal controversy now dividing evangelicals.\textsuperscript{19}

Where the 1963 opening statement on “The Scriptures” declares that “The criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted is Jesus Christ” the newly amended BFM affirms that the scriptures are “a testimony to Christ, who is himself the focus of divine revelation.” Earlier it affirms that the scripture “is God’s revelation of Himself” as opposed to the 1963 statement which speaks of “the record of God’s revelation.”\textsuperscript{20} As the 2000 document adheres closely to the 1963 version (there was no intention to completely rework the statement, and its historic continuity was seen as important), each variation is significant.

The bolder affirmation that scripture is God’s revelation, rather than simply a record of it, is to remove the possibility of neo-orthodox thinking that the Bible simply contains the word of God. Many evangelicals are suspicious of approaches they believe suggest that while some of the Bible

\textsuperscript{17} In his preface to Revisioning Evangelical Theology, Grenz mentions having to participate as a representative “northern evangelical” at a pastors’ conference at Southern Baptist Seminary, following up discussions between Southern Baptists and evangelicals. He notes that the question of whether Southern Baptists could be classified as anything other than evangelicals had never crossed his mind, and cites the event as embarking him on the journey of discovering what the label “evangelical” meant. It therefore seems appropriate to investigate later developments within the Southern Baptist movement as representative of a particular current within evangelicalism. Stanley J. Grenz, Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 9-10.

\textsuperscript{18} “The Baptist Faith and Message” as adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention, June 14th, 2000.

\textsuperscript{19} A brief but useful summary is found in the Editorial, “Do Good Fences Make Good Baptists?,” Christianity Today, August 7 2000, 36-37.

\textsuperscript{20} In Clause 1, “The Scriptures.” "The Baptist Faith and Message."
is divinely inspired, other parts are not. In this approach, truth is contained in the Bible, but not all the Bible is truth.

The intent of altering the statement that Jesus is the criterion against which the Bible is to be interpreted is to avoid pitting Gospel writers against those who wrote the Epistles, or a “Paul versus Jesus” controversy.

While “Process Theology” has generally been viewed with suspicion by evangelicals, the BFM closes ranks on the milder versions advocated in what is known as the “Openness of God” debate. Randall Basinger outlines what he considers to be three representative views amongst evangelicals to process theism.

The first approach affirms that the Bible, not human reason, is the final norm for truth. That some passages in scripture seem to indicate that the knowledge of God is absolute while others suggest that it is relative, is simply a paradox within the biblical revelation. We are not required to understand the paradoxical, only to note and affirm it.

Basinger’s second group are not satisfied with what they would consider to be the flight from reason adopted in the first approach, and affirm the importance of logic, but suggest that it should be used to counter process theists. Instead of opting for “paradox” as a means of being able to affirm both that God is absolutely sovereign and that humans are genuinely free, this group believes that “a middle ground can be achieved on logical, philosophical and biblical grounds.”

Basinger’s third group adopts a mediating concept of God, working to avoid the static God of Thomistic theology or the finite God of process theists. While not agreeing amongst themselves

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21 At an anecdotal level, the researcher can recall a church service where the preacher flung a book making a comparable suggestion from the pulpit, urging whoever picked it up to take it away and burn it.
22 Though not specifically referring to this change, in chapter 5 of Revisioning Evangelical Theology, Grenz laments the tendency of current evangelicals to focus on the inspiration of scripture, while only paying lip service to its illumination by the Spirit. Grenz’ concern, which reflects a Barthian influence, would make him uneasy with the change. The stress on both inspiration and illumination allows the best of both worlds. One can agree to the total inspiration of scripture, while suggesting that a local community of faith has discerned that the Spirit is illuminating one part of its message for particular emphasis in a given context. This is a key lever in Grenz’ understanding of scripture, and one which we investigate more fully later.
as to which course corrections may be needed to avoid Thomistic theism, the four commonly disputed areas are:

1) Immutability and impassibility
2) Time and eternality
3) Omnipotence, providence and sovereignty
4) Omniscience

Within this range of views, BFM 2000 takes a committed line and affirms that God’s “perfect knowledge extends to all things, past, present, and future, including the future decisions of his free creatures.” By stating this, the BFM effectively closes the possibility of debate on the “Openness of God” issue.

In 1998 the Southern Baptist Convention added a clause on the family to the 1963 document, controversially stating, “A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ.” BFM 2000 makes a further addition on gender, declaring, “the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.” The stance taken on gender issues is therefore unambiguous.

BFM 2000 also shuts any debate on homosexuality with a simple statement, “Christians should oppose... all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality and pornography.”

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25 Ibid.: 162.
26 From Clause II, God, "The Baptist Faith and Message."
27 The BFM 2000 is not the only militant voice against “Open Theism”. In November 2002 the Evangelical Theological Society decided to challenge the memberships of both Clark Pinnock and John Sanders on the grounds of their support for open theism, claiming that support of such a view is incompatible with the view of Biblical inerrancy to which members of the society must adhere. This issue is explored in 2.3.2. See Doug Koop, "Closing the Door on Open Theists? Ets to Examine Whether Clark Pinnock and John Sanders Can Remain Members," Christianity Today 47, no. 1 (2003).
28 In Clause XVIII, The Family, "The Baptist Faith and Message."
29 In Clause VI, The Church, Ibid.
30 This stance has caused a great deal of hurt and resentment. For a biting summary of the attitude of Southern Baptists to women's issues, see Carolyn DeArmond Blevins, "Reflections: Baptists and Women's Issues in the Twentieth Century," Baptist History and Heritage 35, no. 3 (2000).
31 In Clause XV, The Christian and the Social Order, "The Baptist Faith and Message." The document does not consider the possibility that in some contexts it might be inappropriate to label homosexual behavior as “sexual immorality.” Nor is there any attempt to differentiate between a homosexual orientation and actual sexual activity. The document has a strident tone. It is not that Christians should simply “abstain from” but that they should “oppose.” The exact implications of this are not clear.
Cumulatively these changes amount to Southern Baptists adopting a view of scripture that is close to inerrancy,\textsuperscript{32} closing down discussion in “The Openness of God” debate, placing significant emphasis on gender in the assigning of roles and not being prepared to enter into discussion on the validity of certain homosexual relationships. The Southern Baptist’s clear statement of their position on each of these issues is indicative that each has become controversial within evangelical circles.

\textbf{2.3.2 Case Study 2: The Attempt to Expel Clark Pinnock from the Evangelical Theological Society}

Another possible path in understanding the range represented in evangelical theology is to follow the trajectory taken by Clark Pinnock – one that almost led to his expulsion from the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS).\textsuperscript{33} Pinnock is interesting in that he was an early defender of inerrancy and originally held a fundamentalist position.\textsuperscript{34}

Pinnock’s name is often linked to the “Openness of God” debate, partly because of his editorship of the influential Inter Varsity Press book with that title.\textsuperscript{35} Pinnock also articulates a role for the Spirit in the interpreting of scripture that allows for a more open and fluid understanding of its meaning than the propositional approaches of the past.\textsuperscript{36} Books such as his \textit{Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit}\textsuperscript{37} propose a dynamic understanding of the Bible as the Spirit’s book that contrasts with his more static approach in publications such as his 1971 \textit{Biblical Revelation: The Foundation of Christian Theology}.\textsuperscript{38} In that publication the conservative Moody Press could enthuse in the book’s dust cover, “Scholarly, unusually thorough, and carefully organized. \textit{Biblical Revelation} reminds today’s believer that the Bible is most certainly the infallible

\textsuperscript{32} For an influential and clear example of this position see Harold Lindsell, \textit{The Battle for the Bible} (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976).
\textsuperscript{33} The ETS is arguably the leading evangelical theological society within North America. Its \textit{Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society} is generally considered to be one of the most scholarly journals produced by the evangelical movement. Its membership has been seen as an unofficial “who’s who” within the North American Evangelical scene.
\textsuperscript{34} For Grenz’ discussion of Pinnock see Stanley J. Grenz, \textit{Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era} (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 134-150.
\textsuperscript{35} Pinnock and others.
communication from God." Demonstrating a once for all "infallible communication" is no longer a part of Pinnock's agenda.

Pinnock's theological pilgrimage, and particularly the publication of his *Most Moved Mover*, saw Roger Nicole charge, at the November 20, 2002 meeting of the ETS, that Pinnock had violated the inerrancy clause of the ETS. By 171 to 137 votes the members voted to refer the matter to the ETS Executive Committee for examination and discussion. At the same meeting a similar charge was laid against John Sanders, like Pinnock, a proponent of open theism.

On 3 October 2003 Pinnock was examined by the Executive Committee of the ETS, and agreed to withdraw some of the statements made in *Most Moved Mover*. As a result the committee unanimously recommended that the charges against him not be sustained. Though a brief summary of what was a tense and emotive issue, the insistence of the ETS that Pinnock distance himself from some of his own statements or face expulsion from the society is a clear indication of the pressure for doctrinal conformity within what is perhaps evangelicalism's most influential theological society.

This context impacts our understanding of Grenz' agenda to revision evangelical theology. In part, Grenz' work attempts to transcend some of the impasses reached by evangelicals. It highlights how difficult it is to bring change to the movement. Innovators like Pinnock are quickly brought back into line, those who will not recant (like Sanders), are excluded. This does not bode well for an attempt to revision a movement. However, a key task is to assess how representative Southern Baptist and ETS reactions are. Each has their own constituency, but it could be that the paradigm shifts in society are such that their influence is waning. Apparently this was Grenz' assessment. Roger Olson claims that Grenz confided to him that the 2005 ETS meeting held in Philadelphia would be his last, as he found the attitude of ETS leaders too restrictive. Olson claims that Grenz had planned to found an evangelical professional society that

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40 Full details of the charge, the executive committee's recommendations, and the formal responses of both Pinnock and Sanders, are posted on the website of the Evangelical Theological Society, www.etsjets.org/members/challenge, (accessed 11 June 2004).
41 As in the case of Pinnock, Roger Nicole laid the charge.
42 Pinnock agreed to a revised version of note 66 and the accompanying material on pages 50-51 in all future publications of *Most Moved Mover*.
43 The recommendation for Sanders was different. With a split 7-2 vote the executive voted to uphold the charges against him. The key difference between Pinnock and Sanders seems to be Sanders' view that certain biblical prophecies should be viewed as probabilities rather than certainties.
would encourage fresh thinking whist still being “clearly and unequivocally evangelical.” It would therefore appear that toward the end of his life Grenz accepted that it would not be possible to persuade all evangelicals to accept his revisioned version of evangelicalism, but that he was confident that there was sufficient support for his stance to provide a viable alternative.

However, we are in danger of rushing ahead of ourselves. Significant though areas of disagreement may be, we should first try to understand the debate over the historical origins of the evangelical movement before we look at the question of its characteristics and theology.

2.4 THE DEBATE OVER THE HISTORICAL ROOTS OF EVANGELICALISM

Before embarking on the quest for evangelicalism’s historical identity, it is as well to note Horton’s warning that “...every historical interpretation involves power plays in the sense that interpreters are self-involved participants in the struggle over evangelical identity.” This quickly becomes evident as one tries to find consensus as to the “true” forbears of authentic evangelicalism. Noll’s brief summary helps bring several streams together. He suggests,

The word ‘evangelical’ has several legitimate senses, all related to the etymological meaning of ‘good news.’ For Christians of many types throughout history the word has been used to describe God’s redemption of sinners by the work of Christ. In the Reformation of the sixteenth century it became a rough synonym for ‘Protestant.’ That history explains why many Lutherans still employ the term... The most common use of the word today, however, stems from the renewal movements of the eighteenth century and from practitioners of revival in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially as personified by such noteworthy preachers as Charles Grandison Finney, D.L.Moody and Billy Graham.

A variety of classification options exist as to the threads making up the evangelical mosaic.

James Hunter identifies four main types of evangelicalism in contemporary American evangelicalism, viz: The Baptist tradition; the Holiness-Pentecostal tradition; the Anabaptist tradition and the Reformed-Confessional tradition.

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Dorrien prefers the typology suggested by Max Stackhouse and Donald W. Dayton, which acknowledges three main streams:

1) Those deriving from the confessional and dissenting movements of the 16th century Protestant Reformation. Stackhouse calls this "Puritan" evangelism.
2) "Pietistic" evangelism, deriving from the 18th century German and English Pietist movements and in the USA, from the Great Awakening.
3) Fundamentalist evangelism, deriving from the modernist-fundamentalist conflict of the nineteenth and twentieth century. 48

There are real differences between each stream. As Dorrien notes "...pietistic evangelism, deviates substantially from the languages of absolute divine sovereignty, forensic justification, and literalistic inerrancy developed in the Reformed and Lutheran traditions, giving heightened evangelical emphasis to experiences of conversion, sanctification, spiritual regeneration, and healing." 49

If one accepts this classification one could argue that there are four rivals for the title of "The Evangelicals."

First are the "Reformed Evangelicals" who place their emphasis on historical continuity with the doctrinal position of the Protestant Reformation. Here the emphasis is on correct doctrine and the "solas" of the Reformation, especially "sola fide" and "sola scriptura." The Puritans are seen as suitable role models. The "Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals" see themselves as guardians of this tradition and actively try to ensure that the title "Evangelical" be reserved for those who are within this tradition. 50

Second are those deeply influenced by the Pietists and their effort to move the Reformation beyond what they considered to be the "deadness" of Lutheran orthodoxy. Grenz suggests Pietist Philipp Jakob Spener as a good representative. He notes that while Spener acknowledges scripture

48 Dorrien, 1-3.
49 Ibid., 3.
50 See e.g. James M. Boice and Benjamin E. Sasse (eds), Here We Stand: A Call from Confessing Evangelicals (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996). Also Michael S. Horton, ed., A Confessing Theology for Postmodern Times (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2000).
to be objectively true, Spener stressed that scripture only transformed the life of the reader if he or she allowed the Spirit to work through scripture and supplemented it with prayer, meditation and an attempt to live a holy life.\textsuperscript{51} The Wesleyan/Pentecostal stream of evangelicalism is usually seen to have its roots in the emphasis on the individual believer’s responsibility to lead a holy and consecrated life.

Third is the convergence of the Puritan and Pietist streams into what is sometimes called “classical evangelicalism.” Characterized by what Grenz calls “convertive-experimental piety” it places an emphasis both on the doctrinal content of faith and its experiential outworking.\textsuperscript{52} It should probably be viewed as the closest contender for the title of forerunner of the neo or new evangelicalism.

A fourth stream is that of fundamentalism. Named after a series of ten tracts published by the leaders of the movement in 1910, \textit{The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth}, fundamentalism saw its role as the defence of certain classical doctrines. Religious experience was distrusted because liberals could also claim religious encounters. An unswerving loyalty to the Bible in the face of challenges to its authority was required. This was the prelude to the later inerrancy debates within evangelicalism.

Often an attempt is made to simplify the evangelical landscape into two competing camps. Sometimes known as the Marsden-Dayton debate (loosely stated, are the true heirs of evangelicalism the Reformed/Presbyterian stream as Marsden argues, or is Dayton correct in opting for a Wesleyan/Pentecostal constituency?) it does a disservice to the richly varied history of evangelicalism.\textsuperscript{53} Roger Olson reaches a reasonable conclusion when he writes:

\begin{quote}
It seems clear to me that the Marsden-Dayton debate has a relatively simple solution: evangelicalism is neither primarily, normatively Reformed (Presbyterian paradigm) nor primarily, normatively Wesleyan (Pentecostal paradigm). Evangelicalism is an unstable compound of several strands of Protestantism held together by several adhesives. That is why it is plagued by controversy over its true identity.\textsuperscript{54}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{51} Grenz, \textit{Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era}, 62-63.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 51.


Michael Horton suggests that, “Instead of trying forever to determine what evangelicalism is (socio-historical definition), we should enjoy a free exchange concerning what it ought to be in faith and practice (theological definition).” However, this side steps the issue. The theological emphasis of the movement cannot be divorced from its history.

The debate gains significance when we try to evaluate the thesis proposition “that Stanley Grenz’ theological method effectively revisions evangelical theology” in that critics of his work suggest that he favours Dayton in the Marsden-Dayton debate. Grenz enters the debate in an attempt to validate the Wesleyan/Holiness stream of evangelicalism. While willing to acknowledge other streams, part of Grenz’ revisioning project is to revision evangelical identity. His goal is to demonstrate that the “evangelical ethos is more than mere theology. At its heart is a shared experience cradled in a shared theology…”

At times Grenz overstates his case. When in Renewing the Center he suggests that “By the mid-twentieth century... many evangelical theologians had begun to define the nature of the movement by augmenting the traditional interest in the gospel with another, decidedly cognitive concern, namely, the desire to maintain correct doctrine,” the implication seems to be that the movement was largely disinterested in doctrine prior to this point. This is a contestable claim, and one that William Travis sharply critiques Grenz for. After exploring numerous exceptions to Grenz’ claim of general doctrinal disinterest, Travis concludes that, “Overall, the views of Grenz and those who agree with him on both the nature and role of Pietism in the evangelical movement need significant revision. In terms of the history component, ‘renewing the center’ needs serious rethinking.” If Grenz’ revisioning of evangelical theology is partly dependent upon an inaccurate historical reconstruction of evangelicalism, it is unlikely to be successful.

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57 Grenz, Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century, 34.
58 Grenz, Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era, 53.
59 Travis, 279.
2.5 THE STRUGGLE TO ARTICULATE EVANGELICALISM'S CHARACTERISTICS AND THEOLOGY

Finding consensus on evangelical theological distinctives is difficult.

John Stott, long time champion of the evangelical movement in Britain, suggests that because of the confusion the term evangelical often occasions it is wise to begin with three disclaimers:

1) Evangelical faith is not a recent innovation. "On the contrary, we dare to claim that evangelical Christianity is original, apostolic, New Testament Christianity."\(^{60}\)

2) Evangelical faith is not a deviation from Christian orthodoxy. "It is neither an eddy nor a backwater but mainstream Christianity. Evangelical Christians have no difficulty in reciting the Apostle's Creed or the Nicene Creed *ex animo.*"\(^{61}\)

3) The evangelical faith is not a synonym for fundamentalism. Stott argues "the two have a different history and a different connotation."\(^{62}\) Though acknowledging that originally "fundamentalist" was an acceptable synonym for "evangelical" he maintains that since the 1950's evangelicalism has been associated with what was originally viewed as the "new evangelicalism" of North American leaders such as Carl Henry, Billy Graham and Harold Ockenga.

It is worth developing Stott’s third disclaimer, if only because those outside the evangelical movement tend to associate evangelicalism with fundamentalism. Stott justifies the line he draws between fundamentalism and evangelicalism by describing what he calls ten “tendencies” in fundamentalism that he does not consider characteristic of evangelicalism. In summary form these are that fundamentalists:

1) Give the impression that they distrust scholarship.

2) Hold to an “excessive literalism” in their view of the Bible.

3) Have tended to view the Bible’s inspiration as a mechanical process. While evangelicals readily acknowledge the double authorship of scripture, with the divine author speaking through people in full possession of their faculties, fundamentalists have focused more on inspiration as divine dictation.

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\(^{61}\) Ibid., 17.

\(^{62}\) Ibid., 19.
4) Tend to interpret the text as though it were written directly to them, overlooking the cultural gap between the biblical world and today.
5) Are suspicious and usually rejecting of the ecumenical movement.
6) Have a separatist ecclesiology, with a tendency to withdraw from discussion when their specific doctrinal viewpoints are not held to.
7) Have an ambiguous relationship with the world. Sometimes values are uncritically adopted, at other times they stay aloof for fear of contamination.
8) Have shown a tendency to cling to the myth of white supremacy and have defended racial segregation.
9) Have tended to view evangelism and mission as synonymous.
10) Are usually dogmatic about the future, often dividing history into rigid dispensations and going into considerable detail about the fulfillment of prophecy.

Marsden, while noting the differences between American and British fundamentalists, suggests that,

their most distinctive doctrines... were the divinely guaranteed verbal inerrancy of scripture, divine creation as opposed to biological evolution, and a dispensational-premillennial scheme that explained historical change in terms of divine control.

While not all would agree with Stott’s distancing evangelicalism from these tendencies, they do go some way to debunking the myth that “evangelical” and “fundamentalist” are synonyms.

Dorrien has wittily noted that this distinction is often not observed, “Though scholars generally allow that evangelicalism and fundamentalism are not interchangeable terms, the impression persists that modern evangelicals are merely fundamentalists with better manners.” Olson articulates a more pressing concern when he writes, “I am convinced, as are many commentators on evangelicalism, that ‘fundamentalism’ is being replaced with the label ‘conservative evangelicalism’ while retaining fundamentalistic habits of heart and mind.”

63 Ibid., 21-24.
65 Dorrien, 1.
From the perspective of this research, the distinction is important. The working thesis is "that Stanley Grenz' theological method effectively revisions evangelical theology." If evangelical theology is equated with fundamentalism, it is improbable that the thesis can be sustained. The defining boundaries of fundamentalism are too narrowly drawn to allow for movement. It is possible that those sectors within evangelicalism which are unlikely to accept Grenz' revisioning, are unlikely to do so because they have shifted further to the right, and now fit more comfortably within the fundamentalist block.67

Categorizing evangelical distinctives by a core group of foundational theological convictions or characteristics is difficult. Different evangelical spokespeople devise different lists of defining characteristics.

David Bebbington's characterization if often cited.68 He writes:

There are the four qualities that have been the special marks of Evangelical religion: conversionism, the belief that lives need to be changed; activism, the expression of the gospel in effort; biblicism, a particular regard for the Bible; and what may be called crucicentrism, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Together they form a quadrilateral of priorities that is the basis of Evangelicalism.69

The quality of activism is of special importance in that it helps to separate evangelicalism from earlier forms of Protestant Orthodoxy. While activism is more a sociological than a theological distinctive, it arises from theological convictions. Bebbington argues that the assurance of salvation that flowed from evangelicalism's stress on conversion, led to the active sharing of faith in the attempt to get others to experience a similar assurance of salvation.70 A working week of

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67 So e.g. one could argue that whatever their historic position, recent changes in the Southern Baptist denomination equate to their now fitting more naturally into a fundamentalist than evangelical block. Their decision to withdraw from the Baptist World Alliance, made in June 2005, helps underline the validity of this new classification. They uphold Stott's 6th point cited above, that fundamentalists usually have a separatist ecclesiology, with a tendency to withdraw from discussion when their specific doctrinal viewpoints are not held to.
69 David Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), p2-3.
70 Ibid., p74.
between 90 and 100 hours was expected of those in the nineteenth-century Wesleyan ministry. Bebbington contrasts this with the non-evangelical English-parish clergyman of the later eighteenth century who "was very like a member of the gentry in how he spent his time." Though attempts have been made to contemporize Bebbington’s list, Turnbull for example suggesting as an alternate the foci of authority, doctrine, spirituality and practical commitment, most assessments of evangelicalism cite Bebbington’s classification. Thus even though adopting a different approach to Bebbington, McLaren is not far from Bebbington’s choice of activism as a key quality of evangelicalism when he suggests that evangelicals are best characterised by being passionate. Identifying the movement more by its ethos than its beliefs, he writes:

When I say I cherish an evangelical identity, I mean something beyond a belief system or doctrinal array or even a practice. I mean an attitude – an attitude toward God and our neighbour and our mission that is passionate. When evangelicals (at their best) sing, they sing. When evangelicals pray, they pray. When evangelicals preach, they preach.

In trying to articulate the beliefs of evangelicals, Mark Noll compares the doctrinal statements of ten key evangelical groups, three from large American denominations, six from parachurch evangelical agencies and one from an international evangelical movement. He finds substantial lines of convergence in what the statements affirm.

Eight of the ten begin with a statement on scripture, and all ten affirm that the Bible is inspired, infallible and the ultimate authority for Christian beliefs and practices. Each statement identifies the Bible as the source of the other beliefs articulated. This is therefore consistent with the biblicism identified in Bebbington’s taxonomy.

Noll also finds consensus on God as the only God and creator of the universe, who in the mystery of the Trinity exists eternally as three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The statements all affirm the virgin birth of Jesus, as well as the full deity and humanity of Jesus, and his sinlessness. They uphold a substitutionary understanding of Christ’s death on the cross, seeing it as

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71 Ibid., p11.
72 Ibid.
75 Noll, 56-65.
76 Ibid., 59.
sufficient payment to God for the sins of humanity. All likewise proclaim Jesus' bodily resurrection and his ascent into heaven. They concur that at the Second Coming Jesus will return to the earth, and that this will both demonstrate the ultimate triumph of God and the end of the world as we have known it. While there is broad agreement on the person of the Holy Spirit, some of the statements mention activities of the Spirit that are absent in others (such as the Spirit's role in speaking in tongues and world evangelization).77

As regards humanity, all statements recognise that all humans78 are made in the image of God. Each affirms a historic fall, and the consequent corruption of human nature and the resulting alienation between God and humanity. Each statement affirms the importance of believers living a godly life.79

Noll also sees each statement essentially overlapping in claims about the church and the final judgment, although he does see some difference in how explicit statements are in relation to the final judgment. While the denominations are fairly explicit about the ordinances of baptism and communion, (and some have idiosyncratic additions such as foot-washing), these are not present in the parachurch statements, but this is simply as one would expect.80

Other than for divergent views on the role of the Spirit – where the Pentecostal denominations make additional claims to those found in the other statements, Noll did not find the differences to be remarkable, and saw them primarily as differences in style rather than substance.81

While this might seem to indicate remarkable overlap in the belief systems of different groups of evangelicalism, a thoughtful review of the beliefs articulated leads one to ask in what way evangelicalism is different to conservative Protestant orthodoxy. It is because of this that Hart denies that there is such a thing as evangelicalism as a religious identity.82 Hunter adopts a more gentle approach and while willing to speak of evangelicalism, prefers to speak of conservative Protestantism, seeing it as synonymous with Protestant orthodoxy.83

77 Ibid., 60-62.
78 Noll notes that none of the statements use gender inclusive language, though this might reflect the date of the compilation of the statements. Ibid., 62.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid., 63.
81 Ibid., 63-64.
82 Hart describes it as “the wax nose of twentieth-century American Protestantism.” Hart, 16.
83 Hunter, Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation, 3-4.
In light of this, Horton questions if there is such a thing as a distinctively evangelical theology. He raises a fascinating question, “If the label ‘evangelical’ is cognitively (or, at least, theologically) vacuous, why do so many people — including evangelical leaders — identify so strongly with it, thinking of themselves first of all as not Calvinists, Lutherans, Baptists, but as evangelicals?” He then suggests an answer to his question:

...could this at least in part be due to the fact that we are ourselves cognitively vacuous when it comes to articulating our theological convictions beyond slogans? Thus the success of the label despite its practically infinite elasticity may be partially due to our own shallowness and the vision of Christianizing America and western civilization generally.84

In Revisioning Evangelical Theology Grenz argues that a revisioned identity of evangelicalism, while not denying the cognitive features of the Christian faith, would stress “a common vision of the faith that arises out of a common religious experience couched within a common interpretive framework consisting in theological beliefs we gain from the Scriptures.”85 If Noll’s analysis is correct, the common interpretive framework is Protestant orthodoxy. To this Grenz then adds a shared religious experience, leading to Hart questioning “whether evangelicalism had any substance beyond vague and warm affirmations about a personal relationship with Jesus.”86

Summarizing, we could argue that the belief system of evangelicalism is essentially that of Protestant orthodoxy. While individual groups might adopt a particular stance on issues such as pre-millennialism or speaking in tongues, the overarching concern is to uphold conservative Protestant views, which in the first instance flow from the Bible (the biblicism Bebbington speaks of). Forgiveness is possible through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross (the crucicentrism Bebbington speaks of) and is actualized at conversion (Bebbington’s conversionism) gratitude for which overflows into a life of service and witness (Bebbington’s activism).87 Expressing it in Grenz’ terms, categories one and two are key beliefs, while categories three and four are key aspects of the shared religious experience of evangelicals. We can therefore support Grenz’ identification of the ethos of evangelicalism as being “a shared experience cradled in a shared theology…”88

84 Horton, "Is Evangelicalism Reformed or Wesleyan? Reopening the Marsden-Dayton Debate," 147.
85 Grenz, Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century, 34.
86 Hart, 15.
87 Bebbington, 2-17.
2.6 MOVING BEYOND MODERNITY AND FOUNDBATIONALISM: A CURRENT CHALLENGE FOR EVANGELICAL THEOLOGICAL METHOD

Whilst the survey of evangelicalism provided thus far is accurate, it has excluded one key area, and that is an analysis of the changed context within which evangelical theology is now articulated, particularly in the Western world. Robert Webber selects Grenz as being representative of the theological thinking of younger evangelicals because of Grenz’ willingness to revision evangelical theology in a way that sees it ready to address the concerns and insights of a postmodern era.89

Two aspects of this changed context provide particular challenges for evangelicalism. The first is the actual transition from modernity to postmodernity, especially as evangelicalism’s resurgence was partly shaped by its successful adaptation to the assumptions of modernity. The second is the related postmodern critique of Enlightenment foundationalism and the consequent attempts to construct a theological method from postfoundationalist alternatives. Grenz’ theological project cannot be understood outside of an appreciation of the changed context he attempts to address.

Discussions on both postmodernism and postfoundationalism abound.90 Barnes suggests that discussion of these topics constitutes “the primary conversation in systematic theology in the academy...”91 An in depth analysis is therefore outside of the scope of this research, but some introductory comments, as they are relevant to Grenz’ theological method, are appropriate.92

Deciding what the “post” in postmodernism refers to requires some insight into modernity. From the perspective of this study, particular aspects of significance include:

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88 Grenz, Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century, 34.
90 Grenz’ text on postmodernism has been one of his most popular works. Stanley J. Grenz, A Primer on Postmodernism (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).
92 Though I am in disagreement with his conclusions, Jay Robertson devotes his PhD thesis to a study of Grenz’ appropriation of a nonfoundational epistemology. Jay T. Robertson, “Evangelicalism’s Appropriation of Nonfoundational Epistemology as Reflected in the Theology of Stanley J. Grenz” (PhD, Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002). Part of my disagreement with Robertson flows from his agenda to warn “evangelicals of the incipient dangers of adopting Grenz’s reformist agenda.” Robertson, 6.
1) The optimistic assessment of knowledge, which was seen to be certain, objective, good and accessible. Correspondence theories of truth were accepted (truth is that which corresponds to reality), as was the belief in the-world-as-it-is. Knowledge was seen to be intrinsically valuable, which was coupled with a conviction that increased knowledge would lead to a better world.

2) The belief that the human intellect was the arbiter of truth. Reason, not intuition, was the path to truth.

3) The belief in the autonomous self, existing outside of particular traditions, or social conventions.

4) The belief that truth is objective rather than relational.

Key paradigm shifts embraced by postmodernism include:

1) A denial of objective knowledge and its replacement by interpretation. Linked to this is the move from a realist or objective view of truth to a constructionist outlook. Because all explanations of reality are seen as constructions, deconstruction is required. The focus of deconstruction is not to conclude if something is objectively true, but to reveal the control mechanisms implicit in ideas. Deconstruction identifies the stakeholders behind ideas, and thus helps to break the control that the deconstructed ideas might have over beliefs and actions.

2) The affirmation of local narratives rather than metanarratives. Lyotard's definition is widely quoted: "Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives." Linked to this is the loss of the idea of a universe or of universals, and a respect for the local and the particular. This leads to a prizing of difference rather than of uniformity.

3) The conviction that truth is relational rather than objective. It can also be subjective (my truth and my objectivity).

4) A denial of a direct correspondence between language and the-world-as-it-is, to a belief in a symbolic, socially created world, constructed through language, with all words being used in accordance with socially constructed linguistic rules, or to use the concept developed in Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations, “language games.” George Lindbeck applies and extends Wittgenstein’s thinking to the theological arena.

developing his cultural-linguistic approach which suggests that religious doctrines rather than serving as first order truth claims (propositionally asserting things to be objectively true or false) should rather be seen as the rules of grammar, having a regulative function for the believing community, shaping its thinking and experience. Doctrines are therefore not objective statements about God, but rather provide the primary rules for speaking about God. Lindbeck’s thinking has been influential in the development of Grenz’ theological method.

5) A stress on holism and inter-connectedness. Truth, (to the extent that one can talk of truth) is contextual.

Foundationalism in theological construction is closely linked to the modern era. Working from the assumption that the demonstration of objective truth requires an undisputed foundation from which truth claims can be made, theologians attempted to define what this foundation could be. Though conservative and liberal theologians reached different conclusions as to the appropriate foundation for theology, both essentially adopted the same method for theological construction, namely that of identifying a sure and certain foundation from which all other truth claims could flow. Foundationalism assumes that a system of knowledge must include a class of beliefs that are immune from challenge (e.g. scripture) and that reasoning within the system proceeds only in one direction, from the foundational belief to others, but not in the reverse direction.

Nancey Murphy argues that in the modern era both liberal and conservative theologians shared foundationalism’s methodological assumptions, and that the divide between them is therefore not necessarily as great as is often thought. The differences resulted from conservatives choosing an inerrant Bible as their undisputed foundation, while liberals assigned the foundational role to religious experience. Methodologically, both assumed that foundationalism was the appropriate paradigm, albeit that the foundation chosen took the theology constructed in different directions.

Murphy, whom Grenz acknowledges as being influential for his thinking, suggests that three features of postmodernism could potentially help overcome the impasses of the past.

First is that in postmodernism epistemological holism replaces foundationalism by its insistence that it is not possible to distinguish between basic (foundational) beliefs and non-basic beliefs. There is a web of connectedness. Holism means that each belief is supported by its ties to its neighboring beliefs and ultimately to the whole.

Second is that in the philosophy of language the approach is also holistic, with meaning being sought in both the linguistic and non-linguistic context.

The third is that postmodernism is anti-reductionist, with the recognition of the two-way influence between part and whole. The whole influences the part and the part the whole.

Murphy goes on to ask what the implications of this would be for a conservative (evangelical) theology constructed within a postmodern framework, and what would be its distinguishing features, and suggests that while reflecting the holism called for, it would also need to hold on to certain aspects considered to be an integral part of evangelical theology. She writes:

- First it must maintain some special role for Scripture over against experience as authority for theology. Second, it must provide for special acts of God, and third, it must provide for the possibility of making truth claims for Christianity. This latter requirement involves both a definition of truth that is compatible with postmodern philosophy and criteria for judging the truth of a religion.98

Murphy’s proposals and insights, together with those of Lindbeck, are key ingredients that help shape Grenz’ methodological revisioning. Taking seriously the critique of both modernity and foundationalism, Grenz attempts to devise a theological method suitable for a postmodern era and which moves beyond foundationalism. A large part of his solution is found in suggesting a shift from a single foundation for theology (scripture) to a trio of theological sources, scripture, tradition and culture. While scripture remains the norming norm for theology, the three sources work together as conversation partners, with truth statements being tested for coherence rather than simple correspondence. Rather than truth being affirmed in propositions (as in the old evangelical paradigm), it is discerned within the narrative flow of the community of faith. The community understands its experience in the light of its grammar (doctrines) which provides the frame within which religious discourse takes place. The grammar in turn is shaped by the ongoing

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trialogue between the three sources for theology, scripture, tradition and culture. These sources are structured around three focal motifs, the Trinity, community and eschatology.

In devising his method, Grenz is mindful of the particular challenges posed by the postmodern context, and argues that just as theologians could not uncritically adopt the assumptions of modernity (albeit that they sometimes did), they cannot uncritically adopt postmodern assumptions. In particular, he is not willing to abandon the quest for universal truth, arguing that the Christ event stands against the postmodern loss of a center (Christ being the world’s one true center). Arguing against the postmodern view that the world is composed of incompatible and competing local narratives, he writes that “because of our faith in Christ, we cannot totally affirm the central tenet of postmodernism... the rejection of the metanarrative.” He is however responsive to many areas of concern raised by the postmodern critique of modernity, and is hopeful that his method will lead to the construction of a theology that is post-individualistic, post-rationalistic, post-dualistic and post-noeticentric. Subsequent chapters will unpack this method more fully, and assess if it is successful in revisioning evangelical theological method.

2.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has provided an overview of the theological “family” Grenz attempts to revision. It has investigated the tensions created by the numerical growth of the movement and the consequent increased diversity in its thought and practice. Tensions within the Southern Baptist Denomination and the Evangelical Theological Society were chosen to represent something of the ferment within the movement. The dispute over the historical roots of evangelicalism was investigated, as was the discussion as to what constitute the defining characteristics and theological emphases of evangelicalism. The challenges posed for evangelicalism by the transition from modernity to postmodernity were introduced, with particular attention being given to the shift from a foundationalist to a postfoundationalist method in theological construction. Grenz’ response to this changed context was introduced.

98 Murphy, "Philosophical Resources for Postmodern Evangelical Theology," 194.
99 Grenz, A Primer on Postmodernism, 163-164.
100 Ibid., 164.
101 Ibid., 167-174.
To conclude that Grenz has effectively revisioned evangelical theological method, as our proposition suggests, it is necessary to show how his model provides a path beyond the contested and sometimes acrimonious nature of evangelical theology. In addition, his method needs to address the challenges posed by the transition from the modern to the postmodern context. Understanding both these contexts has therefore been a necessary precursor to evaluating his method.

Before examining the effectiveness of Grenz' proposals, one further step remains, and that is a review and summary of his work, particularly those works relevant to the thesis proposition "that Stanley Grenz' theological method has effectively revisioned evangelical theology." It is to this that we now turn.
CHAPTER THREE

AN EXPLORATION OF THE WORK OF STANLEY J. GRENZ

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Grenz was a prolific writer. It is not just the quantity of his published material that is daunting but also the range of topics covered. Over one hundred essays and journal articles, and twenty-five books point to his abundant output. At the time of his death he was involved in several writing projects. He completed reading the proofs of the second volume of his proposed six volume series *The Matrix of Christian Theology* shortly before his death, and this has subsequently been published as *The Named God and the Question of Being: A Trinitarian Theo-Ontology.* Other works might still appear with the assistance of a co-author.

This literature review adopts a chronological approach to the survey of Grenz’ major works. Though not giving an exhaustive overview of all that Grenz has written, current research into Grenz focuses on a few of his publications, but I have not been able to uncover any work which appraises his writing as a whole. This review is therefore more extensive than others presently available, even though it has been necessary to reduce the scope to pay particular attention to those works with particular relevance to Grenz’ theological method. The proposition that “Stanley Grenz’ theological method effectively revisions evangelical theology” serves as the filter for what will receive attention, and what will be mentioned only in passing. The goal is to articulate the major themes and emphases in Grenz’ writing as well as the progression of his thought, before evaluating his methodological proposal and its application, in subsequent chapters.

Some general comments on Grenz’ writing are appropriate to help establish the broader context of his work, before beginning our selective chronological review.

Grenz writes with different target audiences in mind. Several of his texts are largely a synthesis of the writings of others, a genre at which he excelled. One imagines Grenz as professor

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2 For example, Grenz reworked *Theology for the Community of God* (1994) into *Created for Community* (1998). The latter is an easily understood summary of the key points of *Theology for the Community of God*, and is intended for a more general readership.
carefully collating material into a format suitable to serve as a seminary text. Grenz as ethicist and pastor has written on topics such as civil religion, abortion, prayer, women in ministry, the millennium, hell, spirituality and pastoral misconduct. He has also written introductory overviews of Christian belief, an apologetic for studying theology, a dictionary of theological terms and a short dictionary of ethics. As a Baptist theologian, some of his works are aimed at a specifically Baptist readership. Several of his books are co-authored. All his work, even when aimed at a wider readership, is carefully written and demonstrates theological reflection.

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A special focus has been in the realm of sexual ethics. His book on homosexuality has been selected as an example of the application of his method. It makes an ideal case study of the interweaving of his chosen sources for theology, viz. scripture, tradition and culture, and raises questions as to the adequacy of the approach.

As a historian, Grenz displayed a particular interest in the life of Isaac Backus. Backus was instrumental in redefining the nature of the Baptist movement in eighteenth-century New England. Several of Grenz' earlier publications focus on Backus' legacy to Baptist life and thought and highlight his contribution to the struggle for the separation of church and state. This work flows out of Grenz' doctoral dissertation on the life of Backus entitled "Isaac Backus: Puritan and Baptist."

Backus' separation of the spheres of church and state and his delineation of the roles to be reserved for the church, find echoes in Grenz' emphasis on theology being done by and for the community of faith. Neither Grenz nor Backus see this separation as being inherently escapist, but as ensuring that the church has integrity when called to exercise a prophetic role in society. Grenz is also impressed by Backus' view that conversion involves entering into a covenant relationship with both God and the church, and sees it as a "needed corrective for much Baptist thinking that builds largely on the individualism of the Baptist heritage while ignoring the corporate dimension...." Grenz' own conviction on the centrality of the community finds an early expression in this passage. Although Backus does not feature prominently in Grenz' later

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9 See chapter 7.

10 Grenz, Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality.


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

theological construction, he serves as an inspirational figure for Grenz. Thus in the preface to 
Renewing the Center Grenz writes that, "This volume seeks to follow in the spirit of people like 
Backus and offer a hopeful appraisal of evangelical theology in the time of upheaval in which we 
are living."

Grenz' doctoral mentor was Wolfhart Pannenberg. It is thus not surprising that Grenz has made a 
careful analysis and evaluation of Pannenberg's theology. The choice of Pannenberg as his 
doctoral mentor is significant. Though a noted theologian, Pannenberg has not traditionally been 
classified as an evangelical. Grenz' willingness to step outside of classical evangelical theology 
was an early indicator of his inclusive spirit, while in turn, he has helped to make the thinking of 
Pannenberg both more accessible and acceptable to evangelical theology.

Grenz' emphasis on eschatology, which he suggests should be theology's orienting motif, has 
clear links with Pannenberg's thought. This is particularly seen in his emphasis on eschatological 
realism. However, there are interesting discontinuities. Grenz recognizes the value of science,

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14 Later Grenz writes, "Evangelicals today can do no better than be admonished by, draw inspiration from, and follow after the examples of Edwards, Backus, and a host of other evangelical luminaries." Stanley J. 
Grenz, Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era (Grand Rapids: Baker, 
2000), 7, 23.
104, no. 27 (1987), Stanley J. Grenz, "Reasonable Christianity: Wolfhart Pannenberg Turns Sixty," 
Christian Century 105, no. 26 (1988), Stanley J. Grenz, "Commitment and Dialogue: Pannenberg on 
Christianity and the Religions," Journal of Ecumenical Studies 26, no. 1 (1989), Grenz, Reason for Hope: 
The Systematic Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg. Stanley J. Grenz, "Pannenberg and Evangelical 
Theology: Sympathy and Caution," Christian Scholar's Review 20, no. 3 (1991), Stanley J. Grenz, 
Stanley J. Grenz, "The Irrelevance of Theology: Pannenberg and the Quest for Truth," Calvin Theological 
16 In turn, the compliment of being accepted as a doctoral student by Pannenberg should be noted. Grenz 
was only the second student from the USA to complete a doctorate under Pannenberg. Grenz, Stanley J. 
Reason for Hope: The Systematic Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg. New York: Oxford University Press, 
17 Specially remarkable was Pannenberg's co-operation in allowing Grenz to compile a summary of 
Pannenberg's Systematische Theologie, when the German version of the project was still underway and any 
hope of an English translation was years off. With only the first of the three volumes published in German, 
Grenz utilized material from Pannenberg's lectures in Munich to anticipate the thrust of the remaining two 
Volumes. In the foreword to the book, Pannenberg notes that he thought the method "touched me as a 
typically American desire to be always ahead of time" while he went on to confirm that "concerning the 
overall synthesis of my theology, it provides a correct picture." Grenz, Reason for Hope: The Systematic 
Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg, ix.
18 While Grenz views Pannenberg's theology as consistent with several of the main trajectories of Christian 
theology, he maintains that Pannenberg moves beyond classical theology in his conviction that truth is not 
found in the unchanging essences behind the flow of time, but that truth is "essentially historical and 
but does not share Pannenberg’s enthusiasm for the scientific method and is deeply conscious of its missiological limitations in trying to communicate with those shaped by a postmodern ethos. In an article that largely defends Pannenberg’s theological method, he describes as “problematic... Pannenberg’s apparent thorough-going rationalism and hard-nosed rejection of any attempt to base theological conclusions on a faith decision that has not been through the fire of rational reflection and challenged by alternative viewpoints.” Grenz however readily acknowledges that this rationalism is linked to Pannenberg’s understanding of himself as a “theologian called to serve the church in the public marketplace of ideas.” By contrast, Grenz writes his theology “for the community of God.” This is a significant difference from Pannenberg. Grenz notes that Pannenberg sees theology as a public discipline and consciously opts for this to combat what Pannenberg perceives to be the widespread privatization of religious belief. An apologetic motivation thus undergirds Pannenberg’s approach. The irony of an evangelical theologian such as Grenz opting for an in-house approach to theology while the supposedly less evangelical Pannenberg opts for a more missional method, is apparent.

Grenz has an irenic style of writing. While adopting fairly firm positions, he strives to be fair to alternate approaches and has an eclectic orientation. Before reaching conclusions, he provides a broad sweep of the range of alternatives. His evaluation of the stance of others is objective, perceptive and charitable.

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

20 Grenz, "Wolfhardt Pannenberg: Reason, Hope and Transcendence," 86.

21 Grenz sees theology as “a second-order discipline pursued ‘from within.’ The enterprise is a critical, reflective activity that presupposes the beliefs and practices of the Christian community.” Stanley J. Grenz, Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1993), 75.


23 It is not that Grenz does not wish to be missional, but that his strategy is different. Like Backus, Grenz believes that a renewed church will impact the world. Thus e.g. Grenz, citing Edwards and Backus as “surely correct” writes that they “perceptively saw within the momentous changes transpiring in their day the Holy Spirit at work bringing renewal to the church and the world. And they were convinced that the time had come for the church to awaken so that Christ’s followers might fulfil their mission to the world.” Grenz, Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era, 23.
3.2 TOWARDS REVISIONING EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

Grenz' earlier work displays a broad and lively interest, partially shaped by issues arising from his doctoral work, but lacking any unifying theme.

His first book, based on his doctoral dissertation, is on the life and thought of Isaac Backus and its implications for modern Baptist theology. It was followed by a book about Baptist congregational life, and then one on prayer. An exploration of the systematic theology of Pannenberg followed, and then the first of several jointly written works appeared, the initial one exploring ministry to people with AIDS. After it came a book exploring different millennial options facing evangelicals.

In his focus on the millennium debate, Grenz displays an inclusive disposition and urges that all voices be heeded in the discussion, and that a missiological focus be retained, writing, "More crucial than finding agreement about the details and chronology of the end time is the question of how we as the church of Jesus Christ understand ourselves and our mission in the present age." He explores the worldview presupposed by each approach and the ethical implications that flow from each. His ability to link theological and ethical reflection is representative of his ability to adopt an integrated approach to theological reflection. He is able to commend postmillennialism for an optimism that leads to engagement with the world; premillennialism and its innate pessimism for reminding us that "Ultimately it is God, and not our feeble actions, who is the hope of the world" and amillennialism for a realism that reminds us that the kingdom of God is a transcendent reality not to be confused with any earthly kingdom attained prior to the final transformation of creation. Grenz is thus able to sift out the ethical and practical implications of a debate that could otherwise easily be dismissed as idle speculation. His ability to affirm positives in positions he ultimately rejects reflects a generosity of spirit.

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24 Grenz, Isaac Backus. Puritan and Baptist: His Place in History, His Thought and Their Implications for Modern Baptist Theology.
25 Grenz, The Baptist Congregation.
28 Hoffman, a medical physician, is the author of part 1, which focuses on medical perspectives on AIDS, and Grenz authors part 2, where the focus is on providing theological perspectives. Hoffman and Grenz.
31 Ibid.
It is hard to find clear connections between these early publications. Perhaps it is best to understand them as the output of a young theologian with wide ranging interests, discovering that he is able to write publishable material.\(^{32}\)

1993 saw the publication of one of his major works, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*.\(^{33}\) This has proved to be Grenz' programmatic work. It outlines an agenda for evangelical theology that gives focus and direction to Grenz' writing. Because of its importance, I will explore it in detail.

Prior to this exploration, it is informative to examine an article by Grenz published in 1985 entitled "A Theology for the Future."\(^{34}\) It is here that Grenz first signals his intention to explore the future focus of theology. Though unlikely to be classified as one of Grenz' more important articles, it provides an early baseline against which to assess his later work.

The early Grenz, like the later Grenz, is positive about the need to embrace change, urging, "We must not be among those who mortgage the coming future by clinging to the known past. Our task is to understand the future and having done so to devise a strategy to meet its arrival."\(^{35}\) The 1985 Grenz then predicts six challenges likely to have worldwide impact:

1. The increasing role of women in future society
2. The widening gap between rich and poor leading to an increase in the popularity of Marxism and thus increasing the likelihood of international conflict
3. Technological and medical advances leading to a multiplication of the ethical options facing humanity
4. Increased conflict between church and state leading to a reduction of religious liberty
5. Phenomenal population increases in poorer nations coupled with greed in richer nations leading to strain being placed on the world's resources
6. The danger of nuclear proliferation\(^{36}\)

\(^{32}\) Perhaps it is also that Grenz loved to write. In personal discussion with colleagues of Grenz at Carey, several commented to me that he prepared lectures in a format that would enable easy publication thereafter. Staff, (Vancouver: 2006).

\(^{33}\) Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century*.


\(^{35}\) Ibid.: 258.

\(^{36}\) Ibid.: 260.
While these predictions muster a pass mark for Grenz as a prophet, conspicuously absent from the list is the prediction of the cultural shift from modernity to postmodernity. Indeed, the 1985 Grenz still appears to be encapsulated in a modern mindset. Enthusing about a theology for the future he writes of a future transforming “model of reality” (singular) encompassing “scientific breakthroughs,” and argues, “This theology cannot be merely a recounting of the doctrinal orthodoxies of the past, couched in discarded cosmologies. Rather, it must include a model of reality which can encompass future scientific breakthroughs.”

Grenz then suggests six defining characteristics for a theology for the future:

1) It “must first and foremost be biblical.” Grenz at this point argues strongly that a biblical theology will be concerned with issues of justice and reconciliation. He writes passionately,

No theology, therefore, regardless of how many Bible verses it quotes, can properly be called ‘biblical’ which proclaims fragmentation rather than reconciliation, which relegates any segment of humanity to second-class status in the church. It is tragic that Christian theology continues to be used to support discrimination and racism, sexism and patriarchy, practices which will be challenged in increasing intensity in the future.

Later in the article he writes that a holistic theology for the future “speaks of a God who sides with the oppressed and who grieves at the insensitivity of the rich.” In an earlier article critiquing Jerry Falwell’s “Listen America,” Grenz is scathing of Falwell’s one sided agenda. According to Falwell the problems facing America are abortion, homosexuality, pornography, humanism and the fractured family. Grenz writes, Conspicuously absent from this list of our national sins are references to injustice to the poor, exploitation of other countries, support of repression by ‘friendly’ dictators, or any questionable actions carried out in the name of national security or for the purpose of maintaining the American way of life.

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37 Ibid.: 261.
38 Ibid.: 262.
39 Ibid.: 262-263.
40 Ibid.: 265.
41 Jerry Falwell, Listen America (New York: Doubleday-Galilee, 1980).
42 Grenz, "Listen America: A Theological and Ethical Assessment."
43 Ibid.: 191.
The emphasis on biblical theology protecting and championing the rights of the disadvantaged is subdued in the older Grenz.

2) It will demand and foster change. This change will be at both an individual and societal level.\(^{44}\)

3) It will be ecumenical. Grenz clarifies that by ecumenical he means a theology “which represents the whole church.”\(^{45}\) In addition, he suggests that it will be “a theology for the whole world,” and laments that “Human theologies easily become culture bound.”\(^{46}\) Two aspects call for comment.

While the tone of the article suggests that it is aimed at readers from the evangelical tradition, this is implicit rather than explicit. In this article Grenz seems unconcerned about the identity of the evangelical movement or of its place within the theological enterprise. This shifts in his later writing, though in his later work his self-conscious identity as an evangelical again recedes into the background.\(^{47}\)

In addition, though brief, Grenz’ comments on culture have a culture negating ring. He is concerned that doing theology from a “culture-bound” position will lead to a truncated gospel or “the false gospel of cultural imperialism, or even the ‘civil religion’ of nationalism.”\(^{48}\) The later Grenz is more optimistic about the place of culture in the theological enterprise. In his 2001 work, co-authored with John Franke, Beyond Foundationalism, Grenz cites culture as one of the three main sources for theology and is happy to describe culture as theology’s “embedding context.”\(^{49}\) We explore Grenz’ attitude to culture in detail in chapter five, but at this stage it is enough to note his initial

\(^{44}\) Grenz, "A Theology for the Future,” 263.
\(^{45}\) Ibid.
\(^{46}\) Ibid.: 264.
\(^{48}\) Grenz, "A Theology for the Future,” 264.
\(^{49}\) Grenz and Franke, Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context, 130.
wary approach to culture, a caution that is replaced by a more selective appropriation of culture in his later writing.\footnote{50}

4) It will be holistic, capturing both mind and heart, and rising above the "old dualism of matter/spirit, which elevates one aspect of existence at the expense of the other..."\footnote{51}

It is in this section that we find the first hints of the theme of "community" which unites so much of Grenz' later writing. Though only present in embryo, it is suggestive of the later developments. It comes across in statements such as, "reconciliation is horizontal as well as vertical, dealing with the individual in community, as well as the individual before God. To be a Christian, it suggests, means to be a Christian in relationship with others."\footnote{52}

Part of the holism Grenz espouses is that "wholistic theology also deals with the earth. It decries humanity's rape of creation..."\footnote{53} This is a theme the older Grenz does not develop. Davis validly cites Grenz' \textit{Theology for the Community of God} as an example of the scant attention evangelical theologians pay to ecological concerns.\footnote{54} It is a criticism Rees echoes in his examination of Grenz' \textit{The Social God and the Relational Self}.\footnote{55} Rees writes: "the inherently relational character of humans is limited to human relationships only, without consideration of how profoundly our life and well-being is interdependent with that of the rest of the cosmos."\footnote{56} If the older Grenz had heeded his younger voice, perhaps this criticism could have been avoided.

5) It must be life affirming, avoiding legalism and affirming "our liberation from darkness to a fullness of life which begins even now."\footnote{57}

6) It must be oriented to the future. He writes, “Futurist theology… brings a vision of a coming glorious kingdom, which vision ought to shape the present.” Again we find hints of the later Grenz who in Beyond Foundationalism describes eschatology as theology’s orienting motif and develops the importance of this theme in depth.

While it would be unfair to expect Grenz to follow an agenda set in an eleven page article written during his years as a budding but not yet noted theologian, “A Theology for the Future” gives a basis from which to compare his later articulation of an agenda for theology. His agenda was much more clearly developed in Revisioning Evangelical Theology and it is to this that we now turn.

3.3 EXPLORING REVISIONING EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

In the preface to Revisioning Evangelical Theology Grenz attaches two labels to himself, evangelical and Baptist, which raises the question of the relationship between the terms, a question Grenz never really answers. Grenz then outlines his agenda,

As a committed Christian within the evangelical family, I am concerned for the future of the gospel witness in a rapidly changing world. The intent of this volume is to spark interest and discussion among thinkers who bear with me the label ‘evangelical’ as to how we should rethink key aspects of our theological agenda. Such rethinking – what I have called ‘revisioning’ – needs to articulate the biblical, evangelical vision in a manner that both upholds the heritage we embrace and speaks to the setting in which we seek to live as God’s people and share the good news of the salvation available in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Some aspects call for comment:

1) Grenz’ concern is for the gospel witness in a rapidly changing world. It is the changing context rather than a flawed belief system that occasions his writing. He never sees himself as challenging orthodox Christian beliefs, simply as fleshing out their implication for a changed setting.

2) The discussion is for those within the evangelical family. This seems limiting. Why shouldn’t those with a different theological persuasion be invited to participate?

58 Ibid.
59 Grenz and Franke, Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context, 239-273.
60 Grenz, Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century, 11.
61 Ibid.
3) Theology needs to “articulate the biblical, evangelical vision in a manner that both upholds the heritage we embrace and speaks to the setting in which we seek to live.” The statement assumes a clear link between a biblical and an evangelical vision. It gives priority to the evangelical interpretation of the biblical message while acknowledging the need to look to tradition and context as key hermeneutical tools. This is thus an early indicator of key aspects of his theological method.

In the introduction Grenz explores evangelicalism and the transition to postmodernity. Grenz sees some positives in the move. He particularly welcomes the stress on holism and sees it the potential to move away from the “crass individualization of the gospel”62 and thus to invite “the church to be the church.”63 He is anxious that evangelicals think through the implications of the shift, believing it calls for a new vision for evangelical theology. He identifies seven areas in need of revisioning, which are dealt with sequentially in the books seven chapters, namely,

1) Evangelical identity
2) Evangelical spirituality
3) The theological task
4) Sources for theology
5) Evangelical views of biblical authority
6) The integrative motif for theology
7) Evangelical understandings of the church

There is little obvious overlap between this list and the six defining characteristics given in his 1985 article “A Theology for the Future.”64 We can conclude that Grenz’ views evolved significantly in this 8 year period.

In chapter 1 the quest for a revisioned evangelical identity begins. Grenz explores evangelicalism’s roots, and suggests three streams as specially formative, the first phase being shaped by the Reformation, the second by Puritanism and Pietism, and the third, the post-fundamentalist card-carrying evangelicalism that arose after the second world war, heralding in neo-evangelicalism.

62 Ibid., 15.
63 Ibid., 16.
64 Discussed in 3.2.
Grenz is aware that discussions on the historic origins of evangelicalism often reflect partisan interests. His concern is to ensure that the stream of pietism receives adequate attention.65 One of his goals is to demonstrate the validity of Dayton’s characterization of the ethos of evangelicalism as being its “convertive piety.”66 Grenz stresses that though doctrine was important in the development of evangelicalism, it was not the sole driver.67 Grenz believes that the “card carrying” doctrine-believing trajectory of the post fundamentalist period represents but one dimension of the broader evangelical movement.68 To revision evangelical theology he considers it important to embrace the movement’s broader history and argues strongly for the inclusion of those branches with an ethos of “convertive piety.”

Grenz then becomes controversial, giving primacy to experience over doctrinal formulation.69 He argues that the evangelical ethos is more readily “sensed” than described theologically.70 In doing this, Grenz effectively opts for a sociological or psychological grouping rather than a doctrinal one.71 As an alternative, he believes that evangelicalism’s roots in Pietism serve as a key characteristic. He thus departs from the post-fundamentalist stress on doctrine as the definer of evangelical identity. For Grenz, it is not that scripture or doctrine are unimportant, but that

65 It can be argued that Grenz’ own bias is clear here. By insisting that Pietism and revivalism are a key part of evangelicalism’s story, he establishes a base from which to justify the experiential focus he attaches to evangelical theology. Those who place greater emphasis on evangelicalism’s links to the Reformed movement are less convinced. In addition, it should be noted that Grenz’ summary of the third stage of the movement, the post world war 2 neo evangelicalism, reflects a strong North American bias. Thus e.g. he pays no attention to British evangelicals and the role played by thinkers such as C.S.Lewis and John Stott. To be fair to Grenz, his goal is not to provide a comprehensive history of the evangelical movement. He is far more thorough in his later work, Renewing the Center. Though beyond the scope of this research, a study of the difference in ethos and emphasis between evangelical Anglicans (such as Stott and Lewis) and evangelical Baptists, would be of interest. A helpful start is made in Mark A. Noll, Bebbington David W, Rawlyk, George A., ed., Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700-1990 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).
66 Grenz, Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century, 23.
67 Randall suggests that the overriding theme of evangelicalism “is a personal relationship with Jesus” but extends this by suggesting that it is “also a spirituality of ordinary people” which can be understood by examining the sentiments expressed in the hymn, “What a Friend we have in Jesus.” Ian Randall, What a Friend We Have in Jesus: The Evangelical Tradition, ed. Philip Sheldrake, Traditions of Christian Spirituality (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2005).
68 Grenz, Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century, 27.
69 Ibid., 30-31.
70 Ibid., 31.
71 One should not overlook how radical a departure this is. To suggest a revisioned theology on the basis of something “sensed” rather than described theologically, could easily be dismissed as “liberal” subjectivity. Grenz does not deal with the complex issue of what to do when one “senses” a shared experience and identity, and yet believes very differently. The subjective/ objective divide is probably not as easily side-stepped as Grenz suggests. True, Grenz acknowledges the importance of doctrinal belief, but what does it mean for experience to come first when there are significant doctrinal differences? Does the shared
religious experience and encounter comes first. His first characteristic of a revisioned evangelicalism is that its identity is tied to those able to claim a certain “experiential piety cradled in a theology.”

In chapter two Grenz proposes a new understanding of what constitutes evangelical spirituality. He argues that spirituality should be understood in terms of a balanced life, with an emphasis on both individual and corporate elements of faith. This vision is based on his understanding of what it means to participate in the life of the God who is triune. The chapter moves in a few directions. Reacting against what he sees as evangelicalism’s overemphasis on doctrinal orthodoxy in the second half of the twentieth century, Grenz suggests that the early intent of Pietism was to reform life, not doctrine.

Acknowledging that it would be presumptuous to imply that the quest for spirituality is only the concern of the evangelical wing of the church, Grenz asks whether an evangelical spirituality is different from any other version, and if so, what constitutes a genuinely evangelical spirituality. At this point Grenz still thinks of evangelicalism as a “boundaried set,” with marks that delineate those who are in and those who are out. In later writings he suggests it is more helpful to think of evangelicalism as a “centred” rather than a “boundaried” set, with the centre being a conversion narrative of encounter with Jesus. The trajectory can move in different directions from this common centre.

Conscious of the many loopholes in individualistically oriented definitions of spirituality, he broadens his approach and adds that evangelical spirituality involves holding in creative tension the pull between the outward and the inward and the corporate and the individual dimensions of holiness. It is interesting to compare the views Grenz is expressing about evangelical spirituality, to views he had earlier expressed about Baptist spirituality. In an article published in 1991 he suggests that the distinguishing feature of Baptist spirituality is its “balance between the inward experience override the difference, or is there a point where the difference is so great that it negates the experience?

72 Grenz, Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century, 35.
and the outward and between the individual and the corporate." It seems fair to ask if in Grenz' mind Baptist spirituality and evangelical spirituality are essentially the same thing. If so, is he perhaps trying to revision evangelical theology into a Baptist mould?

Grenz then spells out some of the ecclesiological implications of his position. He wants to ensure continuity with evangelicalism's stress on individual salvation and personal piety, while also developing a more rigorous ecclesiology for the movement. At this stage Grenz seems to flounder a little. He tries to reach an equilibrium,

Although primarily the task of the individual, spirituality is nevertheless a corporate project. No one can hope to live the Christian life or grow in Christlikeness in isolation; rather, each believer needs the resources of the group in order to gain spiritual maturity.

Although affirming the importance of the corporate, Grenz is still defining it in terms of its significance for the individual. Thus the purpose of the church seems to be to help individuals grow in their spiritual quest rather than being a sign and symbol to the world. Even while arguing for a balance between inward and outward aspects, he seems to see spirituality as being primarily an "inward" discipline. At best, the corporate aspect seems to be a second tier of concern, which is a little surprising given Grenz' later articulation of a strong communitarian motif flowing from his understanding of God as triune.

The thrust of Grenz' revisioned spirituality is a call to integrate the theological enterprise with the spiritual quest. He maintains that, "All theological work must be directed toward the goal of fostering the spirituality of the believing community and of those engaging in the theological enterprise." Theological discourse thus becomes the preserve of the church, with theology arising out of the life of the believing community. While Grenz is quick to add that "A theology that arises out of discipleship does not dismiss questions of cognition and intellectual knowing," one wonders if critical questions can freely be asked in an environment of prior commitments. If

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75 A general observation on Grenz is that the early Grenz is very consciously a Baptist evangelical theologian, in his middle stages, he is consciously an evangelical theologian and the later Grenz works on a yet broader canvas, and is primarily a theologian. While he never renounces his Baptist and evangelical roots, they feature less prominently in his later work.
76 Grenz, Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century, 53.
77 Ibid., 58.
78 Ibid.
the range of acceptable answers is curtailed before questions have been asked, how genuine is the quest?

Chapter three calls for a revisioning of the theological task. Rather than being a systematic series of propositions about doctrine, Grenz suggests that the theological task be seen as a discipline serving the community of faith by helping it to reflect on its faith commitment and helping it to understand its identity conferring narrative. This assists the community to live ethically in the social-historical context in which it finds itself.

The domesticating of the theological task finds its critics. While not unsympathetic to the needs of the church community, Kuitert’s critique would be echoed by others.79 In summary he argues that:

1) As religion manifests itself beyond the boundaries of Christianity, theologians cannot help but be involved in solving religious problems that all people have in common.

2) While a theologian is a member of a group and even for the group, s/he must retain an independent posture in relation to the group or else become little more than a group ideologist.

3) To the extent that a theologian makes a contribution from within the university, s/he is obligated not just to the faith community but also to society as a whole. To the extent that society needs religion to fare well, it needs non-partisan access to religious faith.80

Tracy makes a similar point when he writes of the three publics of the theologian as being society, the academy and the church.81 The debate is a valid one. Grenz’ position is that the theologian is a member of the faith community and primarily accountable to that community.

79 Grenz’ own doctoral mentor, Wolfhart Pannenberg, has gone to great lengths to ensure that his theology meets the academic criteria of the public market place. Grenz himself acknowledges that this helps explain the rigorous rationalism that pervades Pannenberg’s work. See e.g. Grenz’ comments on Pannenberg’s approach in Grenz, "Wolfhart Pannenberg: Reason, Hope and Transcendence," 86.


Grenz notes that in spite of the evangelical emphasis on spirituality, the theological task is usually viewed in cognitive terms as an academic study of the revelation given in the Bible. He suggests that influenced by the propositionalism of the “Princeton Theologians,” evangelicals have often elevated biblical summarization to being the central task of theology. The weakness in this approach is that it “tends to promote a repetition of traditional formulations of biblical doctrine, rather than appropriate recontextualizations of the doctrines in response to changing cultural and historical considerations.”

Grenz then begins his search for viable alternatives, finding hope in a narrative approach to theology. He returns to what emerges as a theme. Theology, “while a critical, reflective activity” has a practical task to serve the faith community, and “presupposes the beliefs and practices of the Christian community.” Theology systematizes, explores and orders community symbols and concepts into a unified whole, while avoiding the dangers of:

1) Substituting theology for genuine faith.
2) Confusing a specific model of reality with reality itself.
3) Seeing the theological task as completed with the construction of a theological system.

He argues that the goal should be to articulate faith in such a way that the faith community in the world is served. One way is to ensure that theology overflows into ethics.

Cumulatively, Grenz’ argument to this stage is that if evangelicalism’s identity is linked to those whose conversion narrative sees them adopt an experiential piety, the theological framework in which that piety is best fostered will be developed by those who share a similar narrative and who seek to guide those in the faith community by helping them to articulate the ethical and faith implications of this narrative within their particular historical and cultural context.

As his portrait of a revisioned evangelicalism starts to take shape, Grenz’ fourth chapter addresses the need to rethink the sources for theology. He argues that there are three main sources for

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82 While Grenz’ characterisation of the Old Princeton theologians as being scholastic rationalists is not uncommon, it is controversial. An example of an alternate reading of their contribution is found in Paul Kjoss Helseth, "'Re-Imaging' the Princeton Mind: Postconservative Evangelicalism, Old Princeton, and the Rise of Neo-Fundamentalism," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 45, no. 3 (2002).
83 Grenz, Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century, 71.
84 Ibid., 72.
85 Ibid., 75.
86 Ibid., 84.
theology: the biblical message, the heritage of the church and culture. The criteria for evaluating any theology will be the answer to the three fold question,

To what extent does this theology articulate the biblical kerygma, reflect the faith of the one people of God, and speak to the contemporary historical-situation in which the faith community seeks to proclaim the good news and live as the people of God?87

Most of the chapter is an unpacking of the significance of the choice of each of these three sources.

Grenz is aware that most evangelicals would cite scripture as the key source for theology. However, while Grenz is firm that he does not want to discount the importance of scripture, he is convinced that evangelicals need to look for a new understanding of Biblical authority. His justification for scripture as a key theological source is pragmatic. If we are studying the Christian faith community, the Bible is its book and shapes its tradition. Grenz feels that this provides sufficient justification for its study. This line of reasoning provides an alternate to the usual evangelical apologetic for the use of scripture, which typically embraces either a study of the miraculous formation and preservation of the biblical canon, or provides an apologetic for the logical necessity of divine revelation if one is to be able to speak of God in a meaningful manner. Often both lines are adopted. Grenz’ approach is thus both simpler and more difficult to flaw.

On the one hand this is highly satisfactory, but on the other it reduces the force of appeals to scripture. If the Bible is simply the book of the church rather than a divinely inspired book, appeals to its permanent authority become tentative. Following this line of logic, scripture is primarily a part of the tradition of the church. It is a source for theology because tradition is a source for theological construction. If the faith community were to modify its tradition and pay attention to another text, there would be no compelling reason to continue to be guided by scripture.88 It is therefore not surprising that Grenz’ view of scripture has been contested by several evangelicals. While a full evaluation of Grenz’ views is the topic of the next chapter, D.A.Carson articulates the reservation of some evangelicals when he writes, “With the best will

87 Ibid., 101.
88 In addition, if simply the book of the church, it may be authoritative for the faith community, but there is no obvious reason why those outside that community should feel obligated to follow its teaching. The restriction of the sphere of the Bible’s relevance to that of the faith community has significant missiological implications and limitations. It is not clear that Grenz has thought these through.
in the world, I cannot see how Grenz’ approach to Scripture can be called ‘evangelical’ in any useful sense.” 89

In justifying his selection of scripture, tradition and culture, Grenz is at times guilty of building straw men, one to the right of his position, another to the left. Having built them he can claim to occupy the middle ground. The problem is that his three sources have not necessarily exhausted the range of possibilities. In addition, flaws in alternate positions reviewed do not prove the strength of the position being proposed but simply establish that some alternate stances are problematic. However, at this stage our primary concern is to be descriptive of Grenz’ position.

Grenz believes that theological construction flows best out of the conversation between the sources of scripture, tradition and culture. The question begging to be asked is what choices should be made when sources seem to conflict. For much of the church’s history, the biblical kerygma has been at odds with contemporary culture. The role of culture as a source for theology needs careful definition. True, Grenz does not say that the belief system of each cultural context needs to be woven into the belief of the faith community. In the first instance the concern is that the biblical kerygma is both explained and lived out in such a way that it is meaningful to each cultural context. Part of the meaning will flow from living in the realm of contrast and providing an alternate understanding of ethical living.

In chapter five Grenz proposes a revised understanding of biblical authority. He is concerned that biblical authority is often understood in a static sense, and argues that it should be responsive to the illumination of the Spirit, especially when illumination is communally mediated. His stress on the link between the Spirit and the Bible finds some practical outworking. Grenz e.g. suggests that in the writing of systematic theology, instead of bibliology being part of prolegomenon, it be discussed under pneumatology as the book of the Spirit. He also suggests linking the themes of Spirit, scripture, church and eschatology more closely. 90 The structure of his text Theology for the Community of God reflects these convictions. 91 This is a controversial chapter. Grenz elaborates on his understanding of biblical authority in other works, most notably in Beyond

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90 Grenz, Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century, 115.
91 Stanley J. Grenz, Theology for the Community of God (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994).
Evangelical Theologt.\textsuperscript{92} As I engage with reactions to Grenz' revised understanding of biblical authority in chapter four, I will not elaborate on the reaction here.

Grenz begins chapter six by noting that most theologians have sought to order their thinking around a key integrating motif. After surveying the theology of the twentieth century he concludes that the theme of the Kingdom of God was the most commonly chosen integrating motif. However, he is not convinced that this motif is sufficiently content filled on its own, and argues that by exchanging the image of the Kingdom of God for that of community, greater direction is given. To the extent that all God's work in the world is directed toward creating community, he suggests that this theme best serves as the integrating motif for theology.\textsuperscript{93} As Grenz develops his understanding of both community and community as the integrative motif for theology more fully elsewhere,\textsuperscript{94} and as this is described and evaluated in chapter 6 of this research, I will not elaborate further at this point.

In the closing chapter of Revisioning Evangelical Theology, Grenz develops what he calls a "process model" of the church to rectify evangelicalism's inadequate ecclesiology.\textsuperscript{95} The model argues that the church must be shaped by what it is destined to become. This requires adopting eschatology as an orienting motif for theology.

Grenz begins by painting a portrait of the troubled state of evangelical ecclesiology. After briefly surveying the ecclesiology of differing church traditions, Grenz concludes that while each has strengths, none is adequate for a revisioned evangelical theology. Building on his work in the previous chapter, he suggests that the themes of the Kingdom of God and community need to be added to build a more substantial understanding of the church. He introduces a tentative eschatological motif, one he develops more fully in later writings, suggesting "The link of the

\textsuperscript{92} Grenz and Franke, \textit{Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context.}
\textsuperscript{93} For a negative reaction to Grenz' proposal, see Russell D. Moore, "Leftward to Scofield: The Eclipse of the Kingdom in Post-Conservative Evangelical Theology," \textit{Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society} 47, no. 3 (2004).
\textsuperscript{95} Grenz, \textit{Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century}, 183.
church to the reign of God means that ecclesiology has an unavoidable future reference. And this eschatological orientation ought to shape our understanding of the doctrine of the church.”

He springboards from this insight to suggest an eschatological process model for the church. Preferring this model to more static ones, he argues that,

The eschatological-process alternative, in contrast, asserts that the church is constituted by its destiny as the company of the kingdom. The mission of the church, therefore, is not limited to bringing the elect into the fold. Rather, it includes the task of actualizing in the present – modeling for the world to see and as a sign of the eschatological reality – the glorious fellowship that will come into fullness at the consummation of history.

In short, then, the church does not draw her identity from her current practice, but from her future. Grenz then links this to his proposed integrating motif for theology, community. Simply looking to eschatology does not answer the question of the nature of the eschatological reality the church is trying to model. Grenz suggests that a revisioned eschatology must therefore add the motif of community, for, “The church is the community of love, called to reflect the nature of triune God.” He later expands,

Love is a relational term, requiring both subject and object... Were God a solitary acting subject, God would require the world as the object of his love, in order to be the Loving One. But the doctrine of the Trinity asserts that throughout eternity God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The divine reality encompasses a multiplicity within the Godhead.

Grenz thus moves into the community motif flowing from the triune God,

God’s soteriological purposes are to bring glory to his own triune nature by establishing a reconciled creation in which humans reflect in relation to each other and to nature the reality of the Creator. As we exist in love, we reflect what God is like.

*Revisioning Evangelical Theology* introduces all the elements of what becomes Grenz’ fully developed theological model. Although not all are expanded upon, all are present. The three sources for a revisioned evangelical theology are to be scripture, tradition and

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96 Ibid.
97 Ibid.
98 Ibid., 184.
99 Ibid., 186.
100 Ibid.
culture. Community is to be the integrating motif. The motifs of eschatology and Trinity are starting to emerge. The active role to be played by the Spirit has also been indicated.

Significant attention has been given to fully summarizing *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* as much of the remainder of Grenz’ theology and theological method is shaped by the concerns articulated in this work. It provides the agenda for his theological writing, and it is the outworking of this agenda that we now explore as we examine his post *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* writing.

### 3.4 TOWARDS THEOLOGY FOR THE COMMUNITY OF GOD

In 1994, a year after the appearance of *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, Grenz’ systematic theology, *Theology for the Community of God*, was published.\(^\text{101}\) It allowed him to implement some of the proposals made in *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*. In particular, it allowed him to develop the theme of community, and more specifically the eschatological community, as the integrating motif for theology.

Prior to the publication of *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, Grenz heralded his conviction that the theme of community needs to be central in the theological enterprise, particularly if theology is to be relevant to the postmodern era. This view is a refrain in his writing, and finds early expression in three articles published in fairly quick succession. The first “The Community of God: A Vision of the Church in the Postmodern Age,” was followed shortly afterwards by “‘Community’ as a Theological Motif for the Western Church in an Era of Globalization,” and then by “Salvation and God’s Program in Establishing Community.”\(^\text{102}\)

Citing an indebtedness to the work of early twentieth century thinkers Josiah Royce (1855-1916), Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) and George Herbert Mead (1863-1931), Grenz suggests that advocates of communalism dispel the myth of the unencumbered self and argue that our deepest beliefs and values are mediated to us through tradition and the community in which we are

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\(^\text{101}\) Grenz had originally planned to write a one volume systematic theology first, but was persuaded by IVP to precede it by a text exploring an agenda for the future of evangelical theology. Ibid., 11.

located. In “The Community of God: A Vision of the Church in the Postmodern Age” Grenz writes,

Our identity develops as we find a story or narrative in terms of which our lives make sense. This personal narrative, however, is always embedded in the story of the communities in which we participate, and from this larger story we derive our understandings of virtue, common good, and ultimate meaning.\(^{103}\)

He suggests that the church be viewed as the identity-conferring community for Christians who, because of their participation in the life of the church, are imbued with a “special consciousness.”\(^{104}\) For the church to be the identity-conferring community it is called to be, Grenz argues that an appropriate vision of and for the church needs to be upheld. Key ingredients are that the church is a covenant community,\(^{105}\) a kingdom community,\(^{106}\) and the community of God. This community is shaped by its eschatological hope. The hope of a new heaven and earth and the picture of a new order for society thus shapes the thinking and life of the church.

Although his article “‘Community’ as a Theological Motif for the Western Church in an Era of Globalization” largely reworks the material on the kingdom of God found in *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, it is of interest in that it reflects Grenz’ growing use of the insights of the social sciences.\(^{107}\)

### 3.5 Theology for the Community of God

It was perhaps fortuitous that *Theology for the Community of God* was first published in the same year as Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*.\(^{108}\) Grudem’s work is an example of the propositional approach to theology that Grenz wishes to move beyond and Grenz’ “revisioned” approach is highlighted when compared to Grudem. The “anti-liberalism

\(^{103}\) Grenz, "Community as a Theological Motif for the Western Church in an Era of Globalization," 20.


\(^{105}\) Grenz is unapologetic for advocating a congregationalist/baptist understanding of the church. “The church, we declare, is essentially people standing in voluntary covenant with God and consequently with each other.” Ibid.: 20.

\(^{106}\) Grenz is keen that the concept of the church and the kingdom of God, though not viewed as synonymous, also not be severed: “Yet, we dare neither equate nor separate the church and the kingdom. Instead the church is the product of the kingdom; it is produced by the obedient response to the announcement of the reign of God.” Ibid.: 24.

\(^{107}\) Grenz’ use of the insights of the social sciences is of interest, as much for the insights he chooses to reject as for those he adopts. We will explore this when we evaluate his work on human sexuality, and particularly his views on homosexuality, in chapter 7.

apologetic” that often characterizes the tone of many evangelical offerings, is absent in Grenz. His work shows significant engagement with the social-historical context. Most notable is that the work is theme driven. Grenz very consistently makes use of his integrating theme of “community” to draw and hold the work together.

In his introduction Grenz provides a rationale for his use of community as an integrative theme. The following quote is representative,

‘Community’ is important as an integrative motif for theology not only because it fits with contemporary thinking, but far more importantly because it is central to the message of the Bible. From the narratives of the primordial garden which open the curtain on the biblical story to the vision of the white robed multitudes inhabiting the new earth with which it concludes, the drama of the Scriptures speaks of community. Taken as a whole the Bible asserts that God’s program is directed to the bringing into being of community in the highest sense – a reconciled people, living within a renewed creation, and enjoying the presence of their Redeemer.

The work starts fairly traditionally with an examination of the questions of God’s existence, and which God to believe in. What is a little surprising (from an evangelical perspective) is the delay in discussing the doctrine of scripture, which does not appear until chapter 14 in the section on pneumatology. It is more common for evangelical theologians to establish a link between revelation (primarily in scripture) and the possibility of the theological enterprise, early in their work.

After the introduction, Grenz divides his work into six main parts, each with four chapters of comparable length:
1) Theology
2) Anthropology
3) Christology
4) Pneumatology
5) Ecclesiology
6) Eschatology

109 This is in fairly stark contrast to Grudem who, as his title suggests, is adamant that the role of systematic theology is to outline biblical doctrine. For Grudem this is at the expense of any serious engagement with the social context.
110 Grenz, Theology for the Community of God, 30.
111 Ibid., 494.
Having affirmed that God is triune in chapter two, Grenz capitalizes on the insight. If God exists in a triune community, community characterizes and symbolizes the nature and agenda of God. Grenz treats the topics of the remaining 5 parts of the book, (anthropology, Christology, pneumatology, ecclesiology and eschatology) in the light of God’s agenda to create community. This is consistent with the basic thesis of the book that community is God’s purpose for creation.

Grenz’ indebtedness to Pannenberg is apparent in the book. A repeated refrain is that the eschatological reality of the community of God shapes its awareness and practice in the present. It is the future rather than the past that serves as our reference point. Thus even in his discussion on the creation he is quick to point to the importance of the eschaton, writing, “we must give primacy to the future eschaton, and not the primordial past, as the ultimate point of creation.”

Clearly it is not possible to provide a comprehensive summary of a work running to almost 900 pages, but I have highlighted some features that are relevant for this research.

By discussing the doctrine of scripture within the theme of pneumatology, Grenz is giving expression to the conviction he expresses in Revisioning Evangelical Theology that the Bible should be seen as the Spirit’s book. In this way he provides scope for an emphasis not only on the inspiration of the Bible, but also on its illumination by the Spirit. This allows for greater interaction with the historical-cultural context in which the church finds itself.

Also of interest is Grenz’ treatment of the question of the imago Dei. This is an area of special focus in Grenz’ later writing. Following Pannenberg, Grenz initially approaches the question from an anthropological perspective under the theme of humanity’s “openness to the world.” Later in the work he discusses a dynamic understanding of the image of God whereby, “The image of God is a reality toward which we are moving. It is what we are enroute to becoming.” He then spells out the link to eschatology:

The divine image is the goal or destiny that God intends for his creatures. Hence it is a future reality that is present now only as a foretaste, or only in the form of our human potential. Consequently, the focus of the idea is neither anthropology

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112 Ibid., 146.
113 Ibid., 510.
115 Grenz, Theology for the Community of God, 169.
116 Ibid., 224.
nor Christology, but eschatology. The image of God will one day be borne by resurrected humans in the new creation.¹¹⁷

In his theological construction he is thus using eschatology as his orienting motif, which is consistent with his methodological proposal in Beyond Foundationalism.¹¹⁸

Perhaps more significant than the content of each topic is the book’s methodology. Grenz’ consistent use of the integrating theme of community and the orienting motif of eschatology, as well as his willingness to interact with scripture, the heritage of the church and contemporary culture in reaching conclusions, reflects an effort to implement the agenda he set in Revisioning Evangelical Theology.

3.6 GRENZ AND EGALITARIAN VERSUS COMPLIMENTARIAN VIEWS ON THE ROLE OF WOMEN

Grenz actively participated in the debate amongst evangelicals on the role of women, particularly as it relates to women in ministry. His desire to write a book on the topic was birthed almost a decade before he was able to do so, and flowed from noting the emotional debate over the ordination of women in his denomination and his concern over “the negative effect much of the rhetoric was having on the lives of many students.”¹¹⁹ He acknowledges that having a wife actively involved in ministry also impacted his thinking.¹²⁰

In 1995 Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry was published. Written together with Denise Kjesbo, a faculty member of the North American Baptist Seminary, and a former teaching assistant of Grenz’, the book adopts an egalitarian stance on the question of the role of women in the life of the church.¹²¹ Though the tone of the book is essentially peaceable and non-combative,¹²² it is critical of the complementarian position. A paragraph toward the end of the book best summarizes its position,

Egalitarians want the church to avail itself of the particular contributions of men and women in every aspect of life. The egalitarian case is not built on the myth of

¹¹⁷ Ibid.
¹¹⁸ Grenz and Franke, Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context, 239-273.
¹²⁰ Ibid.
¹²¹ For example, “We are committed to this egalitarian position.” Ibid., 18.
¹²² A not insignificant achievement given the emotive nature of the debate in the North American context. In chapter two I discuss the conflict amongst Southern Baptists over this issue.
androgyny, the claim that men and women are essentially the same. Rather, the
differences between the sexes demand the inclusion of both in leadership.
Because men and women view the world in different ways, the church leadership
team is enhanced by the presence of both.¹²³

Following a fairly typical Grenz pattern, Grenz published a major journal article on the topic at
much the same time as the book was published entitled “Anticipating God’s New Community:
Theological Foundations for Women in Ministry.” In it Grenz suggests that evangelicals can be
divided into two camps, complementarians and egalitarians.¹²⁴ Grenz attempts to break the
impasse by an appeal to theological concepts rather than a debate over the meaning of individual
controversial Bible texts, but in the end he probably achieves little more than speaking words of
encouragement to the egalitarian camp. However, from the perspective of theological method
(our area of interest) what is noteworthy is that Grenz consistently uses two of his key theological
categories to justify his conclusion.

The first is the appeal to the eschatological future and the way it should shape present practice.¹²⁵
Predictably, the other is that of community and relationship, both of which flow from the nature
of the triune God. Arguing against the authoritarian assumptions he believes to be present in the
complementarian position, Grenz concludes:

We do the entire people of God a disservice if we merely give women access to
the power structures of the Church while maintaining un-Biblical hierarchical
organizational patterns. Instead, evangelical theological convictions call us to
move to a style of Church leadership that, because it focuses on a shared
ministry, more closely mirrors the relational nature of the triune God, more
adequately reflects God’s intention in creation, and hence more effectively serves
the whole people of God in their task of embodying in their institutional life the
Biblical vision of God’s new community.¹²⁶

In addition, while not as openly stated, the changed cultural context seems to inform Grenz’
thinking. This is consistent with his methodological proposal that culture serve as a source for
theology.¹²⁷ For example, while noting that complementarians argue that the push toward the
ordination of women reflects the “dangerous inroads of contemporary culture into the church,”
Grenz suggests that egalitarians (with whom he identifies) believe that this push “represents the

¹²⁵ Ibid.: 602.
¹²⁶ Ibid.: 611.
¹²⁷ Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context*, 130-166.
work of the Spirit.” This is consistent with his view that the Spirit sometimes appropriates the voice of culture to speak to the church.

Though Grenz primarily focuses on the question of women in ministry, his concern is broader, and he also comments on gender roles in the family. At the fourth annual Kuyper lectures on Women and the Future of the Family, Grenz, in disagreeing with Fox-Genovese, claimed, “I think that the feminist revolution, despite the negative results some of its excesses have produced, has been generally positive.” In rejecting the stereotypical “male-as-leader female-as follower” model, Grenz cautions against elevating certain gender roles to normative status.

While none of this is particularly startling, it does help position Grenz in a debate that has been divisive amongst evangelicals. It also suggests that in this debate, his methodological proposal guides him towards a progressive conclusion.

3.7 A PRIMER ON POSTMODERNISM

Grenz’ A Primer on Postmodernism, has proved to be one of his most popular works. Intended as a “Primer” on the topic, it serves its purpose well.

Grenz claims that his interest in postmodernism was sparked after an invitation to participate in a think tank on ministry to ‘baby busters’ that took place in Charlotte, North Carolina, from 26–28 October 1993. A paper presented to the Southeastern Regional meeting of the ETS at the campus of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in March 1994 provides the basis for the

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128 Grenz and Kjesbo, Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry, 33-34.
132 Ibid., 53.
135 Ibid., ix.
book's first chapter. Grenz had previously raised questions about the implications of postmodernism for the future of theology, but claims that it was after these two events that “I proceeded to immerse myself in postmodernism.” Grenz’ conviction that an understanding and interaction with the postmodern context is crucial for meaningful theological engagement in the Western world is therefore relatively recent, though it is consistent with his conviction that culture should serve as a source for theology and function as theology’s embedding context.

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

Of concern to Grenz is the postmodern rejection of the metanarrative. Grenz notes,

The abandonment of belief in universal truth entails the loss of any final criterion by which to evaluate the various interpretations of reality that compete in the contemporary intellectual realm. In this situation, all human interpretations – including the Christian worldview – are equally valid because all are equally invalid.

In rejecting this stance, Grenz argues that the Christ event provides the criterion against which all other competing ideologies can be tested. He urges that, “...we simply cannot allow Christianity to be relegated to the status of one more faith among others. The gospel is inherently an expansive missionary message.”

Grenz is quick to balance negative critique with affirmation, and suggests that evangelicalism can learn from the postmodern rejection of modernity’s assumption that knowledge is certain, objective and good. He suggests that as the capacity of the human mind is tainted by the fall,

137 Ibid., x.
138 Ibid., 161.
139 Ibid., 163-164.
Christians should take a distrustful stance toward human reason. He writes, "...the human problem is a matter not merely of ignorance but of misdirected will."\(^{141}\)

Grenz concludes that a postmodern articulation of the Christian gospel would be post-individualistic, post-rationalistic, post-dualistic and post-noeticentric.\(^{142}\) In other words, a revisioned evangelical theology suitable for the postmodern situation would stress the communal, value the experiential, embrace a "biblical holism,"\(^{143}\) and "declare that the purpose of correct doctrine is to serve the attainment of wisdom."\(^{144}\) Community, experience, holism and wisdom thus become values that can be stressed and embraced in a revisioned version of evangelical theology.

3.8 THE MORAL QUEST

Grenz is both an ethicist and a theologian. Many of his articles deal with ethical issues, and presuppose an appropriate method in arriving at their conclusions, but *The Moral Quest* is Grenz’ attempt to articulate his ethical method more clearly.

Grenz’ *The Moral Quest*, as its subtitle suggests, provides “foundations of Christian ethics.”\(^{145}\) After a general introduction to the ethical task, Grenz embarks on a survey of ethical thought, starting with the Greek ethical tradition, and then moving to ethics from a biblical perspective. In this section Grenz is keen to show “how the lines of the Bible’s ethical teachings converge in Christ.”\(^{146}\)

He suggests that the main theme in the Old Testament is that of God in covenant, with supporting themes of sin and social solidarity climaxing in an eschatological anticipation that reassures that even if God does not act against the wicked in the present, he will act on behalf of his covenant people at the end of the age.

\(^{140}\) Ibid., 165.

\(^{141}\) Ibid., 166-167.

\(^{142}\) Ibid., 167.

\(^{143}\) Ibid., 171.

\(^{144}\) Ibid., 172.


\(^{146}\) Ibid., 97.
Moving to the New Testament, Grenz affirms that the life, death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus lies at the center of the Bible, and inaugurates an ethic for the Christian community rooted in their being the family of God and attempting to imitate Christ. Christlikeness thus becomes the goal of the moral life. Grenz tracks the Pauline development of this theme where salvation forms the basis of the moral life, the ethical imperative being made possible through the indwelling Spirit of Christ, who is also the guarantee of the eschatological future. He suggests that, "...we might capsulize the ethic of Paul – as well as of the New Testament as a whole – in the phrase 'By the power of the indwelling Spirit, be (that is, become) who you are.'"

Grenz then embarks upon a survey of Christian ethical proposals, both from the past (giving fair coverage to Augustine, Aquinas and Luther, and a smaller spot to Calvin) before starting a new chapter on contemporary Christian proposals in which he surveys developments in ethical thought in the twentieth century.

In many ways The Moral Quest follows a typical Grenz pattern. Up until this point he has largely written in survey mode, sweeping through and summarizing Greek and biblical perspectives before adding an overview of church history and finishing with the contemporary context. Of the book’s 302 pages (excluding endnotes) the first 203 are written in this style. While Grenz is not absent from the review, he is trying to be fair to the material he is presenting. In the concluding third of the book (chapter 6 onwards) Grenz embarks on the constructive process, more actively working toward his own ethical model, drawing support from the historical and biblical review provided. Any survey has to be selective, and not too surprisingly Grenz has reported in a way that will be supportive of his model and conclusions. He consistently applies his theological method by using his trio of theological sources, scripture, tradition and the contemporary context.

It is the contemporary context that seems to be the main driver as Grenz develops his ethical model in the remainder of the book. It is a model that springs from his trinitarian, communitarian and eschatological vision.

Grenz suggests that “the great methodological innovation of postmodern ethics” is its communal vision and concurs that our understanding of virtue and goodness flows from the community in

147 Ibid., 105-117.
148 Ibid., 128.
which we are nurtured. The implication is that, “Foundational to our understanding of the ethical life is the realization that as Christians we constitute a particular community. We are a people that gather around our common confession that Jesus is the Christ.”

The Christian vision that results from the biblical narrative includes viewing God as a social Trinity and humanity being \textit{imago Dei}. These images provide the transcendent reference for the ethical ideal of life in community. The motivation for living according to this ideal flows in part from the eschatological awareness that, “God’s \textit{telos} is nothing less than gathering a reconciled people, nurtured in a renewed creation and enjoying fellowship with the eternal God (Rev 21:1-5).” He suggests that this vision provides the basis for a Christian ethic in the postmodern context. The finer detail is not relevant to this survey of Grenz’ writing, but is summarized well by him toward the end of the book,

The ethical mandate of the church, therefore, is to reflect as far as possible in the midst of the brokenness of the present that eschatological ideal community of love which models itself after the community of the triune God. This occurs as all our relationships embody the comprehensive reality of love revealed in the biblical narrative of God in Christ effecting the reconciliation of the world.

While this falls short of providing explicit guidelines of what to do in particular situations, it provides the major motifs for Grenz’ moral vision. The vagueness is both a strength and weakness. Grenz’ success in applying these motifs when discussing specific ethical dilemmas will be evaluated in chapter 7 of this research.

3.9 SEXUAL ETHICS AND WELCOMING BUT NOT AFFIRMING

Grenz had a special interest in sexual ethics. In 1997 Westminster John Knox Press republished Grenz’ 1990 work, \textit{Sexual Ethics: An Evangelical Perspective}. In the preface Grenz notes with satisfaction that:

With the exception of slight editing of the text, the present book is identical to the original 1990 edition. The desire of Westminster John Knox Press to keep the work substantially in its original form is for me a gratifying indication of the continuing value of the positions I sought to articulate seven years ago.

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149 Ibid., 230-231.
150 Ibid., 231.
151 Ibid., 238.
152 Ibid., 296.
153 Grenz, \textit{Sexual Ethics: An Evangelical Perspective}.
154 Ibid., vii.
In itself the sentiment may seem insignificant, but it must be kept in mind that Grenz argues that a key source for theology is culture, which in chapter 5 of Beyond Foundationalism he describes as its "embedding context." Given the dramatic shift in cultural attitudes toward human sexuality in recent years, it seems fair to ask if someone seriously looking to culture as an embedding context for theology would be so sure that no changes were needed after a seven-year period.

A more critical test comes in Grenz' Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality. The question of an appropriate response to both a homosexual orientation and to homosexual behavior (many commentators, Grenz included, agree that one must distinguish between the two) is proving to be both emotional and divisive within the Christian community. In Welcoming but Not Affirming Grenz tries to respond in an irenic manner, while at the same time providing a scholarly defense of what he believes to be the traditional Christian viewpoint on homosexuality. As Welcoming but Not Affirming serves as the test case of the implementation of Grenz' method, it is discussed fully in chapter 7 of this research, and I will not explore it further here.

3.10 RENEWING THE CENTER

Awarded the Christianity Today 2001 award as the best theology/ethics book in the year reviewed, Renewing the Center is a reflection, as it sub title claims, on "evangelical theology in a post-theological era." Grenz argues that the emerging task of evangelical theology is to come to grips with the postmodern condition, which will involve responding to a "call for a chastened rationality" and a "transition from realism to social construction and from the metanarrative to local stories."

Renewing the Center pulls together much of Grenz' previous work, and at times expands upon previous themes. The opening 183 pages review the history of evangelicalism and some of the key questions it faces. Grenz goes into more detail than in Revisioning Evangelical Theology, but the agenda is essentially the same. Of special interest is Grenz' selection of two representative but

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155 Grenz and Franke, Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context, 130.
156 Grenz, Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality.
158 Grenz, Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era.
159 Ibid., 19.
contrast theologians from each of what Grenz considers the three main eras of evangelicalism in the twentieth century. For the 1940’s to 1970’s he selects Carl F.H Henry as his more conservative theologian, and Bernard Ramm as representing the more progressive wing. For the second generation he chooses Millard Erickson and Clark Pinnock as representing the conservative and left wing respectively. For the contemporary setting, his selection as a conservative representative is Wayne Grudem and to represent the left wing of evangelicalism, John Sanders. The North American bias in these selections is apparent.Rather than the detail of these theologians’ thought, what is of interest from the perspective of this research is Grenz’ approach. “Evangelical” is a contested category. There are those who would dispute the inclusion of theologians such as Ramm, Pinnock and Sanders within the evangelical camp. By contrast, few would argue that Henry, Erickson and Grudem are evangelicals. Grenz quite intentionally draws on a wide canvas, being firmly insistent that the Ramms, Pinnocks and Sanders in the theological world should not marginalized but be readily identified as evangelical theologians. Not all are convinced. Erickson cites Ramm, Pinnock, Sanders (and Grenz) as representatives of the “evangelical left.” Though Erickson concedes that they are evangelicals, in the final paragraph of his book he cautions, Surely there must come a point where a line has been crossed, and at least a hybrid must be present. It does not yet appear that these theologians have moved so far as to surrender the right to be called evangelicals, but such movement cannot be unlimited.

Having established the existence of a wide range within evangelical thought, and argued that evangelical theology is in a transitional phase, Grenz moves to address areas of particular concern for evangelical theology in a post–theological era. He hopes that his proposals will lead to the renewal of evangelical theology. In chapter six he looks at the question of theological method after foundationalism, a question he and Franke explore more fully in Beyond

160 Ibid., 85-162.
161 Grenz briefly discusses the work of Dave Tomlinson as representing a “post-evangelical” thinker. Though claiming that Tomlinson writes “from a British perspective” he acknowledges that his work “has direct application to the North American context as well.” Ibid., 166. See also Dave Tomlinson, The Post-Evangelical (London: Triangle, 1995).
162 See e.g. the discussion on the heresy charges faced by Pinnock and Sanders in chapter 2.3.2 of this research.
Chapter 7 sees him address the question of the relationship between theology and science after the death of realism, while chapter 8 sees him expand on some of the thoughts he had earlier developed in his article “Toward an Evangelical Theology of Religions.” As he draws the book to a close his focus turns to evangelical ecclesiology, an area he argues is in need of renewal.

The books closing chapter suggests that, “…what the present situation demands, and in a sense evokes, is the renewal of a ‘generous orthodoxy’ that is as ‘orthodox’ as it is ‘generous.’” Grenz believes that renewal in ecclesiastical life needs to be preceded by a renewal of the theological center of evangelicalism, a renewal that is more about a restoration of a generous theological spirit to the church, than a revision of particular doctrines.

From the perspective of this research, two key issues raised in Renewing the Center are:

1) Grenz’ portrayal of neo evangelical history as inclusive of both Arminian and Barthian streams of thought, as well as of the more propositional approaches associated with theologians such as Henry, Erickson and Grudem. In his revisioned theology, Grenz works with those others would classify as being on the edges of evangelical theology. To be successful in his bid to revision evangelical theology with a theological method that has as one of its key sources the tradition (or historical understanding) of the church, Grenz needs to establish that evangelical tradition has included a broader range than those whom he has chosen to represent the conservative end of the spectrum.

2) Grenz’ conviction that the postmodern situation requires a different theological approach, and that the postmodern critique of rationality rightly calls for a “chastened rationality” from evangelicals. Rather than seeking for an indisputable foundation for theology, he suggests an acceptance of the postmodern insight that all theology is local or specific, while adding the rider that despite the specificity of all theology, local theologies share in common a similar pattern, shape or style and that this allows for the construction of a

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167 Grenz, Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era, 326.

168 Ibid., 333.

169 Ibid., 19.
meaningful mosaic that can rightly be called Christian theology. Explication of this uniquely Christian style “provides the finishing touches of an evangelical theological method that can meet the postmodern challenge.”

3.11 BEYOND FOUNDATIONALISM

Co-authored with John Franke, Beyond Foundationalism suggests a theological method for the postmodern context. It is a highly stylized work. Lamenting the fragmentation in both mainline and conservative (evangelical) theology, and rejecting the dependence on foundationalism present in both, Grenz and Franke introduce the need for a different theological method. They suggest that it will be found in theology engaging three conversation partners as primary sources, viz. scripture as theology’s norming norm, tradition as its hermeneutical trajectory and culture as its embedding context. Rather than any of the three providing an undisputed foundation, they cohere together in a “web of belief.” These sources then interact with three focal motifs, viz. the Trinity as theology’s structural motif, community as the integrative motif, and eschatology as theology’s orienting motif.

The idea of the book originated with Franke after he read Grenz’ Revisioning Evangelical Theology. Franke intended it as a work on theological method developing the proposals in Grenz’ Revisioning Evangelical Theology. After meeting in the Spring of 1996, Grenz and Franke decided to write the book together. The book takes many constructive steps toward developing a theological method for the postmodern context, including:

1) An exploration of the shortcomings of foundationalism and the external realism that has been assumed by most evangelical theologians since the nineteenth century. Grenz and Franke engage with social constructionists, communitarians and deconstructionists and are able to avoid a reactionary tone.

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170 Ibid., 211.
171 Grenz and Franke, Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context.
172 Grenz and Franke acknowledge their indebtedness for the concept to Quine, and for comparable concepts to Kort, Meiland and Krausz. Ibid., 39.
173 As outlined in the book’s preface. Ibid., x.
174 As e.g. one finds in D.A. Carson, Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), Millard J. Erickson, Postmodernizing the Faith: Evangelical Responses to the Challenge of Postmodernism (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), David F. Wells, No Place for Truth or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology? (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993).
2) The idea of scripture, tradition and culture serving as conversation partners, which elevates the discussion beyond the biblicism often associated with evangelicalism.

3) Adopting the Trinity as the structuring motif for theological construction. By placing the emphasis on the relationship between the persons of the Trinity the focus shifts from the structure of the Trinity to the communal implications.

4) Adopting community as theology’s integrating motif. This serves as a corrective to individualism. In motivating for the theme of community as theology’s integrative motif Grenz repeats his argument in Revisioning Evangelical Theology that the more traditional integrative theme of the Kingdom of God lacks adequate content. As in the earlier work, Grenz’ claims at this point are vulnerable to challenge. The biblical content on the Kingdom of God is rich. It is probably easier to argue in the opposite direction to Grenz that the theme of community is subsumed in the broader theme of the Kingdom.

5) Their eschatological emphasis and usage of Pannenberg’s concept of “eschatological realism” which elevates the eschatological discussion beyond the fanciful flights sometimes engaged in by evangelicals.

From the perspective of this research, Beyond Foundationalism is Grenz’ most significant work, and as I interact with it fully in later chapters, I will not elaborate on it further here.

3.12 THE MATRIX OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

Grenz planned to write a six-volume series The Matrix of Christian Theology. Inserting Matrix into the title helped establish that the series was conceived to interact creatively with the challenges of postmodernity, rather than to be a complete systematic theology as such. The proposed volumes were to deal with six loci of doctrine, namely, anthropology, God, Christology, pneumatology, ecclesiology and eschatology, each volume not so much exploring Christian belief about each topic, but contextually applying the beliefs. Grenz writes, “instead of offering a thorough treatment of the theological focus under consideration, each volume seeks to engage with the most far-reaching challenges that the postmodern context raises for the specific section of the theological corpus under study.”175 His early death saw only the first two volumes being written.

The first, a theological anthropology that draws heavily from the insights of trinitarian theology and applies them to a communal understanding of the imago Dei, is entitled *The Social God and the Relational Self*.\(^{176}\) At the risk of oversimplification, it attempts to answer the question “what does it mean to be human?”

The second volume *The Named God* was published posthumously.\(^{177}\) Attempting to reverse the accusation that Western ontology is responsible for the Christian understanding of God, Grenz argues for a “theo-ontology” as opposed to an “onto-theology.” Reading the Bible as a series of sagas in which the biblical God is self-named, Grenz brings the insights that flow from the *I Am* naming of God into the conversation on the nature of being.

Methodologically, Grenz intentionally engages in a triologue in this series, suggesting that his theological construction results from his

‘thinking through’ a particular topic in a manner in which canonical scripture, the theological heritage of the church, and the intellectual currents of the wider culture are brought together in constructive conversation. Hence, the theological construction developed in this series arises out of the perichoretic dance of a particular, ordered set of sources of insight.\(^{178}\)

Like *Welcoming But Not Affirming*, these two volumes have the potential to be studied as case studies of Grenz’ method in action, but their later publication made *Welcoming But Not Affirming* a more practical choice.\(^{179}\)

It is noteworthy that Grenz intended the third volume in this series to focus on Christology. As his Christology is the most underdeveloped aspect of his theology, it is particularly unfortunate that this volume was not written. It also serves as a reminder that we should not be overly critical of Grenz for not having the time to fully explore some aspects of theology.

**3.13 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

In spite of Grenz writing on a wide range of topics, there is a pleasing consistency in his work and more particularly in his methodological proposals.

\(^{176}\) Ibid.


While clear themes are not discernable in his work prior to the 1993 publication of *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, the seeds of his method are present. The early Grenz has a wide range of interests and also follows through on issues that arose from his doctoral dissertation. A strong social conscience is evident, more so than in his later work. He is also conscious of his status as a Baptist (and evangelical) theologian, the Baptist identity finding less emphasis in his later work.

After the publication of *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, his method gains greater clarity and is expanded upon. The building blocks remain the same. The sources for theology are to be scripture, tradition and culture. The focal motifs are to be the Trinity, community and eschatology. The theologian is part of the faith community, and works for the faith community. Together, the faith community needs to discern the way the Spirit is guiding and leading the church. The renewal of the church will have a missiological impact.

The background provided in chapter two and three concludes part 1 of this research. It places us in a position to explore the proposition “that Stanley Grenz’ theological method effectively revisions evangelical theology.”

179 The clear link between theology and ethics in *Welcoming But Not Affirming* also makes it a more suitable case study.
PART TWO

AN EXPLORATION AND EVALUATION OF THE THEOLOGICAL METHOD OF STANLEY J. GRENZ
CHAPTER FOUR

AN EXPLORATION AND EVALUATION OF GRENZ’ CHOICE AND USE OF
SCRIPTURE AS A SOURCE FOR THEOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Justifying his own exercise in theological revisioning, Carl Henry wrote, “If evangelical Protestants do not overcome their pre-occupation with negative criticism of contemporary theological deviation at the expense of the construction of preferable alternatives to these, they will not be much of a doctrinal force in the decade ahead.” A generation later, though facing different theological challenges, Grenz’ attempt to revision evangelical theological method can be seen as an endeavour to move beyond the impasse encountered when evangelical theology attempts to engage in meaningful dialogue with the postmodern context. In this chapter we begin our exploration and evaluation of Grenz’ attempt at “the construction of preferable alternatives,” with an examination of the first of the three sources he selects for theological construction, scripture.

This chapter needs to be read together with chapters 5 and 6. Together these three chapters explore and evaluate Grenz’ use of theological sources and motifs in theological construction.

On the one hand it is important not to place a wedge between the chapters. An integral component of Grenz’ theological method is that the three sources he proposes for theological construction engage in a triad. As conversation partners, the three are able to move beyond the foundationalism that Grenz believes previously characterized evangelical theology. By exploring each separately, we run the risk of giving the impression that Grenz sees three sources that are simply added to each other (what does scripture say plus what does tradition say plus what does culture say). Seen in this way we could ask why three sources, and not four, five or six. The sources however cannot be seen in isolation from each other. Nor should they be seen as separated from the focal motifs of Trinity, community and eschatology, or the communally discerned pneumatological mediation that is required for the theological construction to be effective. It is out of the dynamic interplay between all of the components that Grenz sees the birthing of a theological method that can be considered to move beyond foundationalism.

2 Ibid.
On the other hand, evaluation of Grenz' method is almost impossible if we do not pay attention to the understanding that Grenz has of each of the key players making up his theological matrix. While it is tempting to explore all players together, it is not practical. In defence of the approach this research adopts it should be noted that Grenz comes to a similar conclusion. However, whereas he discusses each of his sources and motifs in separate chapters in Beyond Foundationalism, I have opted for a slightly more integrated approach, discussing one source (scripture) in chapter 4, two sources (tradition and culture) in chapter 5, and all three motifs (Trinity, community and eschatology) in chapter 6.

I devote an entire chapter to Grenz' understanding of and use of scripture in theological construction both because evangelicals have traditionally placed greatest attention on the use of scripture in theological construction, and because Grenz' use of scripture has generated considerable comment and debate within the evangelical community. This chapter explores the reactions to Grenz' proposed use of scripture, and assesses the weight that should be attached to it.

As Grenz' goal is to revision evangelical theology, a part of assessing his success is to investigate if his approach is genuinely different to other key recognized evangelical theologians. In the exploration of the sources Grenz proposes for theology, I will investigate some of the responses to his work and then, where relevant, use as a comparative grid the way the source or motif features in the major systematic theology texts of Erickson, Grudem and McGrath. While it was difficult to decide which theologians and texts to take as representative, these three routinely appear in the bibliographies of evangelical seminaries and are likely to be accepted as a non-controversial selection. Though Grenz does not interact greatly with the work of McGrath, he often cites both Erickson and Grudem, and would probably concur that they are representative. To be able to claim to have revisioned evangelical theology Grenz will need to be seen as different from other evangelicals in his treatment, while if he is to effectively revision evangelical theology, the difference must be seen to add to and enhance evangelical theology, rather than to simply be different or to compromise the premises upon which evangelical theology has been built. So for example,

6 In Renewing the Center Grenz places Henry, Erickson and Grudem in a historical trajectory representing the changing but more conservative face of evangelicalism. He suggests Ramm, Pinnock and Sanders as representing a more "left wing" three generation trajectory. Stanley J. Grenz, Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 85-162.
when Grenz suggests that evangelicalism moves from a foundationalist model of theological construction, he must show why a postfoundationalist approach is superior.

Before we are in a position to explore and evaluate Grenz' use of each of his proposed sources for theology, because of its importance in Grenz' method, I will elaborate on the relationship between the sources of theology, the Spirit and the community of faith.


Though Grenz (and Franke) treat scripture, tradition and culture as three distinct sources for theology, initially giving the impression of a three-legged rather than a singular foundationalism, what moves their theological construction beyond foundationalism is the dynamic interplay between the three sources, the Spirit and the community of faith. We should not place any wedge between the work of the Spirit and the scriptures. Grenz would agree with Veenhof who writes,

> It becomes clear that the work of the Spirit cannot be described in terms of "addition," as if the Spirit would give or cause a new "quantum," a new "substance." On the contrary the work of the Spirit must be described in terms of relation and interaction.

It is the Spirit who not only inspired the community of faith to initially record the scriptures, but who continues to illuminate the scriptures to each contextually embedded community of faith. Knowing which aspects of church tradition to embrace is likewise a pneumatologically mediated task. Grenz and Franke write "the authority of both scripture and tradition is ultimately an authority derived from the work of the Spirit." Similarly, the aid of the Spirit is required to discern what aspects of human culture reflect the Spirit's will and work. Because the same Spirit speaks through both scripture and culture, the voices are not discordant. Grenz and Franke write,

> Culture and text do not comprise two different moments of communication; rather, they are but one speaking. And consequently we engage not in two different "listenings," but one. We listen for the voice of the Spirit who speaks the Word through the word within the particularity of the hearers' context, and who thereby can speak in all things.

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9 Ibid., 163.
While the Spirit illuminates scripture, tradition and culture, it is the task of the community of faith to discern and receive the Spirit’s illumination. Communal discernment disallows purely individual or idiosyncratic interpretations, though one could counter that by shifting the onus from the individual to the community, one dilutes the sense of responsibility for accurately hearing the Spirit’s voice. If all are responsible, then no one in particular is responsible. In addition, just as individual interpretations can be idiosyncratic, so too can communal interpretations.

As we examine Grenz’ understanding of each of the three sources of theology, the common thread of the source deriving its authority from the Spirit and needing to be communally received, should be noted.

4.3 SCRIPTURE AS THEOLOGY’S NORMING NORM

Probably no aspect of Grenz’ work will be more carefully evaluated by evangelicals than the role he ascribes to the Bible in constructing his theological method.10 McGrath accurately conveys a traditional understanding of evangelicalism when he writes of its insistence upon the importance of Scripture in theologizing: one of the most fundamental and essential distinctives of the evangelical approach to theology is its insistence that theology must be nourished and governed at all points by holy Scripture, and that it seeks to offer a faithful and coherent account of what it finds there.11

In similar vein, Bebbington speaks of biblicism as being a defining characteristic of evangelicalism.12

Grenz is keen to affirm his continuity with the thinking of older evangelicals on revelation in at least three key areas:

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10 This needs qualification. Traditionally evangelicals view the question of an authoritative scripture as central, but there is increasing evidence that an emerging group of evangelicals does not see the question as pivotal. For example, Robert Webber’s book The Younger Evangelicals, while occasionally speaking about the Bible, doesn’t devote a full chapter to the topic, though it gives chapters to areas such as tradition, ecclesiology and spiritual formation. It could well be that Grenz effectively revisions evangelical theology for this younger, emerging group of evangelicals, even if he does not succeed with the more traditional group. Robert E. Webber, The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002).


12 David Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 12-14.
1) God has disclosed himself to humankind
2) The primary focus of God’s disclosure is Jesus Christ
3) The Bible is the deposit of the divine revelation in history.\textsuperscript{13}

While the areas of agreement are important, it is those where Grenz suggests fresh thinking is needed that are of special interest to us.

First he suggests that postfundamentalist evangelical theology has continued to adopt a propositionalist approach to theology, with the theological task being conceived as the discovery and articulation of the one doctrinal system embedded in the Bible.\textsuperscript{14} We should not accept Grenz’ analysis uncritically, as he is a little one-sided in his presentation of propositionalist approaches. We could argue that there are few true propositionalists in the sense that Grenz portrays them. Certainly the Reformers were not. Wallace notes that while Calvin is sometimes accused of over systematizing scripture, Calvin’s approach attempted to move in the opposite direction. Wallace writes,

Calvin resisted any tendency he might have had to master the biblical material before him and to mould it into shape by his logical skill or by his own creative intelligence. He always strove, rather, to bring his mind under the shaping power of the objective reality before him, and to find the logic inherent in the revelation itself. He sought to allow his mind to be taken up, by faith, into the Word itself, and to become penetrated by it. He sought thus to produce a system which reflected the rationality of the Word of God.\textsuperscript{15}

In addition, Grenz’ portrayal of the propositional approaches of the “Princeton Theologians” tends to be reductionist. Noll argues that the grand motifs of Princeton Theology (1812-1921) were,

devotion to the Bible, concern for religious experience, sensitivity to the American experience, and full employment of the Presbyterian confessions, seventeenth-century Reformed systematics, and the Scottish philosophy of Common Sense.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{13} Stanley J. Grenz, Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1993), 109. Depending on the content attached to the third point, it could be a little more controversial (is all of scripture a divine deposit, or does it simply contain a divine deposit? As Grenz does not elaborate at this point, it is not possible to be certain of his meaning.)

\textsuperscript{14} Grenz and Franke, Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context, 60-63.


If Noll is correct, there are areas of significant overlap between Grenz’ approach and that of the Princeton propositionalists. However, both Grenz and Noll have overstated their case. While it is reductionist to limit the Princeton Theologians to a propositional approach to scripture, it did function as somewhat of a “default drive.” Grenz might be overreacting, but he has accurately discerned a tendency.

Rather than follow a propositional programme, Grenz suggests that theology should be conceived as the “reflection on the faith commitment of the believing community.” It is not that Grenz wishes to either reject or discount the importance of scripture as stressed by the propositionalist paradigm, but he aims to explore alternate understandings of the nature of the Bible’s authority. He suggests that its authority derives from it being, “... the source for the symbols, stories, teachings and doctrines that form the cognitive framework for the worldview of the believing community.”

Second, he believes that many evangelicals, “...take loyalty to the Bible to heights not intended by the Reformers and not in keeping with the broader trajectory of the evangelical movement.” He argues that such loyalty is misguided, as it is unnecessary. The Bible’s status as the book of the faith community guarantees it a place of importance in the theological enterprise. Grenz sees it as unimportant to try to establish a role for the Bible on the basis of appeals to fulfilled prophecies or the Bible’s own claims for itself, when any study of the Christian faith necessitates a study of the Bible because it is the foundational text for the community. Grenz’ approach at this point is essentially pragmatic and functional. If theology is the reflection on the faith commitment of the believing community, it is a reflection that cannot begin without an adequate understanding of the “book of the community.”


17 Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century*, 87. The adequacy of this definition must be questioned. It implies a descriptive, rather than prescriptive, role for the theologian. Perhaps a church historian might be willing to be limited to a descriptive role, but it is improbable that many systematic theologians would be willing to accept such an abbreviated description of their task. Indeed, Grenz himself does not, for in spite of this definition, he carves out a far more ambitious role in his own theological work. Perhaps it should be enlarged to be a “reflection on the adequacy of the faith commitment of the believing community in the light of...” with relevant theological criteria inserted (e.g. scripture, the tradition of the church, certain ethical criteria etc.)

18 Ibid., 88.

19 Ibid., 93.

20 Ibid., 94.
From a traditional evangelical perspective, this is provocative. Evangelicals assign a place of prominence to the Bible out of a conviction that its message is the truth, and its revelation the sole surety for statements made about the nature and character of God.\(^\text{21}\) It is the norma

\[\text{normans non normata}.\]

The constituting role of the Bible in the life of the church is usually seen as of secondary importance to the claim that it is an accurate and authoritative revelation of the character, will and actions of God. It seems a short step from this stance to relegating the Bible to a text of historical (but not authoritative) importance. While few would deny that the role of scripture in the life of the church is important, it adopts a “lowest common denominator” approach. All would agree, but evangelicals have historically claimed more for scripture. While Grenz is correct in his assertion that some evangelicals “take loyalty to the Bible to heights not intended by the Reformers and not in keeping with the broader tradition of the evangelical movement,” it seems unlikely that they would be content with the modest role Grenz assigns it here.\(^\text{22}\)

Grenz would add a further qualifier that the Bible’s role as the repository of the original kerygma of the faith community, guarantees it a role of ongoing importance. However this is not self evidently true. Belief systems can change and evolve, and most would not consider a stance definitive simply because it was the one originally adopted.

Something of the heartbeat of Grenz’ concern is best expressed by his approving discussion of the Pietists. He notes, “For the Pietists, talk about the truth claims of the Bible was less important than the fact that ‘truth claims’ – that the Scriptures lay hold of the life of the reader and call that life into divine service.”\(^\text{23}\) This, however, is a false dichotomy. Brand accuses Grenz of driving an artificial wedge between those who focus on the Bible as a source of correct doctrine and those whose focus is on the Bible as a source of spiritual sustenance. Dismissing this typology as overly simplistic, Brand argues that balance between the two has usually characterized evangelicalism’s leading spokespeople.\(^\text{24}\)

\(^\text{21}\) The understanding of truth would be of truth as correspondence with objective reality.

\(^\text{22}\) Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century*, 93.

\(^\text{23}\) Ibid., 112. While hard to dispute, this does seem to beg the question. Is it not the task of the theologian to articulate why this happens and how to evaluate the validity of such an “encounter”? In addition, this presentation of the Pietists is one sided according to Travis. See William G. Travis, “Pietism and the History of American Evangelicalism,” in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accomodation in Postmodern Times*, ed. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004).

\(^\text{24}\) Chad O. Brand, "Defining Evangelicalism," in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, ed. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 298. Smith, in his work of the relationship between Pentecostalism and evangelicalism, is more nuanced when he distinguishes between evangelical theology and grass-roots evangelical experience. He writes: “This issue (the relationship between Pentecostalism and
Grenz then moves to an important stage in his thinking, viz. that the meaning and impact of scripture is pneumatologically mediated. He laments that the theological method of most Protestant theologians separates bibliology and pneumatology, and argues that the doctrine of scripture should be discussed as a section of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, as the Bible is the Spirit's book. Grenz follows up on his own suggestion in *Theology for the Community of God*, and his discussion of scripture in the middle of the book within the section on the work of the Spirit, makes a refreshing difference. It also throws down the gauntlet to traditional evangelical theological methodology, where a discussion of the pivotal role of scripture almost always takes place within the prolegomenon.25

Perhaps the difference Grenz represents is best understood if we compare him to Erickson26 and McGrath27 – both of whom can be taken as representative of the “evangelical centre.”28 Even a cursory glance at the major systematic theology volume each has written helps establish key differences. The subject index at the end of Grenz’ work lists neither scripture nor Bible nor revelation as a topic covered. By contrast, both the McGrath and Erickson works have substantial referencing to both scripture and revelation.29 The absence of clear chunks of text dealing with the Bible and revelation in an evangelical work is startling. It is

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25 Perhaps Grenz should have gone further, and placed his discussion on the work of the Spirit (and thus also the Bible as the Spirit’s book), first in the book (or at least toward the beginning), which would be consistent with the approach suggested by Clark Pinnock (see Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1996). A growing stream of Pentecostal theologians has joined him. An example of a systematic theology written from a charismatic perspective is Rodman J. Williams, *Renewal Theology: Systematic Theology from a Charismatic Perspective*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988-1992).

26 Erickson.

27 McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*.

28 While well outside the scope of this research, it would be interesting both at a sociological and theological level, to ascertain why evangelicals are usually keen to demonstrate that they hold the “centre” ground. Grenz also focuses on the “centre.” E.g. one of his major works is Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era*. This led to Erickson, Helseth and Taylor gathering a team of twelve contributors to publish the rebuttal, *Reclaiming the Center*. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor, eds., *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004). Being on the edges is seen as being in the place of suspicion rather than as a badge of honour.

29 Under Bible, both say “see Scripture.”
not that Grenz does not look at the topics but that he persistently subsumes them under the heading of pneumatology.  

In practical terms, Grenz calls evangelicals to pay as much attention to the doctrine of illumination as they do to inspiration. By placing the emphasis on the inspiration of scripture, a static view of scripture can easily dominate. Arguments revolve around the once for all divinely given message of scripture, rather than around the need to listen to the ongoing voice of the Spirit speaking through scripture (illumination).

Linked to an inadequate emphasis on the illuminating role of the Spirit, Grenz diagnoses that evangelicals routinely give inadequate reflection to the meaning of the human role in the concursive action of God and human authors working together in the writing of scripture. Grenz suggests a greater exploration of the role of the community in the “composition, compilation and canonization of the Bible.” Acknowledging the community role in the formation of scripture also helps to indicate a co-operative path between scripture and tradition, as in this model scripture does not function alone but is always read within the church, which in turn understands the teaching of scripture within its own broad historical trajectory.

However, difference alone neither establishes nor discredits Grenz. Many evangelicals have been calling for a changed view of scripture. For example, Nancey Murphy notes that the foundational role of scripture within evangelicalism is akin to the foundational role of experience in liberal theology. While initially each seems so different, both operate from a foundationalist model, ascribing ultimate authority to a single source. A more diversified approach sits better with postmodernism and is called for by Murphy. However, Murphy is probably cast on the edges of evangelicalism.

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30 One could also question the competence of the person who drew up Grenz’ index. This point is not entirely trivial. Most are not willing to wade through an entire work to decide its merits. A quick glance through the index often helps decide if a book is worth reading. It is entirely conceivable that potential evangelical readers would look to the index to point them to Grenz’ stance on scripture and revelation to help make their decision. The absence of any such references in the index (though not the actual book) might well prejudice evangelicals against reading the work, thus diminishing the likelihood that Grenz would be seen as a suitable theologian to revision the movement. In short, this is probably an unfortunate rather than intentional omission.  

31 Grenz, Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century, 122.  

In *Beyond Foundationalism* Grenz and Franke explore what a postfoundationalist understanding of scripture might look like for evangelicalism. While some of the concerns expressed in *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* are repeated, *Beyond Foundationalism* goes further in its revisioning and is more comprehensive in its range.

Chapter 3 of *Beyond Foundationalism*, which focuses on the role of scripture as a source for theology, states that a key goal of the chapter is to "...inquire as to how the Bible ought to function in theology by pursuing the traditional assertion that the biblical message is theology’s norming norm."34

Noting that conservatives have favoured a propositional approach to understanding the Bible’s message, they express their disquiet at this method, suggesting that when the Bible is reduced to a set of propositions the need to continue to read it becomes questionable. They provocatively ask “Why should the sincere believer continue to read the Bible when biblical truth—correct doctrine—is more readily at hand in the latest systematic compilation offered by the skilled theologian?”35 Clearly this is not the intent of propositionalists.

To avoid this they suggest that it is important to rediscover the Bible as text, rather than as a set of doctrines waiting to be unpacked and lying behind the text. It is noteworthy that the rationale for this approach is to get more from the Bible rather than less. To evangelicals concerned at criticism of the propositional approach, Grenz is essentially arguing that viewing the Bible as text allows a larger and more significant role for scripture over against the reductionism inevitably resulting from propositionalism. At this stage he is on safe ground. Such an approach continues to stress the importance of scripture. Anything less is unlikely to successfully revision evangelical theology as it would probably be rejected before it was seriously considered.

33 Because this is a co-authored book, one must assume that a certain “give and take” has operated. Grenz may not feel as strongly as Franke on some issues, and vice versa. However, in the preface they note who wrote the initial draft of each chapter, and acknowledge Grenz as the initial drafter of chapter 3, which is the main chapter dealing with the role of scripture. It thus seems reasonable to infer that Grenz is in agreement with the views expressed. Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context*, x. At another level, it is worth noting that 9 of the 26 books written by Grenz were co-authored. This seems appropriate given his focus on theology as an enterprise for and by the community of God. His own practice was “communal.” Paying tribute to Grenz for the way in which he worked with him on *Beyond Foundationalism*, Franke has written, “Stan’s willingness to work with a younger thinker on such a project was but one example of his extraordinary professional generosity, another side of his work that is less well known but which was an integral part of his vision for the practice of doing theology.” John R. Franke, “Faith Seeking Understanding in a Postmodern Context: Stanley Grenz and Nonfoundational Theology,” *Princeton Theological Review* 12, no. 1 (2006): 17.
34 Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context*, 58.
35 Ibid., 63.
Referring to the Westminster Confession of Faith, Grenz notes its declaration that the “Supreme Judge” by which to decide on all controversies is “the Holy Spirit speaking in scripture.” For Grenz the link between Spirit and scripture is crucial, and helps to understand in what sense the Bible is authoritative, and why it is the norming norm for theology. The Bible is authoritative because it is “the vehicle through which the Spirit speaks.” Because of the link with the Spirit, exegesis cannot be carried out apart from the life of the believing community. The illumination of the text by the Spirit makes the scriptures authoritative in the life of the church. We are thus back to the scriptures being authoritative because of their functional importance in the life of the community of faith. The view also implies openness to changed circumstances, for the Spirit interprets the text in the light of the situation of the believing community.

Grenz’ model goes a long way to stilling the criticism of some Pentecostal theologians that evangelicalism is a textual community, suppressing the orality and aurality that was at the heart of the early church. Pentecostal theologian James Smith expresses some of these concerns when he writes,

The early Christian community was a charismatic community which placed emphasis on hearing, not reading. As such, early Christianity was not a religion of the Book, though it was certainly a religion of the Word. It was a community centred not around scribes but prophets.

While recognizing that the concept of an oral or textual community does not need to be absolutized (an oral community is not necessarily a community without a text or texts), Smith suggests that communities should be characterized as oral or textual on the basis of the status they afford to texts. Acknowledging his indebtedness to the work of Stock, Smith writes that,

It is beyond debate, I think, that evangelical theology became and is a ‘textual community’ as Stock describes it: a community which organizes its experience against the horizon of a text, the Bible. The standard (kanon) for the community is a text.

Smith then laments that Pentecostal theology has bought uncritically into evangelicalism’s textuality without acknowledging that this represents a conflict with Pentecostalism’s belief in

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36 Ibid., 65. If the strategy is to woo the Evangelical community, reference to the Westminster Confession reflects a sound policy. The Reformed wing of the evangelical community usually views the Westminster Confession as a particularly pure articulation of reformation faith.
37 Ibid., 65.
39 Ibid.: 58.
continuing revelation and prophecy. In calling for a Pentecostal theology that is distinct from evangelical theology he suggests that a “Pentecostal evangelical theology is a house divided against itself”40 and later writes, “It is precisely this textualism of evangelical theology which undermines the Pentecostal experience of continuing revelation.”41 Smith’s suggestion to Pentecostals is that “our theology is to be Pentecostal, I think it is crucial that we give up trying to be evangelical, or at least evangelical theologians.”42

Grenz’ placing of the doctrine of revelation within pneumatology and his willingness for the community to serve as the control is in accord with Smith’s model where “Both oral and written testimony are subject to discernment as the community is guided by the Spirit of truth.”43 While there are differences between Grenz and Smith, there are significant overlaps between the two. That this is so between Grenz and a Pentecostal theologian (who is calling for Pentecostal theologians to acknowledge the tensions inherent in Pentecostal theology working within an evangelical theological framework) raises the question, is Grenz revisioning evangelical theology or simply suggesting that it adopts a Pentecostal paradigm? Alternatively, we can argue that Grenz’ revisioning of scripture is likely to appeal to the Pentecostal wing of evangelicalism (provided one accepts that such a wing is valid and exists).

While Grenz’ stress on the dynamic interrelationship between Word and Spirit has merit, it runs the risk of accusations of subjectivity. Brand warns of “the danger of seeking the ‘Spirit’s guidance’ in an uncontrolled epistemological environment.”44 For evangelical readers accustomed to hearing of the dangers of “Barthian” views of scripture that seem to imply that the Bible’s authority is limited to the Spirit’s illumination, which in turn is limited by our subjective reception of it, this is likely to be a serious concern.45

40 Ibid.: 59.
41 Ibid.: 62.
44 Brand, 304.
45 Evangelicals usually have an ambivalent attitude to Barth. On the one hand they acknowledge that he reacted against the theological liberalism of his time and pointed back to a more orthodox path, on the other they note that he was “neoorthodox” and did not sit comfortably with all the assertions of the Reformers. Though not covering more recent developments in the relationship, Gregory Bolich has provided a detailed account of earlier evangelical responses to Barth. See Gregory G. Bolich, Karl Barth and Evangelicalism (Downers Grove: IVP, 1980).
Grenz’s response is predictable. The guard against subjectivity is the communal reading of the scriptures. The Spirit speaks to the community of faith. That same community helps discern if what an individual believes to be the voice of the Spirit, is indeed the Spirit enlivened scriptures or the wishful or misguided thinking of an individual. Grenz optimistically concludes “…the problem of subjectivism arises only when we mistakenly place the individual ahead of the community.”

One needs to ask which community Grenz is talking about. If it is the localized expression of the Church Universal, Grenz stands on shaky historical ground. Church history is full of stories of communities (as opposed to individuals) who mistakenly read the biblical narrative as being directly applicable to their own situation. Grenz does qualify his position a little more fully by expanding that “this divine regenerative work comes through the biblical message.”

We are back to an earlier concern. How can we get at the message behind the text without the reductionism of propositionalism? Grenz suggests that the way forward is to see the Spirit appropriating passages of scripture. While not ignoring the hermeneutical question of “what did this text originally mean?” for Grenz the key is that the faith community discerns the

46 Barth’s safeguard is similar and might have influenced Grenz. See Harmon’s brief but perceptive discussion on Barth’s ecclesial understanding of tradition and scripture in Steven R. Harmon, “The Authority of the Community (of All the Saints): Toward a Postmodern Baptist Hermeneutic of Tradition,” Review and Expositor 100 (2003): 596-598.
47 Grenz and Franke, Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context, 68. Ironically, the risk of highly individual and subjective interpretations of scripture are always a risk within a Baptist ecclesiology where the teaching of “soul competency” affirms that any individual led by the Spirit is free to interpret the scriptures without reference to confessional statements. Grenz’ qualifier that the community of faith is the arbiter of what constitutes a valid, Spirit illuminated interaction with the text thus qualifies a potentially highly subjective aspect of Baptist theology. Grenz should be understood as both an evangelical and a Baptist theologian.
48 As this is a classic Baptist understanding of the local church, it is likely that Grenz, as both a leading evangelical and Baptist theologian, would have a comparable view.
49 Such readings usually assume that “God is on our side,” with little thought as to God’s attitude to those on the other side. Consider e.g. how quickly the South African Boers in the 19th century, while trekking away from British rule, and more particularly British insistence on the abolition of slavery, identified with the Israelites and their conquest of the Promised Land. They cited their victory over the Zulu’s at the Battle of Blood River on 16 Dec 1837 as tangible evidence that God was on their side and organized that their descendants observed the day as a religious public holiday for over 150 years. Some of apartheid’s early seeds can be seen in this incident, and it serves as a reminder of the risks of too quickly appropriating the biblical text for the purposes of any particular group or community. See F.A. Van Jaarsveld, "A Historical Mirror of Blood River," in The Meaning of History, ed. Adrio König and Henry Keane (Pretoria: UNISA, 1980).
50 Grenz and Franke, Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context, 68, emphasis, Grenz and Franke’s.
“illocutionary act” the Spirit seeks to perform by appropriating the text and communicating it to us in our specific historical-cultural context.  

Grenz (and Franke) then take a sociological turn. Part of the richness of Grenz’ thought is his ability to engage the social sciences in the theological quest. He first draws from the thought of Peter Berger that religion legitimizes the socially constructed world that participants in a society occupy. To this he adds Paul Ricoeur’s stance that the meaning of a text lies not behind, but in front of it, as it points to the possible worlds that can be created by the appropriation of the text. In a few profound paragraphs Grenz draws together sociology, pneumatology and eschatology. The text has a world creating ability through its portrayal and legitimization of a possible reality. The Spirit appropriates the text to impress on the faith community the desirability of a particular construction of reality. This reality is ultimately legitimized in the light of ultimate reality to be revealed at the eschaton. One can thus argue that the Spirit creates the faith community’s world, and helps to move it toward the eschatological world God desires by appropriating the biblical text and portraying it as a possible social construction. This is a world centred in Jesus Christ and comprising a new community of people renewed by the Spirit.

The scriptures are used by the Spirit as “paradigmatic events,” connecting the faith community with participants from the past as those in the present shape their actions in the light of the events of scripture. This usage ensures that the scriptures are not time-bound, but help create and shape both the present and the future. Grenz’ statement serves as a suitable summary:

...the Bible is the instrumentality of the Spirit. By orienting our communal and personal present on the basis of the past and in accordance with the vision of the future disclosed in the texts, the Spirit appropriates the biblical narrative to create in and among us a new world.

The role of the theologian is to help the Christian community understand the paradigmatic narratives through which the Spirit creates the community’s new identity. Scripture is thus the theologian’s norming norm in that it provides the paradigmatic narratives that serve as the

51 Ibid., 72-75. Grenz is utilizing the speech-act theory of J.L.Austin. The “illocutionary act” is what the speaker intends to accomplish by the speech act. Thus it is what the Spirit now wishes to accomplish in the faith community by appropriating the biblical text and speaking to the faith community through it, which is of importance.

52 In this way Grenz is also true to his insistence that culture is the embedding context for theology.

53 Grenz and Franke, Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context, 75-76.

54 Ibid., 76.

55 Ibid., 79.

56 Ibid., 80.
grid or "interpretative framework" for the faith community. Not that the theologian then tries to codify the meaning of the text. To the contrary, the chief goal in reading and rereading the text is to hear the Spirit's voice speaking through the text. Distinguishing between exegesis and hermeneutics Grenz goes on to suggest, "Another way of putting it is to declare that reading theologically entails listening to what the Spirit is saying through the text (exegesis) to us in our context (hermeneutics)."

However, our context is not limited to the present moment. Reading the text theologically entails reading it in community, thereby participating in the faith community that stretches across the ages, while at the same time being aware that we are participants in the contemporary church, needing to listen to the particular word that the Spirit brings to the community through the scriptures. The particularity of our context points back to the need to read the Spirit enlivened scriptures within our local community of faith. The hermeneutical task is thus embarked upon within the local community.

Grenz' views need evaluation in the light of the key criteria set by the thesis proposal "that Stanley Grenz' theological method effectively revisions evangelical theology." For evangelicals a key concern is usually the stance taken on the nature of the authority of the Bible. In summary form, Grenz maintains that ultimate authority is linked to the trio of the Spirit, speaking through scripture, to the church. Each of the components, Spirit, scripture and church, are critical factors in affirming authority. This should be supplemented with the proviso that the Spirit speaks to the church in the particularity of its social, historical and cultural context.

Working from the premise that people are often more conscious of what they are against than what they are for, evangelicalism's deep suspicion of any view of scripture that could be labelled as "liberal" should be noted. Nancey Murphy's important work on the similarities and differences between liberal and fundamentalist views has already been discussed. She asserts that it is not that liberals deny a role for scripture in theology, but that they deny that it is the foundation for theology. For liberals, experience is the foundation, and scripture the

57 Ibid., 83.
58 To do so would be to revert back to propositionalism.
59 Grenz and Franke, Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context, 87.
60 Ibid., 88.
61 The voice of Grenz as Baptist theologian should be noted here.
62 In essence, that each assumes the validity of foundationalism, but make different choices as to what the foundational truth is. For fundamentalism it is an inerrant scripture, for liberalism, religious experience. Nancey Murphy, Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1996).
ground floor. The Bible is a record of religious experience and reflects its historical development. To be acceptable to the evangelical community, Grenz will have to convince evangelicals that he has not reduced scripture’s role to that of an important ground floor, while not being the foundation.

Grenz himself tries to get beyond this critique by arguing for a method that is “beyond foundationalism.” Whether he actually succeeds in moving beyond foundationalism is an open question.

Elizabeth Barnes suggests that he has perhaps been successful, but not necessarily on the terms suggested by Murphy. She notes that traditionally theologians and philosophers of religion have assessed the adequacy of religious language according to three c’s, correspondence, coherence and comprehensiveness. She accuses Murphy of a non-foundationalist approach which embraces a web of coherence while dropping the c’s of correspondence and comprehensiveness. However, while Grenz seems to want to embrace a non-foundationalist approach, he moves beyond Murphy’s web of coherence and is adamant that a correspondence view of truth cannot be dismissed. In his Primer on Postmodernism he writes that the “rejection of the correspondence theory of truth not only leads to a skepticism that undercuts the concept of objective truth in general, it also undermines Christian claims that our doctrinal formulations state objective truth” which Grenz considers unacceptable.

Grenz is also clear that theologians cannot affirm the rejection of the metanarrative in favour of local narratives. In essence, he sees the Christian story as a metanarrative.

So whatever postfoundationalism means in Grenz’ writing, it is not less than an acceptance of the importance of correspondence, coherence and comprehensiveness. This understanding of postfoundationalism is likely to offer some reassurance to the evangelical community.

63 Ibid, 24.
66 Grenz, A Primer on Postmodernism, 163-165.
67 Usually when foundationalism is spoken of in theology it refers to a theory of knowledge grounded in a belief (a foundation) that cannot be called into question. Everything springs from this foundation of belief which is immune from challenge. Views of coherence are seen to move beyond foundationalism.
4.4 RESPONSES TO GRENZ' VIEWS OF SCRIPTURE

Responses to Grenz have been varied.

Don Carson is dismissive of Grenz. In his book *The Gagging of God*, he includes his brief analysis of Grenz in a section with the discouraging title “Playing Loose with the Bible.”68 Accusing Grenz of following Schleiermacher in adopting scripture, tradition and culture as the sources of theology, he disregards the approach as being “to say the least, decidedly unhelpful.”69 He notes the “extraordinary complexities of linking Scripture and tradition” and then becomes somewhat patronizing, suggesting that Grenz has read enough to recognize that the interpreter cannot escape his or her own culture” but in selecting culture as a source for theology has not recognized “the minefield he has created for himself.”70

As Carson’s critique is little more than bluster, being dismissive without seriously engaging the ideas presented, it is difficult to know how to respond. On the one hand, Carson is a respected evangelical. If Grenz is to successfully revision evangelical theology his work must elicit a serious response from those who are the spokespeople for the movement. On the other hand, taken as a whole, Carson’s *The Gagging of God* should probably be placed in the same category as David Well’s *No Place for Truth*71 and *God in the Wasteland*.72 Both Wells and Carson are concerned at the current state of evangelicalism, feeling that it has lost its way. Like Grenz, they agree there is something seriously wrong within contemporary evangelicalism. Whereas Grenz responds by suggesting an altered or revisioned agenda, they react by suggesting a return to the past.73 For each, however, there is unease with the current status quo.

because they allow a dynamic back and forth between basic beliefs and those that flow from the foundation, and also allow for beliefs to be seen as strengthened on the basis of their coherence with other related beliefs.

69 Ibid., 481.
70 Ibid.
73 Carson would deny that this is his response, and in a later article writes that no one has “the right to hunker down in traditional modernist epistemology and feel justified in mere cultural conservatism.” However, the acidity of his attacks on alternatives makes it hard to reach any other conclusion. D.A. Carson, "Domesticating the Gospel: A Review of Grenz's Renewing the Center," in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, ed. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 54.
Carson has subsequently written a fuller critique of Grenz, focusing specifically on Grenz’ book *Renewing the Center*. His broad critique is that Grenz has embraced a fundamentally flawed antithesis embraced by postmodernism, viz., “either we can know something absolutely and omnisciently, or our ‘knowledge’ of that thing is nothing more than a social construction that has the most doubtful connection with reality, i.e., with the thing in itself.” Carson is quick to remind us that “nuanced alternatives abound to the absolute antithesis so beloved of postmoderns and everywhere assumed by Grenz.” Suggesting that Grenz is uncritically influenced by Lindbeck, he attacks what he reads as Grenz’ denial of an extratextual referentiality in scripture, and sharply retorts,

We are not saved by ideas (doctrines) that are merely the discourse rules of the believing community. We are saved by the realities to which those ideas refer. Anything else is a merely intellectualist game, and is not the gospel.

Carson’s conclusion is thus inevitable, “Grenz’s reformulation of the doctrine of scripture is so domesticated by postmodern relativism that it stands well and truly outside the evangelical camp (whether ‘evangelical’ is here understood theologically or socially/historically).”

Carson’s response is not promising. It suggests a “given” in the minds of evangelicals, deviation from which means rejection. If the instinctive inclination of many (representative) evangelicals is rejection of the new, any project aimed at revisioning the movement is doomed to failure. However, Dorrien is hopeful and suggests that the combative stance which once characterized the movement, is on the decline. He writes, “Today, within a significant segment of evangelical theology, the conception of theology as polemical or tournament is receding. The confrontational spirit of fundamentalist evangelicalism is giving way to the discourse of a generous orthodoxy.”

Contra Dorrien, Millard Erickson has developed a sustained critique of Grenz’ view of scripture. While acknowledging the value of reaffirming the Spirit’s role in illumination,

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74 Ibid., 46.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid., 49.
77 Ibid., 50.
79 Millard J. Erickson, *The Evangelical Left: Encountering Postconservative Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997). In *Renewing the Center* Grenz cites Erickson as the successor to Carl Henry, and is essentially appreciative of his work. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era*, 118-134. Erickson’s largely rejecting stance toward Grenz’s work is therefore not encouraging. However, Grenz does note a “drifting to the right” in Erickson’s more recent work, and accuses him of inconsistency over time. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era*, 133. Citing Garrett’s work on Erickson, he notes that whereas in 1983
Erickson is concerned that the approach adopted by “postconservative evangelicals” links the acceptance of the divine authority of scripture to a subjective experience. He is troubled by “their rejection of objective proofs for the inspiration and authority of the Bible.” He links the views to “an increased openness toward the theology of Karl Barth” and sees signs of Barth’s nonpropositional or personal view of revelation. The critique is partly applicable to Grenz, but is modified by his qualification that interpretation is by and for the community of God. The dangers inherent in a radical individualism are therefore reduced.

What is critique for one theologian sometimes leads to commendation by another. Dorrien, like Erickson, sees distinct Barthian tones in Grenz’ doctrine of scripture, but for him this is a positive development. Lamenting that Barth’s subordination of the biblical text to revelation and the work of the Spirit had been repeatedly denounced by evangelicals as heresy, he is encouraged that evangelicals like Grenz are now speaking in words “very close” to Barth. He notes, “It will undoubtedly take more than a generation for Barth’s reputation to recover from the critical pounding he took from evangelical leaders for decades, but today, the seeds of a new kind of evangelicalism are evident.”

In addition to being critical of Grenz for allowing Barthian insights to influence his theology, Erickson is critical of Grenz for making no distinction between scripture as a source and as a norm for theology, and for using the two concepts interchangeably. Erickson suggests that this leads to confusion over the concept of authority, and refers to his own distinguishing between the legislative and the judicial authority of scripture, where he compares the authority of scripture to the authority of the American houses of Congress to produce legislation, while the judiciary (which he compares to the role or authority of reason) decides on the meaning of the legislation. Erickson is concerned that the modification of evangelical views on inerrancy will lead to the modification of other doctrines as well. While Erickson had written in favour of the use of sources in addition to the Bible in theological construction, in 1997 he criticizes theologians (including Grenz) for making use of such additional sources. Grenz appears to approve of Garrett’s conclusion that “Erickson himself evidences a shift from Evangelicalism toward Fundamentalism.” James Leo Garrett Jr., “Review of the Evangelical Left,” Southwestern Journal of Theology 42, no. 1 (1999): 91, cited in Grenz, Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era, 134. The readiness of evangelicals to accuse each other of being left or right, liberal or fundamentalist, should be noted.

Erickson, The Evangelical Left: Encountering Postconservative Evangelical Theology, 84. Grenz is one of a small cluster of theologians Erickson is evaluating at this stage in the book.

Ibid., 77. He is not being fair to Barth at this point, as Barth emphasizes community more than Erickson is willing to acknowledge. See Harmon: 596-598.

Dorrien, 203.

Erickson, The Evangelical Left: Encountering Postconservative Evangelical Theology, 86.

See Erickson, Christian Theology, 257.

Erickson, The Evangelical Left: Encountering Postconservative Evangelical Theology, 86.
cautiously concludes that Grenz and the other theologians he is reviewing have not “moved so far as to surrender the right to be called evangelicals” he cautions that “such movement cannot be unlimited.”

Douglas Groothuis finds Grenz’ rejection of a propositional approach to scripture confused. He also suggests that at times Grenz is ambiguous, noting that, “At points, Grenz seems to give up or at least dilute the notion of propositional truth. At other points, he simply minimizes its relevance for postmodern situations.”

Groothuis is especially critical of Grenz for adopting George Lindbeck’s concept that theology makes second order propositions deriving from religious experience and communal life. He argues that if doctrinal truths only apply within the community, they cannot normatively refer to reality outside the community. He writes,

If the rule theory is correct, the doctrine of a Buddhist community and the doctrine of a Christian community cannot contradict each other, since they refer only to internal practices or rules of those respective communities, and not to objective truths expressed in propositions. But since both communities do lay claim to final realities outside themselves, this cannot be the case.

Contra Grenz, Groothuis goes on to argue that theological propositions should have first-order status in theology and life, and that while community and experience will shape our theologies in various ways, in the first instance theology should be derived from scripture. Revealed truths should be articulated theologically and provide the guide for life for the Christian community. Grenz would not necessarily disagree. The issue highlighted by Groothuis is that at times Grenz seems to speak with different voices. Grenz can for example write, “The contemporary situation demands that we as evangelicals not view theology merely as the restatement of a body of propositional truths, as important as doctrine is.” In another article Grenz writes, “I readily admit that propositions are important. Indeed, theology is an intellectual discipline and therefore has a cognitive dimension.” He does, however, immediately qualify his statement, “Nevertheless, the end of theology is not the compiling of correct assertions in and for themselves. And the intent of the conclusions we reach through theological reflection moves beyond knowledge understood in the modern,

87 Ibid., 147.
89 Ibid.: 10.
90 Grenz, Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century, 79.
objectivist sense.” Groothuis questions if it is really possible to hedge one’s bets both ways. Affirming the importance of doctrine stated as a series of propositional truths while also embracing a view that sees theology as a second-order endeavour seems to Groothuis to be “confused.” He writes, “Propositions themselves’ either express truth or they do not. There is no middle option.”

Groothuis’ critique must be evaluated. Grenz is a more careful theologian than Groothuis acknowledges. While Grenz allows for a category of objective propositional truth, following his doctoral mentor, Pannenberg, he argues that truth is ultimately eschatologically mediated. In the interim, theology is a second order endeavour. Grenz seeks to transcend simple correspondence theories of truth, opting for coherentism, where rather than seeking for an undisputed foundation for truth (e.g. an inerrant Bible, as many evangelicals have argued), truth is seen as a web where insights link together coherently. The stronger the web (and it is strengthened through overlaps, comparable insights being reached through sometimes differing pathways, different layers of agreement and so on) the stronger the truth claim. Ultimately, however, Grenz argues that he holds to eschatological realism, where the end is the final arbiter of truth.

While eschatological realism is hard to refute, evangelicals such as Groothuis argue that it is not necessary to delay confirmation of truth claims, and that the doctrine of revelation and the conviction that the Spirit not only illuminates the scriptures but is also their author and inspirer, is the foundational truth upon which evangelical theological method is built. Such critics feel that Grenz is delaying doctrinal certainty, and argue that the eschaton will not reveal a reality different from the one revealed in the Bible.

Carson’s critique of Grenz’ use of eschatological realism follows similar lines. He writes,

...one might reasonably ask how one knows that the eschatological reality will put everything to rights. One knows this only because of the specific revelation that has been given us in Scripture. But the same Scripture gives us revelation about the past and present, too, and about atemporal truths. If we can know enough about the future, through Scripture, to let it ground our epistemology (even though our knowledge of that future is not omniscient), why not say something similar about other things that are revealed in Scripture?

92 Ibid.
93 Groothuis: 9.
94 See e.g. Grenz and Franke, Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context, 38-46.
95 Groothuis.
Carson’s critique has some substance. While in theory a focus on the telos of human existence and eschatological reality has appeal, in practice it is difficult to be dogmatic about what eschatological reality will entail. Assertions must either be from scripture, or some other source or sources. While the awareness of the eschaton should lead to tentativeness in all theological statements, the same applies to all statements about the eschaton itself.

Archie Spencer, while not focusing specially on Grenz’ views of scripture, laments what he considers to be Grenz’ “apparent ambiguity in his proposals for a revised theological method.”97 Grenz writes a lively reply to Spencer in which he extols the virtue of ambiguity.98

The accusation of ambiguity is made by others. Erickson suggests that Grenz appears to reject certain evangelical doctrines but then backtracks and claims allegiance to them. He writes that “It is therefore often difficult to determine precisely what he does hold on a given doctrinal issue.”99 Kovach complains of Grenz’ writing style and accuses him of being “evasive in taking specific positions on doctrinal matters”100 and later talks of Grenz’ “characteristically noncommittal fashion.”101 A comparable accusation is made by Carson who complains that “the jargon is so thick and fuzzy that I am uncertain if anything substantial or precise is being said” and goes on to accuse Grenz of raising “the fine art of sidestepping crucial questions to an annoying level.”102

Grenz’ response to Spencer is probably akin to the one he would make to Erickson and Kovach. Initially he suggests that Spencer finds his work ambiguous because he has “a less-than-adequate understanding of what I am attempting to accomplish.”103 Certainly Spencer displays a poor grasp of Grenz’ work when he suggests that Grenz is proposing “new boundaries for evangelical theology,”104 given that Grenz specifically addresses what he

101 Ibid., 7.
104 Spencer: 339. In fairness to Spencer, it could be noted that he is probably correct in his assessment that the response to the ambiguity of what constitutes a boundary marker for evangelicalism tends to divide evangelicals into those who fear for the dissolution of the movement (traditionalists like
considers to be the inadequacy of drawing boundaries in a journal article dedicated to the topic. The closing comment of Grenz’ reply to Spencer is important: “I must admit that by its very nature, theology will always be beset by a kind of ambiguity. Indeed, a proper ambiguity can be one of the theologian’s greatest virtues.”

Perhaps we can defend Grenz differently. If his theological method can be reduced to a series of neat propositions he is guilty of the propositional reductionism he attempts to transcend. But Grenz cannot be adequately understood without first sensing the ethos of his writing, or the broadly engaging vision which he pursues. Thus, for example, when Erickson sarcastically titles his chapter reviewing Grenz’ work on postmodernism To Boldly Go Where No Evangelical Has Gone Before, one quickly realizes the different contexts each writes for. In spite of his efforts to be fair, a sense of reproach for attempting a project like “revisioning evangelical theology” regularly leaks out from Erickson.

While this style of defence of Grenz may seem intuitive, it is not without support. Robert Webber selects Grenz as the representative theologian for what he calls “the younger evangelicals,” while suggesting that Carl Henry is representative of traditional evangelicals and Gilbert Bilezikian of pragmatic evangelicals. Webber writes,

The younger evangelical is at odds with the traditional and pragmatic evangelical when it comes to theological method. The method of the traditionalists is to treat theology as a science, subject, as all other sciences are, to the empirical method. Through an analysis of the data of revelation, one could be brought to propositional truth. Theology, the traditionalist says, is a system of objective truth understood in the mind. The pragmatists, on the other hand, are not theologians and care little for the nuances of theological thinking. They tend to reduce theology to Christianity 101 to make it clear and understandable to the seeker.

The younger evangelical sees theology as a way to understand the world. It is an understanding based on the biblical narrative. This is the approach to faith that has captured the postmodern mind. Postmoderns have abandoned the modern worldview in which the supremacy of interpretation is given to

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Erickson, Carson and Wells) and those who see it as a sign of a renaissance in evangelical theology (reformists like Grenz) (338).


108 Erickson, The Evangelical Left: Encountering Postconservative Evangelical Theology.

109 Erickson is a product of modernity. His work is filled with lists that first state the pros of the position being reviewed, followed by a comparable list of concerns. The concerns usually win the day.

110 Bilezikian served as theological advisor to Bill Hybels, founder of the large and successful Willowcreek Church. The Willowcreek movement epitomizes pragmatic evangelicalism (does it work?).
Webber’s insights are helpful and raise the question of whether some of the opposition to Grenz is generational rather than theological. Indeed it could be that Grenz has successfully revisioned evangelical theology for younger evangelicals while being unacceptable to traditional evangelicals. If so Grenz’ influence is likely to increase as “younger evangelicals” come into their own and the influence of traditional evangelicals recedes.\textsuperscript{111}

Other responses to Grenz’ view on the Bible and revelation should be considered.

David Neff, while largely appreciative of Grenz, is surprised that Grenz “is strangely silent on the Bible, yet does not hesitate to turn to sociological theory” and finds it “curious that no attention is paid to the Christian account of how we know what we know about God.”\textsuperscript{112} Grenz’ failure to develop the classic evangelical apologetic for revelation does lead to some reservations. It is not that Grenz is necessarily opposed to classic formulations, but more that he wishes to rectify what he perceives as the neglected role of both the Spirit and the community in receiving and interpreting scripture. He attempts to shift the weighting given to different insights, rather than necessarily denying classic evangelical formulations.

David Allen probably best summarizes the reservation about Grenz’ position amongst traditional evangelicals. He notes that in Theology for the Community of God, Grenz affirms a threefold connection between revelation and the Bible. The first is that the Bible is revelation in a derivative sense. The second is that it is revelation in a functional sense. The third is that it is revelation in that it mediates a proper understanding of God’s essence. It is not what Grenz affirms that is especially troubling to Allen, but what he fails to affirm. Allen writes, “Thus, for Grenz, the Bible is derivatively, functionally, and mediately revelation, but it is not ontologically revelation.”\textsuperscript{113} Accusing Grenz of advocating a “Barthian position,” Allen elaborates on his concern with this approach,

\textsuperscript{110} Webber, 91-92.
\textsuperscript{111} Not that one should fully relate age to being a “younger” or “traditional” evangelical. But it does reflect the more subjective and attitudinal issues that affect the movement. An example of a “younger” but “traditional” evangelical is R. Albert Mohler, Jr. Under 40 when elected as the ninth President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, his influential tenure has taken the seminary in a markedly more conservative direction than his predecessors. He has also been influential in the restructuring of the Southern Baptist Denomination. Again, the direction has been markedly to the right.
Barth may consider the Biblical idea of Satan to be false, while we consider it to be an accurate reflection of the Word of God in the written words of Scripture. Who arbitrates such disputes? In Barthian theology, there is no one to arbitrate; the epistemological foundations have been undercut.\textsuperscript{114}

Allen is not willing to view a Barthian approach to scripture as being compatible with an evangelical position. He expresses his view emphatically,

This reluctance on the part of many within the fold of evangelicalism to equate Scripture with the Word of God in an ontological sense is at the heart of the issue of Biblical authority and was once the hallmark distinction between evangelical and non-evangelical theologians. Barth’s dichotomy between the Word of God and the words of Scripture is indeed a sinister dichotomy for theology, and since it is not supported by Scripture itself must be rejected by evangelicals. It belongs to the right wing of postliberalism, not the left wing of evangelicalism.\textsuperscript{115}

Although Erickson was willing to concede that Grenz and other theologians of the evangelical left had not “moved so far as to surrender the right to be called evangelicals,”\textsuperscript{116} Allen’s assessment is different. While recognizing that Grenz and others with similar views are considered to be within the evangelical camp, he assigns them to the “right wing of postliberalism.”\textsuperscript{117} All this is not promising, but must be modified by more appreciative voices.

Roger Olson in comparing the theological method of Grenz and Kevin Vanhoozer refers to what he sees as the common concern for both, “to provide a postfoundationalist vision for a truly Christ-and Bible-centered evangelical approach to theological reflection and doctrinal construction”\textsuperscript{118} and later writes that both “emphasize the constitutional-regulative authority of Scripture.”\textsuperscript{119} While Olson’s evaluation that Grenz provides a Bible-centered and evangelical approach would hearten traditional evangelicals, his qualification that it is the “constitutional-regulative authority of Scripture” that Grenz stresses is not as encouraging. Unlike most evangelicals, Grenz notes the almost self-evident insight that as the constituting book of the Christian community, the Bible is guaranteed a place of honour.\textsuperscript{120} This however

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.: 496.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{116} Erickson, The Evangelical Left: Encountering Postconservative Evangelical Theology, 147.
\textsuperscript{117} Allen: 496.
\textsuperscript{118} Roger E. Olson, "Reforming Evangelical Theology," in Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method, ed. John G. Stackhouse (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 204.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 205.
\textsuperscript{120} Grenz writes, “Yet all such attempts to establish the role of Scripture, whether or not they are successful, are ultimately unnecessary. In engaging in the theological task, we may simply assume the authority of the Bible on the basis of the integral relation of theology to the faith community. Because the Bible is the universally acknowledged book of the Christian church, the biblical message functions as the central norm for the systematic articulation of the faith of that community. Consequently the
merely points to the functional role of the Bible within the Christian community. Grenz’ reluctance to assign the Bible supreme authority as the witness to God’s revelation is a source of disquiet to traditional evangelicals. Ontologically, evangelicals traditionally claim far more for scripture, and Grenz’ apparent side step of this issue is unlikely to be acceptable to them.

Writing from a Pentecostal perspective, Cross credits Grenz for stimulating his thought on the contribution Pentecostal theology can make to evangelical theology. Many of the concerns raised by Cross are echoes of Grenz. As a Pentecostal theologian he has no need to be persuaded of the importance of the Spirit’s role in illuminating the scriptures. While more ready to assign a role to experience as a source for theology than Grenz, he validly notes that a subjective experience “if bolstered by a text, a community and the Spirit” is essentially what Grenz calls for. In that Pentecostalism is the growing wing of the evangelical movement, support for Grenz from a prominent Pentecostal theologian is significant. On the other hand, given that the classification of Pentecostals as evangelicals is itself controversial, such support further marginalizes Grenz in the thinking of some traditional evangelicals.

The research proposition is “that Stanley Grenz’ theological method effectively revisions evangelical theology.” Historically, scripture has been viewed as the key source for evangelical theology. Grenz is willing to assign scripture the role of the “norming norm” and as the key player in the theological edifice that results from the “insightful conversation” between scripture, tradition and culture. He believes that this interplay will “construct a truly helpful evangelical theology.”

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divine nature of Scripture or its status vis-à-vis revelation need not be demonstrated in the prolegomenon to theology. Sufficient for launching the systematic-theological enterprise is the nature of theology itself as the reflection on the faith of the community. And sufficient for the employment of the Bible in this task is its status as the book of the community.” Grenz, Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century, 94.


122 Grenz argues that experience must be assessed by the three primary sources for theology, the Bible, tradition and culture. While allowing for a more subjective (Barthian) interpretation of scripture, he qualifies this by passing illumination through a communal rather than individual, grid. In other words, genuine illumination by the Spirit is recognized by the faith community, not just the individual.

123 Cross: 52.

124 In essence the issue revolves around the, “Is the ‘Wesleyan-holiness’ movement an authentic part of evangelical history?” question. Grenz argues that it is. Cross is also aware of the dilemma, writing a little tongue in cheek, ‘Some may find the phrase “Pentecostal theology” to be an oxymoron: how can a movement based on experience have any substantive theological reflection to offer?’ Ibid.: 47. He notes the problem evangelicals have in the historical placement of Pentecostalism in footnote 3 (46-47) and again in footnote 4 (47-48).

He does, however, qualify his understanding of the role of scripture. While willing to acknowledge that the propositional approach "has certain advantages,"\textsuperscript{126} he stresses that "evangelical modernists risk collapsing the Spirit into the words of the Bible, or more specifically, into our exegesis of the words of the Bible."\textsuperscript{127}

To enable the journey from "What does the text say?" to "what does the Spirit intend to say through scripture to us in our context," he suggests that the focus should shift from the doctrine of inspiration to illumination.\textsuperscript{128} Acknowledging the subjectivity inherent in such an emphasis, he qualifies this by acknowledging that illumination is communally rather than individually mediated.

Objections to the approach have been noted. Perhaps the most significant criticism is that Grenz never makes clear the relationship between the words of the biblical text, the communicative intent of the author and the work of the Spirit.\textsuperscript{129} While Grenz' desire to avoid a static approach to scripture is both understandable and commendable, simply arguing that the Spirit appropriates the biblical text and makes it authoritative for a Christian community is not likely to convince "evangelical modernists." The objections are not hard to understand. It is possible to cite many examples of sincere communities of Christians whose belief that the Spirit led them through the scriptures is not shared by other sincere communities of believers. At this point one has to make a decision on what basis one discriminates between the two.\textsuperscript{130} Amongst evangelicals the debate usually takes place at a hermeneutical level. In other words, the conviction that there is an objective meaning behind the text has dominated evangelical thought. Grenz himself recognizes and apparently accepts this. His book on homosexuality \textit{Welcoming but Not Affirming} is titled contra those churches who felt led by the scriptures and the Spirit to be "welcoming and affirming" churches. This book is used as a case study of Grenz' method in chapter 7, and gives greater clarity as to the application of Grenz' theological method.\textsuperscript{131}

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid.: 9-10.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid.: 10.
\textsuperscript{129} Grenz' work in this regard would be enriched by interacting with Kevin Vanhoozer's work on the relationship between scripture, the Spirit and authority. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, \textit{Is There a Meaning in the Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge} (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).
\textsuperscript{130} Assuming that one accepts that the scriptures and Spirit lead the church in a consistent direction, and that what is "truth" for one group is not "untruth" for another.
\textsuperscript{131} Safeguards from a traditional evangelical perspective.
4.5 FOUR EVALUATIVE QUESTIONS

The opening chapter of this thesis suggests that the proposition "that Stanley Grenz’ theological method effectively revisions evangelical theology" be tested against four key questions:

1) Does Grenz’ method make an original contribution to evangelical theological construction?
2) Is Grenz’ theological method coherent and credible?
3) Does Grenz’ method genuinely revision evangelical theology?
4) Is Grenz’ method effective in revisioning evangelical theology?

I will modify these questions marginally so that they focus on the way Grenz revisions the use of scripture in theological construction. The evaluation must be seen as initial as it will be supplemented in chapter 5 by Grenz’ revisioning of the sources of tradition and culture and in chapter 6 by an evaluation of Grenz’ use of the themes of Trinity, community and eschatology in his revisioning of theology’s focal motifs, as well as by the assessment of the application of his method in the case study in chapter 7. These four appraisals then form the basis for the extension of Grenz’ method suggested in chapter 8.

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

Section 4.3 explores Grenz’ proposal of the way scripture should function as a source for theology and section 4.4 collates the lively and varied response the model has elicited.

Given the strength of the largely negative response to Grenz’ proposals on scripture, it seems reasonable to conclude that the evangelical community has detected something that, if not original, is at least different in Grenz’ approach to scripture. In suggesting originality as a key indicator, it was noted that it could mean “original within this community.”

Grenz’ pneumatologically mediated approach to scripture, with the proposal that the Spirit speaks through the scriptures to the community, with the contextually embedded community entrusted with the task of discerning what constitutes the authentically Spirit illuminated scripture for the community, has led to concerns being expressed on several fronts. Some major related refrains include that the approach is subjective (and has Barthian overtones) as

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132 Chapter 1.3
well as that it undermines the concept of the authority of scripture by taking the locus of authority from the text and placing it within the contextualized, Spirit guided, community of faith. In addition, his suggestion that the authority of the Bible be linked to the formative role it played in the establishment of the Christian community, is not a view usually developed by evangelicals. We will evaluate each in turn.

The question of the basis for the authority of theological claims has long been important in evangelical circles, with the typical evangelical response being that authoritative theological statements flow from an inspired and inerrant Bible. Any other claims are seen, at best, as tentative and speculative. Grenz is well aware of this tendency within evangelicalism, but notes that what he calls the “cognitive doctrinal” emphasis within the new evangelicalism went hand in hand with an emphasis on “the practical-experiential.” A comparable contrast he notes is between the “propositional” approach to scripture and the impulse towards “convertive piety” that shapes evangelicalism. In describing these two trends, and by taking special care to demonstrate that the subjective, devotional approach to scripture constitutes a valid historical trajectory for evangelicalism, Grenz establishes historical grounds for his more subjective approach to scripture as a source for theology. Whilst wishing to correct what he sees as an overemphasis on propositional approaches to scripture, the question to be raised is whether he allows the pendulum to swing too far in the opposite direction.

Grenz’ stress that the concept of the inspiration of scripture by the Spirit must be accompanied by a corresponding emphasis on the Spirit’s illumination of the text, is what shifts the subject-object locus in his theology. So long as we have an inspired text to study, the theologian can approach scripture as an objective text whose message can be interpreted and explained. If, however, the focus shifts to scripture as a Spirit illuminated text dynamically interacting with the life of the individual or community, the static ‘given’ of the text is replaced by uncertainty, ambiguity and the subjectivity of a required response. The approach has distinctly Barthian overtones where the Word of God shifts from being authoritatively inspired Word to divinely illuminated Word. In this sense, the Word of God becomes the Word of God in the interaction with a particular person or community.

133 For example he writes: “Nowhere is neo-evangelicalism’s genesis in fundamentalism more evident than in its theology. The fundamentalist acceptance of the Princeton understanding of inspiration, especially Warfield’s formulation of inerrancy, gave a particular nineteenth-century cast to neo-evangelicalism’s emphasis on biblical authority.” Grenz, Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era, 83.
134 Ibid., 84.
135 For example he writes: “Nowhere is neo-evangelicalism’s genesis in fundamentalism more evident than in its theology. The fundamentalist acceptance of the Princeton understanding of inspiration, especially Warfield’s formulation of inerrancy, gave a particular nineteenth-century cast to neo-evangelicalism’s emphasis on biblical authority.” Grenz, Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era, 83.
136 The argument is developed in Renewing the Center. Ibid., 53-84.
137 Grenz is well aware of the reservation evangelicals have of Barth, and especially of the subjectivity implicit within his approach. He writes: “Several recent theologies of Word and Spirit have come close
While it is true that earlier evangelicals were suspicious of what they would consider to be a Barthian approach to the text, in practice they have usually embraced the subjectivity implicit in this approach. Grenz has highlighted a gap between evangelical faith as experienced by most evangelicals, and evangelical faith as described by its theologians. It is Grenz' willingness to embrace an approach formerly rejected by evangelicals and suggesting that it provides a pathway to the future, that causes Erickson to bemoan what he calls "category slide,"

...categories and terms have become quite elastic. I term one aspect of this, "category slide." A person who was once considered neo-orthodox may now be termed evangelical and someone who formerly was clearly identified as an evangelical may now be branded a fundamentalist, without the actual views of the persons involved having changed in any significant way.

Grenz would argue that this does not involve a shifting of terms, but an embracing of a fuller understanding of the evangelical heritage. His interpretation of both the Puritans and the Pietists and of their approach to scripture, stresses the value they attached to scripture in the shaping of their daily lives. Scripture was as much for the heart as it was for the head.

Without wishing to prejudice our final conclusion, we could perhaps tentatively suggest that at this point Grenz has made an original contribution to evangelical theology by suggesting theological categories to help understand evangelical experience. While it is true that he draws from others to reach his conclusions, his contribution is original in that it proposes a way beyond the head/heart impasse that has seen a dichotomy between evangelical theological propositions and evangelical practice and experience.

It is the creativity of this approach, and in particular the dynamic role assigned to the Spirit, that is appreciated by Cross who detects in Grenz' approach the possibility of a more dynamic
interrelationship between evangelical and Pentecostal theology. Thus while Grenz runs the risk of alienating some within the evangelical camp, he opens the door for others to enter in.

Given that the pneumatological focus of Grenz’ doctrine of scripture will inevitably lead to a greater subjectivity of interpretation, the next logical question surrounds the authority of the text. For Grenz there are safeguards, first because the Spirit’s voice is heard through the text, the text thus being the objective medium through which the Spirit speaks, and second, because the text is not heard in isolation. The Spirit speaks to an embedded community of faith which has the task of discerning the voice of the Spirit as it comes through scripture. The local embedded community is, in turn, part of the wider community of all the saints, which provides another layer of discernment.

The question of authority is important for Grenz, but he frames it in terms that are largely novel within the evangelical community. Instead of arguing from an inerrant text, Grenz’ broader theological agenda is to devise a postfoundationalist approach to theology. The traditional theological foundationalism inherent in the inerrancy debate is seen by Grenz to be doomed as part of the now past modern era. Theology in the postmodern era needs to be postfoundationalist, springboarding from models of coherence. By suggesting scripture, tradition and culture as sources for theology, Grenz argues that he strengthens the claim for authority, as the coherence detected between these three theological conversation partners provides a stronger web of meaning (or authority) than a single plea to an inerrant text. This motivation seems to be largely ignored by Grenz’ critics, who read more sinister meanings into Grenz’ rejection of foundationalism. While it is true that some valid concerns are raised about Grenz’ understanding of foundationalism, the failure to grasp that Grenz’ concern is to develop a credible apologetic for a postmodern era, is unfortunate.

142 That is, a foundationalist approach where everything stands or falls on the foundational proposition that God has provided a definitive and accurate (inerrant) portrayal of himself in scripture.
143 Moreland and De Weese e.g. challenge Grenz’ assumption that foundationalism is passé, and go on to argue for that they call a “modest foundationalism.” J.P. Moreland and Garrett De Weese, "The Premature Report of Foundationalism's Demise," in Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times, ed. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 90.
144 Erickson also disputes the demise of foundationalism, and suggests that what he calls “post-postmodern theology” will embrace a neo-foundationalist approach, as exemplified in the work of Reformed epistemologists such as Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstoft. Erickson, "On Flying in Theological Fog," 325, 330-331.
145 The value of developing an apologetic for a postmodern era is disputed by James Parker III as he argues for “a certain (and perhaps soon) demise” of postmodernism. He goes on to predict that postmodernism “will be relegated to the realm of the curious but passé.” He detects the emergence of a transmodern era and writes, “Transmodernists affirm objective and normative truth without capitulating to a naturalistic scientism, and they affirm true moral values and virtues.” James Parker III, "A Requiem for Postmodernism - Whither Now?,” in Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical
Another original feature of Grenz’ approach is his claim that linking the question of authority and inerrancy together is misguided because the authority of the Bible is guaranteed within the Christian community by virtue of scripture’s status as the founding text for the Church. Grenz argues that scripture is the identity-conferring text for the Christian community. While there is a certain self-evident quality about this assertion, it suggests a significantly lower authority than that usually claimed by evangelicals for scripture. Historically evangelicals have linked the authority of the Bible to its divine inspiration. This guaranteed its absolute truthfulness, as God does not lie. The emphasis was thus on its authoritative truthfulness rather than on the functional role it played in the forming of the Christian church. Indeed, on the basis of Grenz’ logic it is difficult to understand why the Bible should be viewed as being a greater authority than, for example, the Koran. While a novel proposal, and thus meeting the criteria of originality, this aspect is unlikely to be accepted as an adequate apologetic for an evangelical understanding of the Christian faith. One could argue that at this point Grenz settles for a sociological rather than a theological understanding of scripture. It is hard to dispute that scripture has served as an identity-conferring document for the church, but why it should therefore automatically retain a privileged position in the community is less clear. This is especially so as though Grenz suggests scripture, tradition and culture as the sources for theology, he still argues that scripture is the ultimate norming norm.

Overall we can conclude that while not all have approved of Grenz’ revisioned view of scripture, it is sufficiently novel within the evangelical community to affirm that he has made an original contribution.

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

For Grenz’ theological method to have revisioned evangelical theology it must be a coherent and genuinely theological approach. Certainly this is Grenz’ goal. Grenz and Franke complain that “theological construction that seeks to take the biblical texts seriously routinely degenerates into mere proof-texting” and put forward their proposal for reading the Bible theologically.147 Methodologically their approach is a rich mosaic of interacting with other

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146 See Grenz’ discussion of this in Revisioning Evangelical Theology. Grenz, Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century, 94.
147 Grenz and Franke, Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context, 89.

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theologians, the tradition of the church, scripture and a range of academic disciplines. Their approach is certainly more comprehensive than the proof-texting they seek to avoid.

Grenz’ motivation for his revisioned understanding of the role of scripture in theological construction is a mixture of theological and pragmatic concerns. On the one hand he devises a method that moves beyond a static approach to scripture. The approach requires a post-propositional approach to scripture and takes the role of the Spirit seriously. The link between Word and Spirit is consistently affirmed in Grenz’ method. However, there is also a pragmatic agenda at work. Grenz wishes to tighten the link between theology and piety. In my opinion he is not fully successful, but simply affirms the importance of spirituality while not rigorously thinking through the safeguards and provisos that need to be added. Others have thought these through more carefully.¹⁴⁸ This looseness in construction leaves Grenz vulnerable to accusations of subjectivity. Claiming that communal discernment overcomes the risk of subjectivity simply sidesteps the issue that both individuals and communities can be subjective.

In spite of this concern, overall we can affirm that Grenz’ revisioning of the role of scripture has theological integrity.

From a methodological perspective, Grenz’ work is systematic and he outlines his method clearly and implements it consistently. The initial evaluation of his methodological coherence is therefore straightforward and affirming. In particular, his understanding of the role of scripture is dynamic and interactive. It presupposes scripture as a player together with other players, notably, the Spirit and the community of God.

However, at another level more profound probing is required. The questions arise because Grenz desires to construct a method that moves beyond foundationalism and that is suitable for a postmodern context. Paradoxically, the very tidiness of his system works against this. As this becomes more apparent after analysing Grenz’ understanding of the role of tradition and culture in theological construction, I will defer the discussion to the parallel question in chapter 5.5.2.

¹⁴⁸ For example, Yoder is much clearer on the way in which communal discernment can take place, and outlines parameters for what he calls “the shape of conversation.” John Howard Yoder, The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 28-34.
4.5.3 Does Grenz’ revisioning of the role of scripture contribute to the revisioning of evangelical theology?

The question of whether Grenz’ revisioning of evangelicalism’s understanding of scripture is both sufficiently continuous and discontinuous with the movement’s traditional understanding, should now be considered. If it is not sufficiently continuous, it is reasonable to suggest that it no longer represents evangelical theology and therefore cannot be viewed as a revisioning of the movement. If not sufficiently discontinuous, the question as to why this should be classified as a genuine revisioning must be asked.

Some of the original features of Grenz’ contribution were assessed in 4.6.1. The focus of this discussion is therefore not whether Grenz has made an original contribution, but whether evangelical theology can embrace his understanding of the role scripture plays both in theological construction and in the life of the believing community, and continue to operate with the label of evangelical theology. I have already cited Carson’s conviction that Grenz’ approach to scripture cannot be viewed as evangelical.¹⁴⁹ In short, is Carson right? If so, it serves as a definite obstacle to being able to affirm our thesis proposition.

If Grenz is correct that “the evangelical ethos is more readily ‘sensed’ than described theologically” the more subjective aspects of his pneumatologically mediated approach to scripture can be affirmed as consistent with evangelical theology.¹⁵⁰ Evangelical piety is quick to affirm the reality of the Spirit speaking and guiding through the scriptures. Traditionally evangelicals have not only wanted to hear what the scriptures say, but what they are saying to us (often more individually focused to what are they saying to me). Emphasising the role of the Spirit in illuminating the scriptures is therefore not inherently problematic for evangelicals.

The related question of subjective or idiosyncratic interpretations is an issue. For Grenz this is resolved by communal illumination, which takes place both within the locally embedded community and in conversation with the wider community through the tradition of the church. While evangelicals are not likely to oppose this insight, they have usually added an additional safeguard, that of the objectivity of the biblical text which is guaranteed by its divine inspiration. The Spirit’s illumination will never contradict the Spirit’s initial inspiration, or, put differently, biblical exegesis and hermeneutics will harmonise (where exegesis is

¹⁵⁰ Grenz, Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century, 31.
understood as the objective meaning of the text and hermeneutics its application in a specific context). While Grenz does not dispute this, he does not give prominence to it. This then becomes the underlying unease that causes Allen to claim that “for Grenz, the Bible is derivatively, functionally, and mediately revelation, but it is not ontologically revelation.” Allen is overstating his case. Grenz does not write in an either/or style. He focuses on areas he believes have been underdeveloped. Grenz’ analysis is that evangelicals have paid enough attention to the inspiration of scripture and that their focus now needs to turn to the illumination of scripture. That does not mean that he negates the insights drawn from the earlier focus on the inspiration of scripture.

Overall, while we have noted opposition to Grenz’ views of scripture, analysed as a whole, they are continuous with the evangelical tradition, though they suggest a refocusing of attention onto some areas that Grenz considers to have been neglected. In summary form, Grenz has articulated a path beyond the usual evangelical trio of scripture interpreted by an individual believer through the illumination of the indwelling Spirit to a more holistic view of scripture interpreted by the faith community in the light of the tradition of the church as illuminated by the Spirit. This can be affirmed as contributing towards a genuine revisioning of evangelical theology.

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

The question now focuses on the likelihood of Grenz’ revisioning of scripture being effective. A key indicator is the probability of Grenz’ views being embraced by evangelicals.

While Grenz is attracting increasing interest from evangelical authors, much of it is critical. Perhaps more significantly, he is now sometimes labelled as the leading representative of postconservative evangelicalism. Taylor describes postconservative evangelicals as,

...self-professed evangelicals seeking to revision the theology, renew the center, and transform the worshipping community of evangelism,

151 Or the authorial intent of the text.
152 Allen: 494.
153 Grenz suggests that a comparable accusation of “a subjectivist understanding of the presence of the divine Word through the Bible” which has been made against Bloesch, represents a misreading of Bloesch. Grenz and Franke, Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context, 68.
154 In much the same way as he does not negate the value of a propositional approach to scripture, but wishes to find models that extend beyond propositionalism.
155 Prior to 2000, there were not many references to his work. Since then, there has been a significant increase. One example is the 2004 publication of Reclaiming the Center, which gives Grenz the dubious honor of having fourteen leading evangelical scholars combine together to produce what is essentially a rebuttal text of his Renewing the Center. Erickson, Helseth, and Taylor, eds., Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times.
cognizant of the postmodern global context within which we live. They desire a "generous orthodoxy" that would steer a faithful course between the Scylla of conservative-traditionalism and the Charybdis of liberal-progressivism.\(^{156}\)

While acknowledging the risk of oversimplification, Taylor suggests that "Stanley Grenz is postconservatism’s Professor, Brian McLaren its Pastor, and Roger Olson and Robert Webber its Publicists."\(^{157}\)

Such recognition can be seen in two lights. On the one hand it is a clear acknowledgment that Grenz is seen as an influential thinker within evangelicalism. On the other hand, it suggests that Grenz is being marginalized as a representative of a particular type of evangelicalism. Labels both empower by recognition and disempower by limiting people to the parameters of the label. If the latter is the case, Grenz is finding a niche for a particular brand of thinking within the broad family of evangelicalism, but it could not be argued that he has revisioned the entire movement.

If we ask for which sectors of evangelicalism is Grenz’ revisioning likely to effective, three groups can be listed. First are those Webber labels as "younger evangelicals,"\(^{158}\) second is those Taylor describes as "postconservative evangelicals"\(^{159}\) and third is Pentecostal evangelicals.\(^{160}\) If one accepts Pentecostalism as the natural extension of the Wesleyan-Holiness stream within evangelicalism, this rapidly growing group could be the largest segment within evangelicalism. We did, however, note Smith’s stance that Pentecostal theologians should distance themselves from evangelical theology.\(^{161}\)

An underlying question that springboards from this is if evangelicalism is too broad a movement to be revisioned in its entirety. This moves beyond the question of Grenz’ method, and is not within his control. Rather than finding the pathway for evangelical theology, it is probable that one will have to settle for a pathway that some evangelicals will happily travel.

\(^{156}\) Justin Taylor, "An Introduction to Postconservative Evangelicalism and the Rest of This Book," in Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times, ed. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 18.
\(^{157}\) Ibid. Such categorizations are sometimes primarily descriptive, at other times more evaluative. Depending on the stance of the author, the same descriptor can be viewed as being affirmative or pejorative. Taylor falls within the pejorative camp but Robert Webber comparably uses Grenz as the theological representative of "younger evangelicals," and clearly intends it as a badge of honour.
\(^{158}\) Webber, 92.
\(^{159}\) Taylor, 18.
\(^{160}\) There are significant overlaps between each of these three groups, but overall a distinct classification for each is valid.
\(^{161}\) Smith, "The Closing of the Book: Pentecostals, Evangelicals, and the Sacred Writings."
This should not be seen to imply that any pathway will do. It needs to be one which is a logical outflow from the trajectory evangelicalism has already followed. It would, for example, be inconsistent if a pathway linked to the evangelical movement refused to give an honoured voice to scripture in its theological construction.

4.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored Grenz’ understanding of the role of scripture as a source for theology, and the varied responses his proposals have elicited. Because evangelicals attach so much importance to scripture, this has been explored in some depth. If Grenz’ views on scripture are not acceptable to the evangelical community, it is unlikely that he will be able to revision evangelical theology, which would render the thesis proposition “that Stanley Grenz’ theological methodology effectively revisions evangelical theology,” improbable.

In summary form, our response to our four evaluative questions as applied to Grenz’ proposals regarding scripture are:

1) Does Grenz’ method make an original contribution to evangelical theological construction? Yes.
2) Is Grenz’ theological method coherent and credible? Yes, though with minor reservations.
3) Does Grenz’ method genuinely revision evangelical theology? Yes, it is both sufficiently continuous while also suggesting a refocus on some underdeveloped areas.
4) Is Grenz’ method effective in revisioning evangelical theology? Yes, for certain sectors of evangelicalism, especially postconservative evangelicals, younger evangelicals and Pentecostal evangelicals. Yes for certain sectors does however imply no for others.

These conclusions are used to draw up the table of findings in chapter 8.1.

To our evaluation of Grenz’ view of scripture as the norming norm for theology we must now add an investigation of the other two conversation partners in his theological method, tradition and culture. This is the focus of our next chapter.
CHAPTER FIVE

AN EXPLORATION AND EVALUATION OF GRENZ' CHOICE AND USE OF TRADITION AND CULTURE AS SOURCES FOR THEOLOGY

5.1 BEYOND SOLA SCRIPTURA

One of the key cries of the Reformers was sola scriptura. Distrustful of the theologians of the Roman Catholic church who advocated two main sources for theology, the Bible as canonized by the church and interpreted by the magisterium, and apostolic tradition as handed down and augmented by the church, they insisted that scripture alone was the chief source for theology.¹

At first glance then, it is a little surprising to discover that someone claiming to work within the evangelical context should consider expanding the range of sources for theology beyond that of scripture. Indeed, as Grenz advocates the use of the Bible, tradition and culture, the initial instinct might be to imagine that he has not only returned to the model rejected by the Reformers, but by adding the source of culture to it, thereby dilutes the scripture principle even more radically. At the heart of evangelical identity lies a commitment to the Bible, and any attempt to revision evangelical theology that can be seen as compromising a strong commitment to scripture, is unlikely to be accepted as evangelical.² Our thesis proposition is "that Stanley Grenz' theological method effectively revisions evangelical theology." This single factor could potentially disallow us from considering the proposition upheld.

This fear is given some weight when we note that evangelical opponents of Grenz question if any method that embraces anything other than scripture as theology's norming norm can be consistent with evangelicalism. Brand provides a summary of the typical evangelical method,

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¹ This is not to suggest that they saw no role for tradition, but to note that they were not prepared to consider tradition to have an equal weight to that held by scripture. Melton suggests that by drawing a divide between scripture and tradition they ceased to see tradition as the context within which scripture is understood. "From the Orthodox perspective, therefore, the Reformation dogma sola scriptura implies the wrenching of the Scriptures from their God-given context, which is the whole Tradition." Isaac Melton, "A Response to Harold O.J. Brown," in Reclaiming the Great Tradition: Evangelicals, Catholics and Orthodox in Dialogue, ed. James S. Cutsinger (Downers Grove: IVP, 1997), 92.

² E.g. McGrath comments, "One of the most distinguishing features of evangelicalism is its emphasis on the authority of Scripture... The task to which evangelical theology must set itself is that of showing that it is legitimate and helpful to use theology as a means of enhancing the quality of the believer's engagement with Scripture." Alister E. McGrath, "Evangelical Theological Method: The State of the Art," in Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method, ed. John G. Stackhouse (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 20.
Evangelicals have historically contended that the source for theological construction is the Bible. They have recognized the importance of tradition but do not see it as the source for theological construction. Similarly, contemporary culture is not a source for theology but is the context in which theological constructions are offered.3

Balancing this, we should note that attempts to expand on what sola scriptura might mean are not new. In 1979 Robert Johnston made a proposal remarkably similar to Grenz' when he suggested that theology should view its "sources as threefold," writing that "theology is the translation of Christian truth into contemporary idiom with an eye toward Biblical foundations, traditional formulations, and contemporary judgments." He also suggests that such a translation should emerge from "a communal listening to the theological sources."4

Grenz himself notes the increasing acceptance by evangelicals of what is misleadingly referred to as the "Wesleyan quadrilateral"5 and its suggestion that there are four sources for theology, viz. scripture, reason, experience and tradition.6 He also notes the increasing call for theology to be contextually related.7 While evangelical versions of contextualization usually stress the importance of relating the biblical message to the contemporary context,8 they reflect an awareness that the theologian must take seriously the thought forms of the culture within which the theologising takes place.9 Acknowledging the influence that cultural context has on the theological task allows for a more open and transparent process. Denial of the influence of time and culture empower cultural assumptions to influence the theologian more than when they are acknowledged and therefore factored into the thinking.

3 Chad O. Brand, "Defining Evangelicalism," in Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times, ed. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 296.
4 Johnston's work is a remarkably perceptive reading of evangelicalism. It is unfortunate that he did not develop his thinking more fully. Robert K. Johnston, Evangelicals at an Impasse: Biblical Authority in Practice (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979), 151.
5 Misleading, as it is increasingly doubted that the Wesleyan quadrilateral originated from John Wesley. In this connection, Grenz cites Ted A. Campbell, "The 'Wesleyan Quadrilateral': The Story of a Modern Methodist Myth," Methodist History 29 (1991).
7 Ibid., 89-90.
8 At a popular level, see e.g. John Stott's metaphor for preaching as bridge-building, spanning the gap between the world of the Bible and the contemporary world. John Stott, I Believe in Preaching: (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1982), 137-150.
9 The direction is therefore to unpack what the biblical message means in the contemporary context, rather than allowing the contemporary context to deepen the understanding of the biblical message. In this stance, the biblical message is understood within ever changing cultural contexts, but is not sourced by those contexts.
Simply listing possible sources for theology is inadequate. In the end it is not the selection of scripture, tradition and culture that is decisive, but the content and role Grenz allocates to these sources. A careful examination of the content and role Grenz assigns to tradition and culture is therefore undertaken in this chapter.

5.2 TRADITION AS THEOLOGY'S HERMENEUTICAL TRAJECTORY

In exploring tradition as a theological source which serves as theology’s hermeneutical trajectory, Grenz attempts to answer the question of how the insights gained from the Spirit’s guidance and leading of the church over the last two thousand years can be utilized in the process of theological reflection. In suggesting that tradition serves as a hermeneutical trajectory, pointing a path ahead toward the ultimate eschatological future of the church on the basis of insights from the past, and in turn being critiqued on the basis of the eschatological vision, he hopes to overcome static views of tradition that have historically led to an impasse between opposing groups, as each tries to justify their tradition as the valid one.

Grenz’ revisioned theology is intended to win over two audiences. On the one hand, it is evangelical theology that he revisions, and his hope is to draw traditional evangelicals to a broader vision of the movement, one that methodologically draws its sources from the conversation partners of scripture, tradition and culture. On the other hand he is writing for the postmodern context, and seeks to develop a theology that is true to its evangelical roots, but which is a respected player in the postmodern arena.

For neither of these audiences is tradition an obvious choice as a source for theology.

However the roots of evangelicalism are traced, it is never less than a movement that was supportive of the Reformers’ cry of sola scriptura. Indeed, the perceived use of tradition at the expense of the scriptures was a key factor in the Protestant Reformation. In suggesting tradition as a source for theology Grenz therefore has to indicate how to move beyond the hermeneutics of suspicion from which evangelicals usually operate when appeals to tradition are made in theological construction.

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11 Which is not to suggest that the reformers made no use of tradition. Attempts to literally apply sola scriptura are, inevitably, naïve. While the reformers held a theoretical commitment to sola scriptura, their hermeneutical practice is better described as suprema scriptura.
Neither is the choice of tradition for a postmodern audience a self-evident one. Wentzel Van Huyssteen accurately summarizes key postmodern concerns about the use of tradition,

Clearly one of the most distinguishing characteristics of the "postmodern" is precisely the crisis of continuity that now disrupts the accepted relationship between an event and a tradition that gains its stability from that relationship. The writings of Foucault offer a vivid picture of precisely the kind of postmodern thinking that seeks to purge history of any such overtones of metaphysical continuity. This view of tradition certainly presents a radical challenge to a Christianity that generally tries to live in continuity with the event and person of Jesus Christ and for whom the relationship to this kind of tradition is based on the witness of Scripture and the preaching and tradition of the church. By seeking to disturb any easy relationship with our past by arguing that our assertion of continuity is itself an invention of our need to control the destiny of our culture and society, a sceptical form of the postmodern critique of continuity thus calls into question the very possibility of tradition.  

The claim that any choice of historical trajectory, validated in the name of continuity with tradition, represents a means of control or power play is one that cannot be lightly dismissed. Again, Grenz has to indicate how his theological method helps a postmodern audience to move beyond a hermeneutics of suspicion when an appeal to tradition is made in theological construction.

A related question in choosing tradition as a key dialogue partner is which tradition? Conyers correctly notes, "While there are good reasons for thinking about Christianity in its broadest, most Catholic form, the fact is that theology comes to us embodied in specific traditions that are distinct in important ways from one another." If it is evangelical tradition that is to be the conversation partner, Olson notes a potential problem in his discussion of what it means to be a conservative evangelical. He writes,

Within evangelicalism, 'conservatism' often signals holding fast to 'the received evangelical tradition' (which always means someone's interpretation of the historical evangelical consensus) and refusing to consider seriously the possibility that it may have been mistaken and stands in need of some revision at certain crucial points. A 'conservative evangelical', then, is not someone who is not liberal; it is someone who emphatically rejects reform of evangelical belief and practice even when such reform is consistent with scripture. A conservative evangelical places such value on the status quo that he or she is close-minded with regard to theological creativity and innovation.

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even when they are fueled by faithful exegesis and believing reflection on God’s word.\(^\text{14}\)

If Olson’s assessment is correct, for conservative evangelicals tradition is not a source for theology, but the source, provided it is valid tradition as determined by conservative evangelicals. Tradition is then not a conversation partner, but the sole source. While Olson is likely to be overstating the case,\(^\text{15}\) his view raises numerous questions and leads logically to the question of determining a valid historical trajectory and tradition for evangelicalism.\(^\text{16}\)

Linked to Olson’s point, one has to ask whether a movement in need of revisioning is wise to choose tradition as a source for theological reflection. Tradition instinctively points back to the status quo and disallows radical thought – unless there is a review of tradition that is willing to privilege minority voices and to find in them the seed for new thought and reflection. This is then complicated by the disputed nature of what constitutes a valid history of evangelicalism.\(^\text{17}\) Grenz writes, “In a sense, we might say that evangelical theology is a family of local theologies, none of which dare set itself up as the definitive standard for evangelical orthodoxy.”\(^\text{18}\)

In spite of these reservations, Grenz chooses tradition as one of three sources for theology. Initially he states his reasons fairly superficially in *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*. They are that:


\[^{15}\text{McGrath probably speaks for a greater number of evangelicals when he suggests that, ‘The study of historical theology encourages us to operate a ‘hermeneutics of suspicion,’ which demands that we justify our interpretations of Scripture… Tradition is something to be actively and selectively appropriated, not passively and unthinkingly received.’ Later he is even more adamant, ‘the study of history discloses that evangelicals regard their tradition as determined by Scripture, not by what evangelicals have historically thought. Thus, contemporary evangelicals have not felt obligated to mechanically repeat the theologies and ethics of, for example, their eighteenth-century forebears… Evangelicalism is thus able to undertake a critical appropriation of its own heritage.’ Alister E. McGrath, "Engaging the Great Tradition: Evangelical Theology and the Role of Tradition," in Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method, ed. John G. Stackhouse (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 149-150.}\]

\[^{16}\text{If Olson is literally correct, any attempt to ‘revision’ evangelical theology is logically doomed, as one cannot revision a movement set on retaining the status quo.}\]

\[^{17}\text{Grenz is fully aware of the debate. The opening chapter of Revisioning Evangelical Theology (Grenz 1993) deals with the question of revisioning evangelical identity. Grenz, Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century. In Renewing the Center he explores the question in some depth. Stanley J. Grenz, Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).}\]

1) Past doctrinal statements and theological models are instructive for the present theological quest and help to avoid the pitfalls from the past
2) Traditions serve as a reference point
3) Some doctrinal formulations have withstood the test of time
4) As a second order task, theology is undertaken by theologians who are themselves members of a faith community which spans the centuries.19

At a certain level, these benefits are self-evident. In his work on the emerging church, Don Carson pithily notes the value of “Wanting to be linked to historic Christianity and not merely the latest twenty years of Christianity.”20 However, whether the benefits are great enough to classify tradition as one of three sources for theology is open to debate. While Grenz’ work reflects a consistent selection of tradition as one of three sources, his earlier work is more emphatic that “the primary norm for theology is the biblical message”21 and that of “secondary importance to the theological task is the flow of church history.”22 While a hierarchical arrangement of sources is still present in Beyond Foundationalism, it is articulated more subtly.23 If it were not, it would be hard to sustain the argument that this is a move beyond foundationalism.

The role of tradition as a source for theology is developed in significantly greater detail in Beyond Foundationalism24 where Grenz and Franke write, “The acknowledgment that the Spirit has been speaking to the church throughout history naturally leads to the question, How ought the fruits of this heritage to bear on the process of theological reflection?”25 Noting that until recently the debate about tradition usually focused on the different views of Roman Catholics and Protestants on the status of church tradition over against scripture, they suggest that this led to a static view of tradition and express the hope that the “postmodern situation provides the occasion to move beyond the impasse.”26

19 Grenz, Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century, 95-97.
20 D.A. Carson, Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 55.
22 Ibid., 23.
23 At times it is not subtle. The opening paragraph of the chapter on tradition reassures that Christianity being a tradition “is not to deny the centrality of scripture for Christian faith and practice.” Grenz and Franke, Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context, 94.
24 As the book is co-authored, and as Franke wrote the initial draft of chapter 4 which deals with tradition, it is possible that this section of the work is a fuller reflection of Franke’s thought than of Grenz’. However, as Grenz has attached his name to the book, we must assume that he is essentially in agreement with what is written. Ibid., x.
25 Ibid., 94.
26 Ibid., 95.
Working from Richard Lints' work, they cite three reasons for the low value attached to tradition in evangelicalism. First, by encouraging an inductive approach to Bible study it has birthed a movement where the key question in approaching the biblical text is the subjective one of what the text means to the individual reader. There is little encouragement to explore what it has been understood to mean to the broader faith community through its history. There is the risk of lapsing into nuda scriptura, in other words scripture abstracted from the ongoing life of the church. Second, the parachurch orientation of evangelicalism has led to an underdeveloped ecclesiology as well as an inadequate grasp of the potential role of tradition in theological dialogue. Third, evangelicalism tends to foster an ahistorical devotional piety. What God is saying now is viewed as all-important. Few evangelicals are willing to explore much beyond the very recent past.27

Noting that the usual debate between Protestants and Roman Catholics stalls on whether scripture or tradition has priority, Grenz and Franke suggest a shift away from the foundationalist presuppositions upon which such debates rest.28 They suggest a pneumatologically mediated approach is more fruitful, and write,

> What unifies this relationship between scripture and communal tradition of the church is the work of the Spirit. It is the Spirit who stands behind both the development and foundation of the community as well as the production of the biblical documents and the coming together of the Bible into a single canon as that community’s authoritative texts.29

The authority of both scripture and tradition are thus derived from the Spirit. Neither are static categories, as under the guidance of the Spirit the faith community interacts with the scriptures and the tradition of the church in the light of the contemporary (and changing) cultural setting.

Key to Grenz' understanding of tradition is that it is characterized by both continuity and change, which are pneumatologically mediated. "It is the Spirit who stands behind both the development and formation of the community as well as the production of the biblical documents."30 Any attempt to place a wedge between scripture and tradition is therefore misguided.

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27 Ibid., 109-111.
28 Ibid., 114.
29 Ibid., 116.
30 Ibid.
Though Grenz talks of tradition as a source for theology, one of the headings he uses reflects his position more accurately when it reads “Tradition as theological (re)source.” He summarizes his position when he writes:

...the tradition of the Christian church serves as a source or resource for theology, not as a final arbiter of theological issues or concerns but a hermeneutical context or trajectory for the Christian theological enterprise. Tradition provides this context as the constructive theologian examines the history of Christian worship, the history of Christian theology, and past theological formulations for the sake of articulating the belief-mosaic in the contemporary context.31

There is a significant difference between viewing tradition as a resource rather than a source for theology. Criticism that Grenz is sometimes ambiguous in what he proposes is founded at this point. Few deny that tradition is a helpful resource for the theologian. Knowing the ecumenical consensus from the past, as well as the debates which ultimately led to some views being declared as orthodox and others as heresy, is also helpful in avoiding the repetition of the disputes of the past. It is hard to imagine embarking on the task of theological construction from a genuinely blank sheet, so the usefulness of tradition as a theological resource is essentially self-evident.32 If Grenz is simply stating that tradition is a helpful resource in theological construction, the insight is neither novel nor controversial.

Up to this point, therefore, Grenz’ view is essentially non-controversial. However Grenz does not limit the role of tradition to that of resource. In developing a pneumatologically mediated view of tradition, he argues that tradition serves as a genuine source for theology. Guided by the Spirit, the faith community may sense that certain aspects of the church’s tradition or past experience speak to it authoritatively in their present context.33 Just as the Spirit enlivens and illuminates the scriptures, so too the Spirit can illuminate the tradition of the church, creating a belief that God has spoken a particular word for the faith community as it lives out its faith in its particular context.

31 Ibid., 120.
32 It is this ‘common sense’ approach to tradition that Steven Porter adopts when evaluating Wesley’s use of tradition, writing “This emphasis on tradition seems appropriate given the notion that the Holy Spirit has been involved in the illumination of the Word to human interpreters since apostolic days (1 Cor 2:12-16). Thus, we should be suspicious when after two thousand years of reflection on the biblical text we arrive at an interpretation of Scripture or a doctrinal formulation that is novel. Rather, we should expect to find our theological views reflected to a large extent in the orthodox stream of Christian thought, and we should be bothered and have good reason for departing when they are not,” Steven L. Porter, "Wesleyan Theological Methodology as a Theory of Integration.,” Journal of Psychology and Theology 32, no. 3 (2004): 196.
33 There is a strongly intuitive, non-precise aspect to Grenz’ proposal. Grenz would not necessarily view this as a criticism.
While the subjectivity inherent in the approach is clear, it is modified by Grenz’ refrain that theologizing is a communal activity with the theologian both a part of the faith community, and interacting with that community. Purely individual conclusions are unlikely to gain the approval of the community. In addition, using tradition as resource rather than source for theology also provides additional safeguards. Grenz and Franke give the example of the way in which “overly accommodationist approaches to the relationship between theology and culture have had devastating long-term consequences for the church,” citing the adoption of national and political ideologies at the expense of faithfulness to the gospel.34 Tradition as resource thus highlights the potential danger of uncritically adopting tradition as source.

In addition, because Grenz’ theological method requires a triad between scripture, tradition and culture, enthusiasm over an aspect of the church’s practice in the past does not disempower the critique of either scripture or contemporary culture of that or any other practice. To the contrary, having three conversation partners provides a more rigorous grid than the routine evangelical foundationalism inherent in a simplistic understanding of sola scriptura.35

Whether Grenz and Franke are able to avoid reverting to a form of foundationalism is debatable. While at times the image of interacting conversation partners looms large, at other times foundationalism seems alive and well. One wonders if they are trying to reassure different audiences. Thus for example, after lauding the helpfulness of classic theological formulations they write, “Despite their great stature, such resources do not take the place of canonical scripture as the community’s constitutive authority. Moreover, they must always be tested by the norm of canonical scripture.”36

The hierarchicalism inherent in such statements seems to undermine their agenda. Barnes is probably correct in her (approving) assessment that Grenz has not really abandoned foundationalism, but that he embraces an enriched foundationalism that allows for multidirectional reasoning and discussion.37

34 Grenz and Franke, Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context, 122.
35 One should note that a simplistic understanding is historically unwarranted. For example, in reviewing the Baptist “tradition” of antipathy to tradition, Steve Harmon notes “the disparity between the Baptist profession of Sola Scriptura and the reality of Baptist hermeneutical practice.” Steven R. Harmon, “The Authority of the Community (of All the Saints): Toward a Postmodern Baptist Hermeneutic of Tradition,“ Review and Expositor 100 (2003): 590.
36 Grenz and Franke, Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context, 124.
37 Elizabeth Barnes, “Jesus Christ: The Church’s One Foundation,” Perspectives in Religious Studies 25, no. 2 (1998): 179-180, 183. Barnes is herself arguing for a modified or “centered” foundationalism, with Christ as center, and the adequacy of truth claims being assessed against the criteria of coherence, correspondence and comprehensiveness.
Grenz and Franke conclude that the value of tradition is that it, "...provides a historically extended, socially embodied context in which to interpret, apply, and live out the communally formative narratives contained in the canonical texts."38 They follow through with the comment that, "...the tradition of the community provides a crucial and indispensable hermeneutical context and trajectory in the construction of faithfully Christian theology."39

Earlier Grenz and Franke had noted that the trajectory taken by tradition points to the eschatological future that the Spirit works to bring about. Tradition is thus not closed, but is constantly corrected in the light of the future the Spirit invites the church toward.40 Grenz’ eschatological realism thus comes through again. Tradition’s trajectory must be modified or redirected in the light of the future God has in store. While Grenz speaks of scripture, tradition and culture as the three sources for theology, in moving beyond foundationalism he also includes eschatological motifs as discussion partners in theological construction. Sources and motifs dynamically interact with each other whilst the theologian and community of faith are open to the Spirit’s guiding and leading.

The approach has risks. While Grenz appeals to a pneumatologically mediated appropriation of tradition it is hard to imagine this avoiding accusations of subjectivity and the domestication of supporting streams of tradition. The postmodern suspicion of utilizing tradition to foster support for one’s own position via appeals to continuity with the past, is relevant.41

The question that insists on being asked is how tradition can be viewed as a source for theology if it must be checked and evaluated against a more fundamental source (scripture). While few would dispute that historical debates and conclusions have helped to crystallize the

38 Grenz and Franke, Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context, 128.
39 Ibid., 129. This can be extended with Medley’s insight that while tradition provides a hermeneutical context, it is also unpacked in a hermeneutical context. He writes, "What is missing from an understanding of tradition as a ‘thing’ to be ‘handed down’ in a supposedly ‘uncorrupted’ form is recognition of the malleable, inculturated and lived character of tradition as communicative and identity-shaping. Traditions shape beliefs, attitudes and actions of those who participate in them. In turn, individuals and communities reshape traditions in the very process of reception, transmission and enactment." Mark Medley, "Catholics, Baptists, and the Normativity of Tradition: A Review Essay," Perspectives in Religious Studies 28, no. 2 (2001): 122.
40 Grenz and Franke, Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context, 126-127.
41 For example, Mirsolav Volf speaks of warning his students of the danger of domesticating tradition for their own ends, writing, "I am a guardian of the Christian tradition’s alterity, its otherness. I must teach students not to occlude its opacity, not to distort it by squeezing it into their own cognitive frameworks and by pressing it into their predetermined life projects, like some missing piece of a puzzle. The student must learn not to trivialize the wisdom of the tradition by taking from it only what they happen to need, recycling what they can use in a different form, and disregarding the rest." Mirsolav Volf, "Teachers, Crusts and Toppings," Christian Century 113, no. 5 (1996): 134.
church’s formulation of its faith, evangelicals classically give tradition an approving nod or an impatient dismissal on the basis of its perceived fidelity to scripture. The source is thus scripture, not tradition.

At this point it is salutary to reflect on Grenz’ reminder that the church precedes both scripture and tradition. The early church had already taken significant strides before the canon of scripture was agreed upon, and the role of the church in confirming the configuration of scripture was pivotal. Indeed, the Reformers felt free to challenge the agreed canon with the consequence that Protestant and Roman Catholic versions of the Bible are no longer identical. While it is tempting to insist that the faith is evaluated in the light of scripture, one cannot escape the role of the church in determining (and in the case of Protestantism, re-determining) what constitutes scripture. In this process of “traditioning” the church confirmed a canon of authorized texts. Seen in this light, traditioning is a source for theological construction, though one could argue that the formation of the canon was a unique event and is therefore an unsuitable example for the way in which tradition can serve as a source for theological construction.

In Grenz’ interactive model, the Spirit inspired community of faith determines which aspects of scripture and tradition are to be seen as of special importance for today. Having said this, it is clear that the source of authority is then neither tradition nor scripture, but the community of faith, as guided by the Spirit. Perhaps Grenz would be more consistent if he argued that the church is the source of theology. Alternately that the Spirit is the source of theology, as the Spirit guides the church.

The role of the Spirit is central to Grenz’ method. There are moments when he makes his position clear. For example in Beyond Foundationalism he writes,

The Protestant principle means the Bible is authoritative in that it is the vehicle through which the Spirit speaks. Taking the idea a step further, the authority of the Bible is in the end the authority of the Spirit whose instrumentality it is.43

Ultimate authority lies in the Spirit, whose voice can be discerned through scripture, tradition, culture, or any other source the Spirit chooses to use. The focus is thus on hearing what the Spirit is saying to the community of God, and while this most routinely happens through scripture or reflection on tradition or the contemporary context, in principle, the actual source

42 The Reformers rejected the inclusion of the Apocrypha.
43 Grenz and Franke, Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context, 65.
of theological authority is the voice of the Spirit.\textsuperscript{44} We should thus note the pneumatological orientation of Grenz’ theology.

While Grenz’ case for appropriating tradition as a conversation partner with scripture and culture is sensible and persuasive, he glosses over the problems inherent in the approach. To claim that the believing community will be guided by the Spirit to know which aspects of tradition to embrace flies in the face of the very history of the church that Grenz wishes to uphold. Even a cursory glance through church history establishes the wide range of conflicting answers that have been adopted by different segments of the faith community. Grenz is silent on how this impasse is to be overcome, other than to note the helpfulness of having modifying voices provided by a triologue rather than a monologue.

A key issue Grenz leaves unresolved is therefore what criteria can be seen as valid in testing the authoritative status of any particular theological tradition. At the very least, tradition needs to be an interactive player subject to other criteria. Acknowledging the input of both scripture and culture in reaching a decision is useful, but still leaves wide and vague parameters. Openness to pneumatological mediation may reflect a commitment to a pious and reverent approach to theology, but its hazy boundaries make it hard to either affirm or refute.

5.3 CULTURE AS THEOLOGY’S EMBEDDING CONTEXT

Mark Strom has suggested that “evangelicalism works largely by maintaining the myth that it is not a cultural, historical and social phenomenon: ‘We simply believe the truth.’”\textsuperscript{45} Though Strom is overstating his case, he is probably right in implying that evangelicals have not given sufficient attention to the role culture plays in theological construction. To Grenz’ suggestion that culture is a source for theology, evangelicals are likely to respond that while they agree that culture provides the location within which a particular theological system is developed, to suggest that culture is actually a source for theology goes beyond the mandate of any theology that wishes to identify itself as evangelical. Of Grenz’ three sources, culture is therefore the most provocative, and therefore potentially also the most creative.

Grenz is aware that his use of culture as a theological source and as theology’s embedding context, is controversial. In Beyond Foundationalism he writes,

\begin{itemize}
  \item\textsuperscript{44} A more cynical approach might suggest that the actual source of authority is therefore the believing community, and what they think they discern as being the voice of the Spirit.
  \item\textsuperscript{45} Mark Strom, Breaking the Silence: The Abusiveness of Evangelicalism (Sydney: Robert Menzies College, 1993), 5, 1:11.
\end{itemize}
Not all theologians, however, have agreed that culture has a role to play in theology. The rhetorical question 'What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem?' has been trumpeted since Tertullian's day by those who find no place for philosophy, and hence for culture, in theological construction.

Perhaps because of this, it is the source that Grenz is most ambiguous about. Because Grenz writes in a nuanced way, it is dangerous to assume that one can respond to his broad categories without carefully examining the meaning he attaches to them. At times he seems simply to be calling for a "culture-sensitive theology," a plea which is neither original nor divisive. At other times he views culture as a "re-source" for theology, which allows for a somewhat larger role, but remains an essentially uncontested insight. More often, however, the suggestion is that culture is one of three conversation partners sourcing theology. This latter stance has been the cause of debate amongst those who have responded to Grenz' work.

Brand is not encouraging in his summary of issues that result from using culture as a source for theology,

The difficulty, of course, is that culture is constantly shifting and is generally in rebellion against God. Finding those elements within any prevailing culture that might be deemed as authoritative is, therefore, an ambiguous task at best, a fruitless one more likely.

The idea of cultural relativism has important theological significance, especially as the implication is that something may be appropriate (morally acceptable) in one society but not another. In addition, the shift from thinking of culture as a static and given reality to a more dynamic understanding of its role, one in which people are active creators of their culture rather than mere recipients of it, also has theological ramifications, as does the growing awareness that cultures are made up of multiple (and often diverse) sub-cultures.

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46 Grenz and Franke, Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context, 131.
49 Brand, 296.
As Grenz and Franke unpack their understanding of culture in chapter 5 of *Beyond Foundationalism,* one could be excused for thinking one was reading an introduction to a sociology text rather than a theological treatise. Their familiarity with the social sciences is a strength of their writing. They summarize the pertinent points of their exploration,

> Our discussion of the contemporary conversation in cultural anthropology yields the conclusion that we inhabit socially constructed worlds to which our personal identities are inextricably bound. The construction of these worlds, as well as the formation of personal identity, is an ongoing, dynamic, and fluid process, in which the forming and reforming of shared cultural meanings play a crucial role.

The exploration of the theological significance of these insights then begins. The inevitable involvement of culture in theological construction is noted, “While the dangers involved in accommodating the faith to culture are real, the quest to construct a culture-free theology is misguided. We simply cannot escape from our particular context into some transcultural intellectual vantage point.” Grenz and Franke then go a little further suggesting that in addition to the impossibility of a culture-free theology, the concept is “theologically and biblically unwarranted” overlooking the incarnation as occurring at a specific time and within a particular culture.

While not unsympathetic to Tillich’s method of correlation, they ultimately reject it because it reflects a foundationalist assumption, “The correlating enterprise assumes some discoverable universal reality – some structure of human existence or some essential human characteristic – on which the theological enterprise can be constructed.”

Though it moves in an opposite direction to the foundationalist assumptions in correlation, they believe that contextualization as a model for the relationship between theology and culture is comparably flawed by its foundationalist underpinning,

> ...contextualizers are tempted to assume too readily a Christian universal, which in turn functions as the foundation for the construction of the theological superstructure, even though its architects articulate this

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50 It is interesting to read this chapter in parallel with Grenz’ article *Culture and Spirit: The Role of Cultural Context in Theological Reflection.* Large sections of the article appear to have been literally cut and pasted from the book chapter. While the book is co-authored, it confirms that it closely reflects Grenz’ views. Grenz, “Culture and Spirit: The Role of Cultural Context in Theological Reflection.”

51 Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context,* 147.

52 Ibid., 151.

53 Ibid.

54 A method in which one starts with existential questions, the theologian first serving as philosopher striving to understand the nature of human existence, and then as a second stage, drawing from the symbols of divine revelation to find answers to the implied questions. The theologian correlates existential questions with resources from the Christian message.

55 Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context,* 159.
superstructure in the language of the culture to which they are seeking to speak.\(^5^6\)

The foundationalist assumption in correlation is of a universal human reality, while that of contextualization is of a Christian universal. Grenz and Franke suggest that the way beyond the foundationalist impasse is to envision a model in which both gospel and culture dynamically interact with and inform each other, theology flowing from this interactive conversation. Their conclusion is important and contentious,

Unlike either correlation or contextualization, this model presupposes neither gospel nor culture as preexisting, given realities that subsequently enter into conversation. Rather, in the interactive process both gospel (that is, our understanding of the gospel) and culture (that is, our portrayal of the meaning structure, shared sense of personal identity, and socially constructed world in which we see ourselves living and ministering) are dynamic realities that inform and are informed by the conversation itself. Hence, we are advocating a specifically nonfoundationalist, interactionist theological method.\(^5^7\)

The denial that the gospel is a preexisting given reality, but rather one that is interactively constructed and reconstructed, is controversial amongst evangelicals. It seems to contradict Grenz' plea in his *A Primer on Postmodernism* for a refutation of the postmodern rejection of the metanarrative.\(^5^8\) If the gospel is interactively constructed and reconstructed, in what sense is it objectively true, and why should it not simply be classified as a local narrative, at best loosely related to the narratives of other Christian communities? Grenz would argue that it is simply "our understanding of the gospel" that is in a state of flux,\(^5^9\) but this still implies that there is not a solid core to the message of the gospel that is constant at all times and in all contexts.

Willsey's work on the difference between what he calls existential contextualization and dogmatic contextualization, is relevant to this discussion, and helps provide some of the nuance missing in Grenz' work. Willsey writes,

> In order to avoid confusion over terms, it should be noted that there are two types of contextualization in current usage. One is existential contextualization, generally associated with Liberation Theology. This approach, which must be rejected, places culture over the biblical text and finds new meanings in each cultural, social, or political context. The other, which may be called dogmatic contextualization, views the Bible as

\(^{56}\) Ibid., 158.
\(^{57}\) Ibid.
\(^{58}\) In it Grenz writes, "There is a single metanarrative encompassing all peoples and all times." Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 164.
\(^{59}\) Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context*, 158.
authoritative over culture and provides a valid method for expressing biblical truth unchanged in diverse cultural forms. In other words, the former alters the content of biblical teaching, the latter modifies the form in which the teaching is expressed.\(^{60}\)

Willsey’s distrust of any approach seen as altering the content of the biblical message is likely to be echoed by most evangelicals. Grenz and Franke’s denial of any preexisting given to the gospel is divisive and therefore it is important to examine the qualifications and limitations that Grenz and Franke place on their claim. The qualifications are significant and seem to backtrack to the foundationalism they seek to supersede. After making the commonplace observation that theology must hear, scrutinize and interact with the wider social context, they suggest that this interaction should be pneumatologically mediated. Lamenting that in the past Western theology focused on the church as the sole repository of truth and the only location for the operation of the Spirit, they assert a wider role for the Spirit in the understanding of the biblical authors’, writing,

> Because the life-giving Creator Spirit is present wherever life flourishes, the Spirit’s voice can conceivably resound through many media, including the media of human culture... Consequently we should listen intently for the voice of the Spirit, who is present in all life and therefore who ‘precedes’ us into the world...\(^{61}\)

While claiming to avoid the foundationalist trap, they seem to fall into it by then cautioning that the Spirit’s voice in culture should not be pitted against the Spirit’s voice in scripture,

> Even though we cannot hear the Spirit speaking through the text except by listening within a particular historical-cultural context, nevertheless hearing the Spirit in the text provides the only sure canon for hearing the Spirit in culture, because the Spirit’s speaking everywhere and anywhere is always in concert with this primary speaking through the text.\(^{62}\)

It is difficult to understand why Grenz and Franke believe that words like everywhere, anywhere and always can pass as anything but the language of foundationalism, in this case a foundationalism based on scripture as the non-negotiable, foundational norming norm.

Grenz makes a similar qualification in his article “What Does Hollywood have to do with Wheaton? The Place of (Pop) Culture in Theological Reflection.” After arguing that culture is


\(^{61}\) Grenz and Franke, Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context, 162.

\(^{62}\) Ibid., 163.
not simply the locus of our theological reflection, but that it also provides insight into the faith, he dismisses the concept that the church is the sole repository of all truth and contends that because God is always at work in the world, the Spirit is present everywhere and can speak through many media. He then cautions,

Wherever the Spirit speaks, he speaks only and always in accordance with, and never contrary to, Biblical truth. And in so far as culture is always a "mixed bag," in the end we can only discern the voice of the Spirit in culture as we are in tune with, and measure it by, the Spirit speaking through Scripture.63

Again we have to ask why Grenz feels that words like "only," "always," and "never contrary to," can pass as anything but the language of foundationalism. In addition, the question of why culture is then a source for theology, able to be listed as part of the interacting sourcing trio of scripture, tradition and culture, begs to be asked. The inescapable conclusion is that scripture is the senior partner, with the minor voices of tradition and culture being heeded only when they resonate with the definitive voice of scripture. If this is so, then tradition and culture can be seen as resources for theology, but fall short of being genuine sources. If this is a valid conclusion, Grenz' proposal fails to revision evangelical theology, but simply restates a core evangelical principle that scripture should be the norming norm in theology.64

This argument however smacks of an unreflected reductionism. Grenz' argument is that the Spirit and community mediated interaction between culture and scripture enriches the understanding of scripture and in the process of enriching, unearths aspects of biblical truth that would otherwise be overlooked. It also allows the theologian to speak to areas not directly addressed in scripture. The whole is therefore greater as a result of the interaction, and culture has thus genuinely sourced theological conclusions.65

64 Stephen Wellum's claim that "at the heart of evangelical theology is the attempt to be biblical" is one few evangelicals would challenge. Stephen J. Wellum, "Postconservatism, Biblical Authority, and Recent Proposals for Re-Doing Evangelical Theology: A Critical Analysis," in Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times, ed. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 161.
65 Grenz' comment that "our theological reflection can draw from the so-called 'secular' sciences, because ultimately no truth is in fact secular" and later that "theology seeks to show how the postulate of God illumines all human knowledge," is important. Instead of the common evangelical reactionary default drive to that which is new in society, this approach allows the embracing of that which is not directly addressed in scripture on the basis of the insights which arise from the interaction. Grenz, "What Does Hollywood Have to Do with Wheaton? The Place of (Pop) Culture in Theological Reflection," 310-311.
This should be contrasted with a more traditional evangelical approach, summarized by Wellum as being “that theology moves from the first-order language (Scripture alone) to second-order description (theological formulation).” However, Wellum goes on to challenge this summary, dismissing it as a caricature and arguing that evangelical theology has always affirmed a hermeneutical spiral in which,

we approach the text with assumptions and biases, but as we read and study the text, it, by the work of the Spirit, in relation to a believing community, is able to correct our readings. Thus, by hard work, listening to others (i.e., the role of tradition), prayer, and in obedience to God’s Word, we are able to understand Scripture more correctly and accurately.

The similarity of this to Grenz’ proposal is clear. Wellum suggests that the difference lies in Grenz (and Franke’s) reluctance to affirm scripture as first order language grounded in a “revelational foundation.” He believes that the reason for this is Grenz and Franke’s failure to distinguish between biblical foundationalism (which Wellum believes it crucial to uphold) and classical, Enlightenment foundationalism. The consequence is that,

it leads them to think differently about the theological task and to view theology along the lines of a coherentist, pragmatic, and nonrealist vision, instead of a more realist vision grounded in a first-order, true, and objective revelational foundation.

Wellum is however not acknowledging his own indebtedness to Enlightenment thinking, which sees his proposed method move in a statically linear manner, with the priority, order and weight of sources clearly articulated in advance. Grenz’ approach allows for a more genuine and dynamic interplay between culture and scripture.

In assigning culture a role as a source for theology Grenz sometimes speaks with an inconsistent voice. Earlier we noted that it is not always clear if he sees culture as primarily a source or a resource for theology. In addition, at times it is not clear if he is simply committed to the contextualization of theology, or if he genuinely sees culture as a source for theology. Even contextualization is not an entirely straightforward matter, as Grenz is committed to the eschatological realism of his theological mentor, Wolfhartd Pannenberg. To the extent that theology must be shaped by an eschatological orientation, the question is neither if it is counter cultural or culturally sensitive, but if it is validly oriented toward the telos of creation. Whilst it must be expressed in culturally sensitive terms (contextualized) the source is

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66 Wellum, 172.
67 Ibid., 173.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid., 174.
ultimately the eschatological vision rather than contemporary culture. This matter will again be discussed when we consider Grenz' use of eschatology as the orienting motif for theology in chapter 6, and in the constructive adaptation of Grenz' model in chapter 8.

5.4 SCRIPTURE, TRADITION AND CULTURE AS CONVERSATION PARTNERS FOR THE SPIRIT DIRECTED COMMUNITY

It could be argued that evaluating each of the sources of theology as a discrete entity misses the point of Grenz' enterprise and reflects the modernist perspective he is trying to transcend. The strength of the approach does not lie in the cumulative value of each of the component parts but in the interactive strength achieved as scripture, tradition and culture converse together in a seamless partnership. This discussion takes place under the direction and guidance of the Spirit and within the community of faith. It is because of the interplay of these multiple factors that Grenz is able to claim that his theological method moves beyond foundationalism.

The next chapter explores the three focal motifs Grenz suggests for theology, viz. Trinity, community and eschatology. Again, though each of these focal points will be individually explored, Grenz' model cannot be understood as being composed of unrelated but cumulative components. Grenz' theology should be seen as being sourced from scripture, tradition and culture, the results being structured against a trinitarian grid, integrated via the motif of community and oriented eschatologically. The theological mosaic thus woven is synergistic and cannot be neatly categorized into tidy source boxes. It is the strength of this methodological web that must finally be evaluated. Though at this stage our approach is to evaluate the effectiveness of Grenz' understanding of and use of each of the sources and motifs of his theology, and that through the grid of understandings acceptable to evangelicals, the more important analysis is of the overall impact of his theology, which ultimately must be evaluated holistically.

5.5 FOUR EVALUATIVE QUESTIONS

Chapter 1.4 of this thesis suggests that the proposition “that Stanley Grenz’ theological method effectively revisions evangelical theology” be tested against four evaluative questions:

1) Does Grenz’ method make an original contribution to evangelical theological construction?

2) Is Grenz’ theological method coherent and credible?
Before embarking on this exercise, it is as well to remind ourselves that it is against the backdrop of evangelicalism that we make the evaluation. Chapter 2 of this thesis has explored the relevance of the tensions within this movement for the proposition being investigated. In his discussion on evangelicalism, Richard Mouw pinpoints three specific weaknesses of evangelicalism as being its anti-intellectualism, otherworldliness and its separatist spirit. Immediately apparent in evaluating Grenz’ work is a different ethos. Intuitively it has a different feel to what has come to be expected from evangelicalism. We now critique this part of Grenz’ model more systematically.

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

The initial response to the suggestion that tradition and culture be utilized as sources for theology is to conclude that Grenz’ model makes a novel and original contribution. However, closer examination of the qualifications Grenz makes regarding the way in which tradition and culture can be used, leads me to the conclusion that Grenz’ model is less original than initially appears to be the case.

In 5.5.2 below I argue that in adopting tradition and culture as sources for theology Grenz gives the impression that he assigns them a greater role in theological construction than he actually does. If they were genuinely sources in the sense that they could introduce new material from which theological construction could result, then Grenz’ contribution would be original for evangelical theology. While it is more accurate to suggest that evangelical theologians embrace a model of *suprema scriptura* rather than a naïve *sola scriptura*, they are unlikely to sanction additional sources for theological construction. Most would however acknowledge that biblical authority always exists and functions in relationship with other forms of authority (such as tradition and culture). These *inform* (rather than serve as a source for) the community’s interpretation and practice of the biblical story. This is the way that both tradition and culture operate in Grenz’ theological construction. Thus while the initial

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70 Richard J. Mouw, *The Smell of Sawdust: What Evangelicals Can Learn from Their Fundamentalist Heritage* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 24. In fairness to evangelicalism, it could be argued that this was more characteristic of its fundamentalist stage, and that the new evangelicalism of the Carl Henry era and beyond has moved a long way from these caricatures. Certainly this is Grenz’ reading of the movement. See e.g. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era*, 85-116.
response is to conclude that in proposing tradition and culture as sources for theology Grenz has made an original contribution to evangelical theology, when the role assigned to these sources is examined, the overall model is not radically different from other proposals.71

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

Grenz’ claim is that his theological method moves evangelicalism beyond foundationalism. It is not immediately self-evident that he has succeeded. While the trio of sources he suggests for theology broaden the foundational base from scripture to scripture, tradition and culture, it leaves the impression that instead of a single foundation Grenz has proposed a triangular variation on the same theme. If moving beyond foundationalism, why limit the sources to three? Grenz was well aware that he could have selected as his sources the “Wesleyan Quadrilateral” of scripture, tradition, reason and experience. Why exclude reason and experience if opting for a postfoundational method?72 If the image is to shift from foundations to conversation partners or to a web of coherence, it should be possible to have an open-ended number of possible conversation partners. Other potential conversations could be with other religions, disadvantaged minorities, philosophy and more. While it is true that Grenz could argue that these voices are caught up in the voice of culture, this is not clear from his writing. In my constructive proposal for a modified version of Grenz’ method in chapter 8, I will elaborate on this theme and argue that a greater open-endedness in this regard, whilst not necessarily winning the trust of the evangelical community, would more genuinely birth an authentically revisioned evangelical theology.

In moving from a single source for theological construction to a trio of sources, a fundamental methodological problem appears. Grenz uses the image of the three sources acting as conversation partners, but how does one decide if a conversation partner is speaking too loudly or stridently? Put differently, if we say tradition is a source for theological construction, we must ask “which tradition?” Some theologians have been willing to make their commitments in this regard clear. Thomas Oden, whose name is closely linked to the effort to reaffirm the value of ancient Christian tradition for the renewal of postmodern


72 Grenz in part answers this question. Justifying his rejection of using experience, he cites Tillich’s insight that experience, rather than being a source for theology, is the medium through which theology’s sources are received. Grenz, Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century, 91. Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 42.
Christianity, has proposed that theology draw from a pyramid of sources, with scripture occupying the wide base of the pyramid, and modern theologians the narrow apex.\(^1\) After scripture comes the patristic interpreters of scripture, followed by medieval theologians, followed by the reformers. Modern sources are given less prominence because, as recent participants in the historical conversation, they have had little time to influence the overall consensus. To the question, “which tradition should have the dominant voice?” Oden answers that the ancient sources should be given greater weight than recent ones.

While Oden’s model does not need to be embraced,\(^4\) he has alerted us to the need for criteria to discern the appropriate “volume” of each conversation partner. Grenz has made no commitments in this regard, but seems to believe that the natural back and forth of the conversation will help set an appropriate volume for each conversation partner. By insisting that scripture remains the norming norm, the implication is that scripture has sufficient prominence to mute other sources if they are moving in a direction contrary to scripture. If this is the case, then Grenz is not methodologically transparent in his proposal that there are three conversation partners. A more nuanced approach would acknowledge that while three sources are conversing, they have significantly different amounts of influence.

It is Grenz’ use of the term “source” that is problematic. Claiming that theological construction flows from three sources implies that any of the sources can add to or direct the path taken by the theology constructed. However a careful reading of Grenz reveals that while he treats scripture as a genuine source for theology, both tradition and culture serve more as what Maquarrie has described as “formative factors” in theological construction.\(^5\) By opting to use the term “source” Grenz has claimed more for tradition and culture than he is willing to actually give.\(^6\) Those who have reacted against Grenz have usually accepted Grenz’ use of the term “source” at face value, without observing the significant limitations he places upon

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\(^4\) While accepting the usefulness of seeking areas of consensus in the church’s tradition, Harmon points out how fruitful times of dissent have been. Harmon, "The Authority of the Community (of All the Saints): Toward a Postmodern Baptist Hermeneutic of Tradition," 611-612.

\(^5\) Maquarrie prefers to speak of formative factors as this clarifies that each factor is not on the same level or of the same importance. While acknowledging many formative factors, he discusses six, experience, revelation, scripture, tradition, culture and reason. John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, Revised ed. (London: SCM, 1977), 4-18.

\(^6\) For example, Grenz very modestly suggests that “the tradition of the Christian church serves as a source or a resource for theology, not as a final arbiter of theological issues or concerns but a hermeneutical context or trajectory for the Christian theological enterprise.” Even when speaking of the ecumenical consensus represented by statements such as the Apostles and Nicene Creeds Grenz cautions, “Despite their great stature, such resources do not take the place of canonical scripture as the community’s constitutive authority. Moreover, they must always and continually be tested by the norm of canonical scripture.” The limitations that Grenz places on both tradition and culture in theological construction will become clearer as we explore the application of Grenz’ method in chapter 7. Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context*, 120 & 124.
both tradition and culture in theological construction. The criticism is therefore often unfounded, but flows from Grenz’ misleading terminology.

If it is valid to assert that in Grenz’ method scripture serves as source for theology and tradition and culture as formative factors, the question arises whether Grenz’ method represents a genuinely postfoundationalist contribution to theological construction, or if it is better described as a model utilizing a “chastened” foundationalism. In Grenz’ work, ultimately scripture is the source for theological construction, but other factors are encouraged to actively participate in and enrich the construction process. The introduction of additional voices ensures that Grenz has moved beyond a crass foundationalism, but I am not convinced that it represents more than a chastened foundationalism.

A further issue arises when we question the appropriateness of Grenz’ model for a postmodern context. Paradoxically, the very tidiness of his system works against him. Peter Leithart articulates the concern when he asks of Grenz, “Can one reject foundationalism, and continue to pursue method, even if we label the method ‘postmodern’?” The concern is simple. Method has been closely aligned with foundationalism and is an integral part of the enlightenment project Grenz wishes to move evangelical theology beyond. Via tight methodological rules one was able to move from the foundational assumption (traditionally for evangelicals, an inerrant Bible) to both the ground floors and upper stories of the edifice (for evangelicals, the propositions that could be formulated from the inerrant text of scripture, and the implications that then flowed from these propositions). The more tightly the method is constructed, the more limited the range of possible outcomes. While Grenz undoubtedly broadens the foundation through which theological reflection is undertaken, the a priori decision as to what constitutes valid sources and appropriate motifs significantly limits the range of possible conclusions. Though arguing for a method involving the communal discernment of scripture through the Spirit’s enabling and in interaction with the voices of tradition and culture, the very edifice constructed runs the risk of domesticating the Spirit to the set method.

Perhaps this is overstating the problem. The issue is not method per se (and even the absence of a clear method would be a decision in method), but the tightness with which it is constructed. For a method to move beyond foundationalism requires some openness. We are back to the critique that it is hard to justify a method as being “beyond foundationalism” if the list of possible sources is curtailed in advance. To this we could counter that it is because

78 Explored in chapter 6.
Grenz moves beyond a source (singular) to sources in dynamic interaction, that the approach can justifiably be classified as beyond foundationalism. I therefore revert to my earlier conclusion that this represents a “chastened” foundationalism.

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

The question of whether Grenz’ use of tradition and culture in theological construction is both sufficiently continuous and discontinuous with the movement’s traditional understanding, should now be considered. If it is not sufficiently continuous, it is reasonable to suggest that it no longer represents evangelical theology and therefore cannot be viewed as a revisioning of the movement. If not sufficiently discontinuous, the question as to why this should be classified as a genuine revisioning must be asked.

Grenz’ trio of sources overlap with those in several other models. For example, the choice of both scripture and tradition, usually supplemented by reason, was common in Wesley’s day. To transform this trio into his quadrilateral, Wesley added experience. We have earlier noted Grenz’ reasons for adopting culture rather than reason and experience. Before concluding that this marks his sources as distinctly different from Wesley’s, the emphasis on pneumatology in both Grenz and Wesley should be highlighted. Grenz argues that the Spirit needs to illuminate scripture, tradition and culture if they are to be appropriated in theological construction. He is close to Wesley at this point. Bevins has demonstrated the key role Wesley assigned to the Spirit in his method, and argues that for Wesley the building blocks of theological construction were not scripture, tradition, reason and experience alone, but that it was scripture and Spirit, tradition and Spirit, reason and Spirit and experience and Spirit. Bevins concludes, “Wesley becomes a good dialogue partner for embarking on a pilgrimage in theological method because he was not afraid to look to the Holy Spirit and the larger Christian family for help along the journey.”

Thus if we use the Wesleyan Quadrilateral as an example of evangelical method, it seems reasonable to conclude that Grenz’ model displays significant continuity with it, while also

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80 Though Wesley himself never spoke of the Wesleyan quadrilateral as such, it is a fair description of the method he employed.
81 He agrees with Tillich that experience is the medium through which theology’s sources are received, while reason is culture specific. Grenz, Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century, 91.
82 Bevins: 110.
adding some different perspectives. There is therefore both continuity and discontinuity. However, unlike Grenz, Wesley was unambiguous that the scriptures come first, while tradition, reason and experience help in the valid interpretation of scripture. As Bevins writes,

There is a dynamic interplay in which tradition, reason, and experience work to shine light on Scripture. They have a unique reciprocal interrelationship with one another, while Scripture remains pre-eminent. Although never a substitute for Scripture; tradition, reason, and experience are complementary to its interpretation.\(^{83}\)

Grenz’ desire to embrace a postfoundationalist method makes him reluctant to make as clear an affirmation of the ultimately decisive role played by scripture, and this has been a cause of unease amongst some of the critics of his work whom we have examined. However, when Grenz’ work is carefully examined it is clear that, like Wesley, he assigns the decisive role to scripture in theological construction. Discontinuity with traditional evangelical approaches is therefore of minor rather than dramatic proportions.

Grenz’ appropriation of culture as a source (or more strictly, a resource) for theological construction is fairly novel in an evangelical context, even though the voice he allows culture is subdued. Because of the eschatological orientation of Grenz’ model, the voice of culture is heeded only when it is consistent with the telos of human existence.

Overall we can conclude that Grenz’ model is both sufficiently continuous and discontinuous for us to affirm that he has made a modest contribution towards the revisioning of evangelical theology.

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

The fourth question asks if Grenz’ use of tradition and culture in theological construction is likely to be effective in revisioning evangelical theology. One of the key indicators of effectiveness is the likelihood of Grenz’ views being embraced by the community whose theology he attempts to revision.

At a popular level, the suggestion that there are authoritative sources for theological construction other than scripture itself is likely to have little appeal. Harmon notes, “Explicit Baptist recognition of sources of theological authority in addition to Scripture thus far exists

\[^{83}\text{Ibid.: 103.}\]
almost exclusively in the context of academic theological discourse; extrabiblical sources of authority have yet to be referenced by Baptist confessions of faith in North America.\textsuperscript{84} Though he is speaking of the Baptist context, Harmon's comments can be generalized to the evangelical community. This raises a dilemma for Grenz' theological project. While it is inevitable that his theological method will primarily be of interest to theologians, Grenz' goal is to revision evangelical theology in such a way that it is "theology for the community of God." His intent is not elitist. Consideration therefore needs to be given to the practicality of moving Grenz' project beyond the academy and into the life of the church.

Some of the negative reaction to Grenz' proposal has resulted because he describes tradition and culture as sources for theology. In practice, he utilizes them as resources. If Grenz were to say that scripture is the primary source to be used in theological construction, and that tradition and culture are helpful resources whose voices should be heeded in the conversation surrounding theological construction, it is likely that evangelicals would embrace his model. This model represents a form of chastened foundationalism, which is what Grenz ultimately seems to be proposing.

\textbf{5.6 CONCLUSION}

This chapter has explored Grenz' proposal to adopt tradition and culture as sources for theological construction. In summary form, the response to the four evaluative questions as applied to Grenz' proposals regarding tradition and culture are:

1) Does Grenz' use of tradition and culture make an original contribution to evangelical theological construction? \textit{A minor contribution. While initially Grenz' model seems radical, when the qualifications he attaches to the use of tradition and culture are factored in, the model is less original.}

2) Does Grenz' use of tradition and culture as theological sources reflect a theological method that is coherent and credible? \textit{Yes, provided one accepts that Grenz' model represents a chastened foundationalism rather than a postfoundational method.}

3) Does Grenz' use of tradition and culture as sources in theological construction contribute to the revisioning of evangelical theology? \textit{Yes, a modest contribution.}

4) Is Grenz' use of tradition and culture in theological construction effective in revisioning evangelical theology? \textit{Almost. If he were to redesignate tradition and culture as resources or formative factors for theological construction, it is likely that the answer could be affirmative.}

\textsuperscript{84} Harmon, "Baptist Understandings of Theological Authority: A North American Perspective," 59.
These conclusions are used to draw up the table of findings in chapter 8.1.

The remaining significant component in Grenz’ model is his proposal that the Trinity, community and eschatology serve as theology’s focal motifs. This is the topic of our next chapter.
CHAPTER SIX

AN EXPLORATION AND EVALUATION OF GRENZ' CHOICE AND USE OF FOCAL MOTIFS IN THEOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Grenz and Franke suggest that in addition to utilizing scripture, tradition and culture as sources for theology, a theology suited to the postmodern situation will utilize three focal motifs, namely the Trinity as a structural motif, community as an integrative motif and eschatology as an orienting motif. They reason that while the use of scripture, tradition and culture provides a rounded trio of conversation partners for creative theological construction, these need to be supplemented by the focal motifs of Trinity, community and eschatology to ensure that the theology constructed is not so specific to the context in which it arises that its continuity with Christian theology becomes suspect. Placing contemporary theological construction in eschatological perspective, and in this way working backwards from the ultimate telos of human existence, helps to address the concerns of the present without being held hostage to them. It ensures that theology retains a prophetically anticipatory character. As Franke writes, “Hence, theology speaks about the actual, future world for the sake of the mission of the church in the present, anticipatory era.”

There is a natural relationship between the three focal motifs chosen. Onishi pithily summarizes it writing,

Taking our cue from Grenz, we will begin with the assumption that community is the telos of existence; insofar as communion is the eternal being of the triune God and that state of being for which we were given life as part of creation.

Alternatively expressed, if the eschaton will see the creation of a community that reflects and interacts with the communion experienced by the triune God, focusing theological construction around Trinity, community and eschatology provides a seamless trio of motifs. There are no obviously discordant notes or sharp edges in this approach. The interrelatedness of the motifs is consistent with the nonfoundationalist approach Grenz wishes to adopt, and

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furthers the journey away from a building with a sure but single foundation to a web of interrelated and interdependent beliefs.

In this chapter we explore Grenz' use of these motifs, primarily in *Beyond Foundationalism* but also in his other works, and evaluate if his understanding and use of these motifs helps to support our thesis proposition “that Stanley Grenz' theological method effectively revisions evangelical theology.”

We begin by systematically examining his understanding of each of the motifs and the response that this understanding has elicited. The chapter then draws these threads together and poses the four evaluative questions outlined in chapter 1.4 to see if Grenz' use of these three focal motifs lends support to the thesis proposition.

6.2 THE TRINITY AS THEOLOGY’S STRUCTURING MOTIF

The Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed, both of which serve as ancient and ecumenical symbols of the church, are structured around and divided into articles that correspond to the three persons of the Trinity. The first focuses on God the Father and creation, the second on the Son and reconciliation and the third on the Spirit and salvation as well as consummation. Franke has noted that “For much of the history of the church this creedal pattern gave rise to a trinitarian structure in the construction and exposition of theology.” When Grenz and Franke argue that the Trinity should serve as the structuring motif for theology, they are therefore able to claim solid historical precedents for the practice.

While in *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* Grenz argues for the use of scripture, tradition and culture as sources for theology and for seeing community as the integrating motif for theology, both his use of the Trinity and eschatology as motifs is less fully developed. He

4 Franke: 21.
5 Which is consistent with their insistence that theological construction be sourced by (in addition to scripture and culture) the tradition of the church.
7 Ibid., 137-162.
8 Though as early as 1985 he argued for the importance of a theology for the future being linked to the future, and wrote: “Futurist theology calls the people of the world to turn from the past and its sin to the future. It brings a vision of a coming glorious kingdom, which vision ought to shape the present.” Stanley J. Grenz, “A Theology for the Future,” *American Baptist Quarterly* 4, no. 3 (1985): 266. In addition, while the stress in the earlier stages is on the motif of community, Grenz often portrays this community as the eschatological community, e.g. “We live with the assured confidence concerning the outcome of history and our participation in the eternal community of God.” Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 850.
loosely utilizes a trinitarian framework to structure his major systematic theology work, *Theology for the Community of God*, but it is not as rigorously implemented as his later work would suggest is appropriate. 9 While the integrative theme of community was present from an early stage in Grenz’ writing, 10 the possibilities of trinitarian theology for theological construction gain in emphasis in his later work.

In some ways this slight treatment of the Trinity in his earlier theological construction is surprising, as Grenz credits his doctoral mentor, Pannenberg, with the honour of showing him how the triunity of God should inform all areas of theology. 11 However, while in *Theology for the Community of God* Grenz asserts the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity, 12 in practice the implications he spells out from the doctrine are largely linked to his understanding of the connection between the Trinity and community. Thus he writes,  

Insofar as God is the ultimate model and standard for humankind, the essential nature of God forms the paradigm for the life of the Christian and of the Christian community (Matt 10:39). At the heart of the Christian understanding of God is the declaration that God is triune – Father, Son, and Spirit. This means that in his eternal essence the one God is a social reality, the social Trinity. Because God is the social Trinity, a plurality in unity, the ideal for humankind does not focus on solitary persons, but on persons-in-community. God intends that we reflect his nature in our lives. This is only possible, however, as we move out of our isolation and into relationship with others. The ethical life, therefore, is the life-in relationship, or the life-in community. 13

At this stage he does not develop this idea much further. Not that this should necessarily be seen as a weakness. Grenz himself affirms the importance of the evolution of theological thought and method, and suggests that theologians should consistently be going back to the drawing board. 14

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9 His rationale is limited to less than a page. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 31.
10 It became a major theme after his 1992 inaugural address as the Pioneer McDonald Professor of Baptist Heritage, Theology and Ethics at Carey Theological College, the text of which can be found in Stanley J. Grenz, "The Community of God: A Vision of the Church in the Postmodern Age," *Crux* 28, no. 2 (1992).
11 See his discussion of this in Stanley J. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), ix-x.
12 For example he writes, “The doctrine of the Trinity forms the heart of the Christian conception of God. Rather than being of secondary importance, this doctrine is central to our faith. The implications of this conception are immense.” Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 99.
13 Ibid., 98.
14 “Rather than a situation to be bemoaned, the never-ending character of theology that drives its practitioners back to the drawing board is actually a great strength of the discipline.” Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology*, 223.
Grenz’ increasing use of a trinitarian motif for his theological structuring takes place against a resurgence of interest in the doctrine of the Trinity. Grenz has documented this renaissance in *Rediscovering the Triune God.*[^15] He is grateful for the renewal of trinitarian theology that largely commenced in the twentieth century and was given significant impetus by Karl Barth’s reassertion of the centrality of the doctrine of the Trinity for the theological task in his *Church Dogmatics.*[^16] While the doctrine has been prominent for much of church history, it was not a key issue in the Reformation. The Reformers acknowledged the doctrine but did little further reflection upon it, largely because their primary concern in this regard was not God in himself (*in se*) but God as he is for us (*pro nobis*). Their focus was thus on the authority of scripture, the nature of individual salvation, and the nature of Christian community. The Age of Reason saw the doctrine challenged as a superstitious relic from the past. While Hegel’s work in the nineteenth century saw a foundation laid for the resurgence of interest in the Trinity, it was not until Barth’s work that the doctrine regained its prominent position in theological construction.[^17]

Grenz believes that the renewal of interest in the doctrine of the Trinity will have significant practical outcomes for the church. In an article written in honour of Clark Pinnock, Grenz explores the relationship between a well developed understanding of the Trinity and the worship life of the church,

> The recent renaissance of theological interest in the doctrine of the Trinity not only *can* but also *must* provide a needed resource for the renewal of contemporary church practice in general and for renewal in the worshiping life of the people of God in particular.[^18]

Grenz goes on to expand on the concept of *theosis,*[^19] noting the trinitarian dynamic inherent in participating in the divine life. Salvation is our participation in the divine life as a result of our being ‘in Christ’ by the Spirit. This in turn is the basis of our being part of the church. In its life as a worshipping community, the church anticipates its final *telos* of eschatological consummation when our *theosis* is fully actualized.[^20]

[^15]: Ibid.


[^17]: See Grenz and Franke’s summary of this era in Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context,* 183-186. For a more extended discussion, see Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology.*


[^19]: Participation in the divine life or deification.

Another example of Grenz' practical application of his understanding of the Trinity is the way in which he uses it to justify an egalitarian as opposed to a complementarian view of gender relationships. 21 The concept of the *perichoresis* of the three trinitarian persons leads naturally to a doctrine of God that stresses mutuality rather than lordship. While, for example, Schemm criticises Grenz for rejecting an asymmetrical model of subordination in the Trinity to justify his egalitarian stance, it does serve as another example of the practical use Grenz makes of the doctrine of the Trinity. 22 Grenz in turn, is clear that his stance is both theologically and ethically justified. He cites Moltmann approvingly,

Convinced that societies reflect their fundamental theological outlook, their basic understanding of God or the gods, in the way they organize themselves, Moltmann views the doctrine of the Trinity as a “critical principle” for theology in its mission of transforming the world. For this reason, he calls Christian cultures to rediscover the biblical concept of God’s trinity as the community and fellowship among three equal persons, rather than the monarchy of one person over the others and the world. 23

Grenz believes that Moltmann’s view is a rediscovery of the biblical concept of God’s trinity, highlighting Grenz’ bias to giving scripture the priority as the leading theological conversation partner. 24 This excerpt from Grenz' *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* is one of several in this work where Grenz interacts creatively with the insights of trinitarian theology to develop his anthropology. 25 Again, the doctrine of the Trinity has a practical corollary.

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22 He is referring to Grenz’ rejection of the concept of the one way subordination of the Son to the Father. Peter R. Schemm Jr., “North American Evangelical Feminism and the Triune God: A Denial of Trinitarian Relational Order in the Works of Selected Theologians and an Alternative Proposal” (PhD, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2001), 118-120. Though Schemm’s views do find support amongst some evangelicals, they should not be seen as representative. For a brief but helpful survey of the debate see Kevin Giles, *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2002), 106-117.


24 Grenz is however aware that Moltmann’s social trinitarianism borders on tritheism. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology*, 85.

25 Grenz believes that this is totally appropriate. He writes, “the specifically theological context in which theological anthropology must be developed is that of the confession of the triune God. Hence,
In *Beyond Foundationalism* Grenz and Franke spell out the rationale for using the Trinity as the structuring motif in their theology. They succinctly summarize their position,

Because Christian theology is committed to finding its basis in the being and actions of the God of the Bible, it should be ordered and structured in such a way as to reflect the primacy of the fundamental Christian confession about the nature of this God. Because the structuring motif of the Christian confession is trinitarian, a truly Christian theology is likewise necessarily trinitarian.26

It is not an argument that they engage in naively. They immediately follow this claim with an acknowledgment that they are “conscious of the continuing scepticism regarding the doctrine of the Trinity.”27 John Stackhouse, a colleague of Grenz at Regent College, approvingly summarises much of the criticism when he cautions against being too speculative as to the implications of the Trinity. He warns,

Of course evangelicals should be trinitarian (for we have no evidence that God is more than a trinity and lots of evidence that he is), and of course we should plum what depths we can of God’s revelation of himself as triune in order to know and enjoy and serve him best. My concern here is simply to emphasize that we evangelicals ought to maintain our Christological approach and Christological emphasis in all doctrine, including the doctrine of God. This tradition will keep us from presuming to know more about, and emphasizing more than we should about, the Holy Spirit, or God the Father, or the Triune God in Godself. God the Holy Spirit points us to Christ, and Christ is the one who shows us God the Father.28

While aware of the concerns of those who advocate a Christological approach, Grenz considers it to be restricting. In his critique of the Stone-Campbell movement Grenz cautions,

A trinitarian impulse is evident in the very ecclesiological images found in Scripture... limiting the discussion to these christological images risks losing sight of the wealth of the biblical metaphors that connect the church to the other trinitarian persons, as well as overlooking the connection between the church and its Old Testament foundation.29

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27 Ibid.
Grenz' conviction of the fruitfulness of a trinitarian approach in theological construction finds support in the broader theological community. Schwöbel maintains "it is difficult to point to any one area of theological reflection that is not potentially affected by being viewed from a trinitarian perspective." Trinitarian structuring therefore seems a sensible part of an attempt to construct a revisioned evangelical theology.

In outline, the trinitarian structuring that Grenz and Franke envisage has the following key features.

First they assert their conviction that, "The doctrine of the Trinity is not the product of philosophically speculative theology gone awry but the outworking of communal Christian reflection on the concrete narratives of scripture which call for coherent explanation." In other words, they believe that the doctrine is biblically grounded, a conclusion reached by the community of faith through their reflection on the biblical narrative, and thereby meeting Grenz' first requirement for theological construction.

Second they believe that "apart from a hiatus generated by the Enlightenment," the doctrine of the Trinity has informed and shaped theological conversation throughout the church's history. In terms of Grenz' second source for theology (tradition), its significance has been affirmed for most of the church's history. Indeed, as Grenz and Franke write,

...because the Christian community has, in a fundamental way, been committed to finding its basis in the being and action of the triune God, truly Christian theological reflection must continue in this tradition if it is to make any claim of continuity with the past. Faithful Christian theology should thus be ordered and structured in such a way as to reflect the primacy of this fundamental Christian confession.

The third point is predictable but reflects consistency in their work. "A trinitarian theology reflects the understanding of theology that arises from the contemporary understanding of the nature of theology itself." The current cultural practice of the Christian community is to regard the Trinity as the central symbol of the Christian community and as such the cultural context requires that the Trinity be viewed as a key component in any theological model.

31 Grenz and Franke, Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context, 177.
32 Ibid., 186.
33 Ibid., 187.
34 Ibid.
In short, scripture, tradition and contemporary culture, theology’s three key conversation partners in Grenz’ model, all point to the Trinity as a central motif for theological construction.

A fourth point made is that in trinitarian theology the three key aspects, theology (proper), Christology and Pneumatology are interrelated. While a self-evident insight for a trinitarian approach, it is a key concept.

A fifth concern of Grenz and Franke is to utilize the trinitarian understanding of God to inform the anthropological quest. In other words, what insight does the triune nature of God give to answering the question of what it means to be human, and more specifically, *imago Dei*? The trend has been to extrapolate from the relationality of God affirmed by the Trinity to the relationality of humanity. If the ontological focus shifts from the divine substance of God to God as divine persons in relationship, with the persons constituted by their relationship to one another, then the key category of God’s being can be viewed as relationality. Grenz and Franke go on, “Throughout all eternity the divine life of the triune God is aptly characterized by the word love, which, when viewed in the light of relationality, signifies the reciprocal self-dedication of the trinitarian members to one another.” Love requires both subject and object and the statement “God is love” refers primarily to the eternal, relational, intratrinitarian fellowship among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who together are the one God.

The relationality of God implicitly challenges the radical individualism championed since the Enlightenment. The autonomous, individual self, championed in modernity, has subsequently been rejected by postmodern thinkers who affirm that the “self is in some sense constituted by social relationships.” These relationships fluctuate, leading to a sense of impermanence, even chaos. Grenz and Franke see the possibility of fruitful engagement with the postmodern context by linking the concept of the triune, relational God with the *imago Dei*. The postmodern insight that the self is a social reality gains focus when linked to the theological insight that because God is relational, the *imago Dei* is only fully present in community. As Grenz and Franke write,

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35 Ibid., 192.
36 As Beyond Foundationalism is the clearest explication of Grenz’ theological method, at this point I am summarizing the main points he and Franke make in this work. However Grenz addresses the issues raised by this particular topic at considerably greater length in Grenz, The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei.
37 Grenz and Franke, Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context, 195.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid., 197.
The creation of humankind in the divine image, therefore, can mean nothing less than that humans express the relational dynamic of the God whose representation we are called to be. Consequently, each human is related to the image of God ultimately only within the context of life in relationship. Only in community can we truly show what God is like, for God is the community of love, the eternal relational dynamic enjoyed by the three persons of the Trinity. They then conclude their exploration of the Trinity as theology’s structuring motif by emphasising that in addition to a trinitarian theology fully informing any discussion of the theological foci of theology (proper), Christology and pneumatology, the structuring principle of God as triune and therefore relational “leads to a truly relational anthropology, a fully theological ecclesiology, and a completely trinitarian eschatology...” They also argue that it points to the “primacy of community in the construction of Christian theology.”

Grenz’ attempt to utilize a trinitarian structure in his theological construction is one of the less controversial aspects of his project of revisioning evangelical theology. His thinking has been shaped by Barth’s appropriation of the Trinity in his work. By following Barth, Grenz attempts to avoid the potential criticism that his trinitarian focus is at the expense of a Christological centre.

In an article published shortly before his death, Grenz explores the topic of Jesus as the *imago Dei*. He laments that evangelicals have rarely developed the New Testament concept of Jesus as the *imago Dei*. While they have explored what it means that people are made in God’s image, they have rarely given more than cursory attention to the implications that flow from viewing Christ as the image of God – as expounded particularly in 2 Corinthians 4:4 and Colossians 1:15. Grenz argues that failing to link the *imago Dei* to Christology leads to a linear theological sequence of *imago Dei* tarnished by the fall. The focus then becomes soteriological. Put slightly differently, theological *loci* move sequentially from theology (proper) to anthropology to Christology to pneumatology to ecclesiology and then to eschatology. Grenz comments that “This tried, tested, and true approach likewise generally assumes that the findings in any given *locus* constitute the basis for the discussion in

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40 Ibid., 201.
41 Ibid., 202.
42 Ibid.
44 After criticising both Erickson and Grudem for the scant attention they pay to this in their systematic theologies, Grenz acknowledges that he made the same error in his own systematic theology text, *Theology for the Community of God*. Ibid.: 624-625.
subsequent loci."45 There are numerous dangers in this approach, but Grenz expresses particular concern that,

Christ’s connection to the wider creation story is mediated through the story of the fall of humankind rather than arising directly out of Jesus’ vocation in the divine program. The result is an anthropocentric, rather than a theocentric, doctrine of creation. Creation becomes the background or stage for the drama of the fall and subsequent restoration of humankind, rather than an area in which Christ is Lord and as Lord completes the human vocation to be the *imago Dei*.46

In *Beyond Foundationalism* Grenz and Franke note that “for Barth it is the Christocentric focus of the biblical witness that necessitates a trinitarian revelational theology.”47 They go on to write, “the Christian understanding of God begins with the Son through whom God is revealed as Father, and it is through the revelation of the Son that God is known as the triune one.”48 They conclude, “As a consequence of this Barthian insight, a truly trinitarian theology is one that is structured around the self-disclosure of the triune God as centered in Christ and given through Scripture to the believing community.”49 Extending this, they argue that in a truly trinitarian theology “all of the theological loci are informed by and, in turn, inform the explication of the Trinity.”50

Put differently, Grenz is not willing to sacrifice a Christological focus to a trinitarian focus or a trinitarian focus to a Christological focus. Following Barth, he weaves the close connection between a Christological and a trinitarian focus and is thereby able to argue, in the subtitle of a later article, for “the non-linear linearity of theology” and for the importance of this in constructing a coherent (as opposed to a logically linear) theology appropriate for a postmodern context.51

In assessing how effective Grenz is in using the motif of Trinity for the structuring of his theology, it is helpful to compare his work to that of other noted evangelical scholars. One source of comparison is between Grenz and Erickson’s text on the Trinity, *God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity*.52

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46 Ibid.
47 Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context*, 188.
48 Ibid., 189.
49 Ibid., 190.
50 Ibid.
51 Grenz, "Jesus as the *Imago Dei*: Image-of-God Christology and the Non-Linear Linearity of Theology."
Part of Erickson’s motivation for writing this book is his concern that while there has been a renaissance of interest in the doctrine of the Trinity within the broader theological community, there “really has been no major scale doctrine of the Trinity produced for some time by persons of distinctly evangelical persuasion, despite the centrality of the doctrine in evangelical theology.”

Of practical significance for this research are the conclusions and implications Erickson draws from his work on the Trinity. Many are similar to the conclusions Grenz draws. Thus Erickson argues that one of the effects of a communal understanding of the Trinity (a concept which he supports) is that it shapes our understanding of personhood so that we believe that to “the extent that the individual reflects the image of the Triune God, that individual would not be solitary or independent, but would be related to other persons.” The relationships themselves should be characterized by mutual submission as Christians pattern themselves on the model provided by the intratrinitarian relationships. Erickson even goes so far as to suggest that the shared trinitarian life of God, while not dictating “a particular form of church government... is most easily fitted with a congregational form of government, where each communicant has a share in the power of determination of the group’s actions.” Extending this further, while not willing to go as far as liberation theologians with their stress on the implications of believing in a “communion of equals within the Trinity as a basis for society,” he does agree that the “sort of society that would emerge from inspiration by the trinitarian model would be one characterized by fellowship, equality of opportunity, and sharing.”

All this sounds very similar to Grenz, especially the stress on the Trinity as a model for community. However, what is notable is that Erickson does not extend these insights to theological method and the structuring of theological systems. There is not an insistence on viewing all theological loci through trinitarian eyes. Grenz’ vision of the pivotal nature of the Trinity for all theological thought therefore goes further than Erickson travels.

Though Grenz’ use of the Trinity as the structuring motif for theology is helpful, some questions should be asked. Is “structuring” an adequate portrayal of the role the Trinity should

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53 Ibid., 14.
54 Ibid., 332.
55 Ibid., 333.
56 Ibid., 335.
57 Ibid., 336.
58 Ibid., 337.
play in theological construction? In *Theology for the Community of God*, Grenz describes how he has used the different members of the Trinity to allow for logical divisions in the work (Part 1, Theology – The Doctrine of God, Part 3, Christology, Part 4, Pneumatology). In itself, this is not remarkable. However, other theologians appropriate the doctrine of the Trinity more creatively.

Leonardo Boff, for example, sees the Trinity not primarily as a way to structure theological themes, but as a model for human community. Operating from a paradigm of liberation, Boff is nevertheless careful to acknowledge that the Trinity is not structured to answer human injustices, but is in the first instance a valid description of the way God is revealed. The Trinity does, however, provide insight into the type of society God desires, as a society modelled on the Trinity will be just, egalitarian and allow for the development of both groups and individuals.

It would be easy to continue to list the different emphases theologians have drawn from the doctrine of the Trinity. However, though suggesting that the Trinity is best seen as the structuring motif for theology, Grenz is convinced that linking the motifs of Trinity, community and eschatology together helps provide an answer to some of the most significant questions raised by the renewal of interest in trinitarian theology. He argues that, "The golden thread that weaves its way throughout a century of trinitarian theological renewal is the question as to how theology can conceptualize the relationship between God-in-eternity and God-in-salvation…" He suggests a consensus 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 triune life." He then asks and answers, "What kind of ontology will facilitate this theological objective? And the provisional answer to which the rediscovery of the triune God in the twentieth century points is: An ontology that is thoroughly eschatological and communal."

Grenz thus seems confident that his trio of motifs, Trinity, eschatology and community, is correctly clustered and provides a path into the future.

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61 Grenz himself does so in Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology*.
62 Ibid., 222.
Grenz’ focus on relationality within the Trinity is central to his construction of a relationally based theology. Rather than construct a doctrine of God from an understanding of one divine substance, theology moves from the three persons revealed in the Trinity to the divine unity. There is an inherent threefoldness about all of God’s acts of revelation, and we are thus required to think in trinitarian terms when we think of God. However, this then overflows into all loci of theology. For example, our understanding of humanity as imago Dei draws from our understanding of God as triune and thus relational, which leads to a fully relational anthropology, or a trinitarian theological anthropology. Utilising the Trinity as the structuring motif for theology is therefore more than a convenient system for classification and structuring. It helps to reflect the nature of God and to shape our understanding of all the loci of theology.

6.3 COMMUNITY AS THEOLOGY’S INTEGRATIVE MOTIF

The selection of an integrative motif for theology is a well-established practice for theologians. David Kelsey has effectively argued that all theological readings of scripture depend upon “a single synoptic, imaginative judgment” in which the theologian “tries to catch up what Christianity is basically about.”63 Discussion therefore does not revolve around the validity of attempting to find a suitable integrating motif, but of the adequacy and appropriateness of the choice, and of the content attached to it. More recently, theologians have shifted from choosing a single integrating motif to working with a cluster of related themes. While Grenz was willing to cite community as the integrating motif for a revisioned evangelical theology in his 1993 text Revisioning Evangelical Theology, in Beyond Foundationalism he ties it closely together with the motifs of Trinity and eschatology, albeit that each has a slightly different focus.

After signalling his intention to use "community" as theology’s integrative motif in Revisioning Evangelical Theology,64 Grenz proceeds to do so in Theology for the Community of God.65 There are various reasons for his choice.

In the first instance, Grenz sees the motif of community as being biblically warranted, while providing more focused content to the traditional evangelical selection of the theme of the Kingdom of God as an integrative motif. He therefore sees his choice as clarifying and

63 David H. Kelsey, The Use of Scripture in Recent Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 159.
64 Grenz, Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century, 137-162.
65 Grenz, Theology for the Community of God.
extending the evangelical tradition, rather than contradicting it. In addition, he believes that
the motif of community is appropriate for a postmodern context. He suggests that the radical
individualism of the modern era has been replaced by a longing for genuine community and
belonging. The church rediscovering her identity as a community shaped by the
eschatological vision of the people of God participating in the life of the triune God, therefore
serves as a sign and witness in a postmodern era. In short, the discussion between scripture,
tradition and culture sees the affirmation of the choice of community as an integrating motif.

A second factor is the link between the structuring motif of the Trinity and the integrating
motif of community. The one flows naturally from the other. As Grenz writes in The Moral
Quest, “the Christian vision of God as the social Trinity and our creation to be the imago Dei
provides the transcendent basis for the human ethical ideal of life-in-community.” Closely
linked to this is Grenz’ insistence that community be understood in eschatological rather than
purely anthropological terms. It is the eschatological community that will reflect the imago
Dei. The focal motifs of Trinity and eschatology therefore cohere closely together with the
integrating motif of community.

A third factor is the lack of an adequately developed ecclesiology within evangelicalism. While in Grenz’ theology community and ecclesiology should be understood as similar but
not synonymous terms, Grenz’ choice of community rather than church or ecclesiology is
sound as the term church is often understood in institutional and hierarchical terms, while
community emphasises the participatory and corporate character of the people of God. Using
community as his integrative motif helps to ensure that ecclesiology has a central and
integrating role in his theology, while it also suggests the kind of ecclesial vision Grenz
considers valid. It is this meaning that Moore attaches to Grenz’ stress on community when
he writes, “Within evangelicalism, ‘post-conservatives’ such as Stanley Grenz attempt to
‘revision’ evangelical theology with the doctrine of the church (or, more precisely, the
community of God) as the central organizing motif for doctrinal formulation.”

66 Grenz, Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century, 139.
67 Ibid., 150.
68 Stanley J. Grenz, The Moral Quest: Foundations of Christian Ethics (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity
Press, 1997), 238.
69 See e.g. Grenz, Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century,
158.
70 For example, Grenz approvingly quotes Donald Bloesch on the “appalling neglect” of ecclesiology
in evangelicalism. Ibid., 168.
71 Russell D. Moore, “God, Revelation, and Community: Ecclesiology and Baptist Identity in the
Grenz envisions various gains by adopting community as the integrative motif for theology. Initially his understanding is sociologically mediated. He notes the communalist insight that the social unit is integral to the process of knowing, stating “We are able to make sense of the world because we have received a set of interpretive concepts mediated to us by the community in which we live.”72 In a later article Grenz notes Mead’s insight that the individual is not *sui generis*, but a product of the process of social interaction.73 Our identity develops as we find a narrative in terms of which our lives make sense. This narrative is invariably embedded in the story of our identity conferring community. A consequence of the Enlightenment was the rise of individualism, which was reflected in evangelical theology. This led to an identity crisis (in which community am I embedded?), which in the postmodern era has led to a quest for community. Grenz thus suggests that the call for a move from individualism to community “is in effect a postmodern cry for the church to be the church.”74 He argues that an adequately communal ecclesiology should view the church as a covenant, kingdom community75 and claims that this “Biblical vision of community stands as a critique of the modern evangelical concept of God’s program in the world and of its individualistic understanding of the church.”76

Grenz sees the societal shift from individualism to a communitarian understanding as justifying a shift in theological focus. He rather daringly writes,

> The human sciences are moving beyond the radical individualism of the modern era to an understanding which seeks to strike a balance between the individual and social dimensions of the human phenomenon. *This development suggests that theology must make a corresponding move*. We must journey beyond the focus on the kingdom, which typified the past orientation of theology, while not leaving the insights of kingdom theology behind. Into the reigning kingdom theology, I would argue, we must incorporate the motif of ‘community’ as defining the nature of God’s reign. In so doing we can fill the kingdom of God with its proper content.77

Grenz adds a qualifier that it is not only because the concept of community fits the thinking of the contemporary world that this shift should be made, “but more importantly because it is central to the message of the Bible” - a more traditional evangelical sentiment.78

75 Ibid.: 20-25.
76 Ibid.: 25.
77 Grenz, "Community' as a Theological Motif for the Western Church in an Era of Globalization," 14, emphasis mine.
78 Ibid.: 14.
He goes on to cast a theological vision of community,

The vision of the Scriptures is clear: The final goal of the work of the triune God in salvation history is the establishment of the eschatological community—the one redeemed people of all the nations of the world dwelling in a renewed earth—a renewed globe—enjoying reconciliation with their God, fellowship with each other, and harmony with all creation. This goal of a global community lies at the heart of God's actions in history.79

It is significant that Grenz places this vision of community in an eschatological light—consistent with his vision of a theological method that has the Trinity as its structuring motif, community as its integrative motif and eschatology as its orienting motif.

In *Beyond Foundationalism* Grenz (and Franke) more fully develop the concept of community as the integrating motif for theology. Their claim is that "Community forms the theme that integrates the various strands of theological reflection into a single web or mosaic."80

They begin by noting the tension between two traditions within Western thought, that of individualism and communalism. As is not uncommon for Grenz, what follows reads more like a sociological than a theological text.81 Grenz and Franke articulate three aspects that they see as central to their understanding of community. First is that a community consists of a group of people who are conscious that they share a similar frame of reference, and as such view "the world through similar glasses."82 Second is a group focus. They note that this does not imply a uniformity of thought within the group, but rather a desire to participate in "an ongoing discussion about what constitutes the identity of the group."83 Third is a focus on the person, whereby "members draw their personal identity from the community."84 The group thus plays a key role in the shaping of the identity of the members who belong to it.

Drawing on the distinction between individualism and communalism, Grenz and Franke then contrast individualistic views of ecclesiology with communal ones. They suggest that individualistic views find their "ecclesiastical counterpart in the view that sees the church as the voluntary association of individual believers whose identity precedes their presence in the

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79 Ibid.: 16.
80 Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context*, 204.
81 This is not intended as a criticism. One of Grenz' strengths is his interdisciplinary and integrative approach.
82 Ibid., 216.
83 Ibid., 217.
84 Ibid., 218.
congregation." Inevitably this leads to a soft ecclesiology, for "Not only does such individualism reduce the local congregation to a voluntary society, it demotes participation in the visible community from an essential to an optional dimension of discipleship." This in turn can lead to the church being little more than a life-style enclave rather than a community in the fuller sense of the word.

Communal views start with the awareness that the community precedes the individual for it is God who constitutes the church. "The church is formed by the work of the Spirit who speaks through the biblical text and thereby creates a people who inhabit the world God is creating." The community created gathers around the constitutive narrative of Jesus the Christ. As Grenz and Franke put it,

The Spirit-appropriated, community-fashioning biblical narrative spans the ages from the primordial past to the eschatological future. As the church retells this constitutive narrative it functions as a community of memory and hope. It provides the interpretive framework—the narrative plot—through which its members find meaning in their personal and communal stories... Through their connection with this people, members of the community discover the connection between their personal lives and something greater—something transcendent—namely, the work of the biblical God in history.

The community into which we are called invites us to participate together "in the perichoretic community of trinitarian persons." Participating in the divine life in this manner enables us to see the shortcomings of various human groups in comparison to the divine community. Aware of the shortcomings of all current versions of community, the church holds to the eschatological ideal of what God is calling the church toward.

Acknowledging their indebtedness to the Reformed epistemology of Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, Grenz and Franke then provide three reasons theology should be communitarian. First it is communitarian because theology flows from the community of faith. It is not simply the individual believer seeking understanding, but the community seeking understanding. Second, theology is communitarian because theology is about God

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85 Ibid., 224.
86 Ibid., 225.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid., 226.
89 Ibid., 228.
90 They are particularly influenced by their interaction with postfoundationalism, in particular their view that certain beliefs, while communally shaped, are properly "basic." Like Grenz, both Plantinga and Wolterstorff can be accused of (or complimented for) a "soft" or a "chastened" foundationalism. See e.g. D.A. Carson, "Domesticating the Gospel: A Review of Grenz's Renewing the Center," in Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times, ed. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 52-53.
and God is Trinity, hence God is social or community. Third, the biblical narrative points to the ultimate goal of establishing community, and theology therefore has the task of unpacking this eschatological goal. They conclude with an explication of this third reason, suggesting that the ultimate theme of scripture is the creation of the eschatological community. The narrative plot of scripture is the exploration of the acts of God that make the creation of this community possible. Because this is the underpinning theme of all of scripture, it is the suitable integrating motif for theology.

It is interesting to compare Grenz’ work to the work of others, as well as to see the reaction his work on community has elicited.

Richard Hays’ work in the field of New Testament ethics can be seen as supportive of Grenz’ choice and use of community as an integrative motif. In his own attempt to find suitable lenses to enable “our blurry multiple impressions of the texts” to “come more sharply into focus” he selects community, cross and new creation as his three focal images. Hays argues that, “No single image can adequately encapsulate the complex unity of the New Testament texts… consequently, we need a cluster – or, better, a sequence – of images to represent the underlying story and bring the texts into focus.”

Though Hays is working to produce an ethical vision flowing from the New Testament while Grenz is working on a broader canvas and endeavouring to construct a revisioned theological method for evangelicalism, the areas of similarity and dissimilarity between the choices made by Grenz and Hays are of interest. While Grenz selects the single integrative motif of community for his theological construction, he is not necessarily in disagreement with Hays’ suggestion that a single image will not suffice, and we should add Grenz’ choice of Trinity and eschatology as structuring and orienting motifs for theology to our consideration. At this point interest in the comparison heightens. Hays selects community, cross and new creation, Grenz, community, Trinity and eschatology.

Both agree that the theme of community is part of the selection. Like Grenz, Hays affirms that the primary focus of the biblical story is the formation of a covenant people, rather than of a collection of unrelated individuals. “The community, in its corporate life, is called to embody

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91 Grenz and Franke, Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context, 231-232.
93 Ibid., 196.
an alternative order that stands as a sign of God’s redemptive purposes in the world." Hays goes on to write, "The coherence of the New Testament’s ethical mandate will come into focus only when we understand that mandate in ecclesial terms, when we seek God’s will not by asking first, ‘What should I do,’ but ‘What should we do?’"

Hays had earlier suggested three criteria for evaluating the adequacy of images proposed as focal lenses, viz. that the image finds a textual basis in all the canonical witnesses, second that the image does not stand in serious tension with the ethical teaching or major emphases of any of the New Testament images and third, that the image highlights “central and substantial ethical concerns of the texts in which it appears.” Hays is convinced that the lens of community meets these requirements, and that it is an appropriate motif as the “church is a countercultural community of discipleship, and this community is the primary addressee of God’s imperatives.”

If Hays’ selection of community adds support to Grenz’ comparable choice, his selection of the cross and new creation as his other two central motifs raises interesting issues. Though their agendas are slightly different, (Hays constructing a model for ethical evaluation, Grenz, a theological method), it does raise questions of the genuinely evangelical nature of Grenz’ model if the motifs of the cross and new creation are not included. However, a closer reading of Hays indicates that eschatological concerns dominate when he speaks of the motif of new creation, so again this is supportive of Grenz’ project.

The significant difference is therefore the absence of the motif of the cross in Grenz’ theological construction. This is an important observation. While the cross is a central image for all forms of Christian theology, evangelicalism has historically been linked to a strong emphasis on the soteriological significance of the cross, with emphasis placed on a substitutionary understanding of the atonement. If evangelicals are to be understood as “people of the book” they are also understood as people who stress the redemptive imperative of accepting the forgiveness offered through Christ’s substitutionary sacrifice on the cross.

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94 Ibid.
95 Ibid., 196-197.
96 Ibid., 195.
97 Ibid., 196.
98 Ibid., 198.
99 Grenz himself suggests that a key ethos of evangelicalism is its “convertive piety”. This cannot be understood apart from the classical evangelical emphasis on conversion through the substitutionary work of Christ on the cross. In Revisioning Evangelical Theology Grenz writes: “evangelical theology is oriented around the practical task of reflecting on and delineating the nature of the conversion experience, which as evangelicals we all share... the genius of classical evangelicalism is its concern for or emphasis on a conscious experience of the grace of God in conversion. Hence it is characterized
The absence of such focal images in Grenz’ theological construction is therefore surprising, and raises questions as to whether evangelicals are likely to see his theological method as being sufficiently continuous with evangelical theology to effectively revision it.

Hays does note a potential danger in utilizing the cross as a paradigm for Christian ethics, namely that it might “be used by those who hold power in order to ensure the acquiescent suffering of the powerless,” but quickly retorts that such a use of the text is clearly unwarranted, for “It is precisely the focal image of the cross that ensures that the followers of Jesus – men and women alike – must read the New Testament as a call to renounce violence and coercion.”

An inevitable criticism of a communitarian emphasis is that the focus is so much on the community that it comes at the expense of a focus on the transcendence of God. While partially appreciative of Grenz’ work, Dever asks if Grenz’ communitarian focus sees Grenz stress the horizontal rather than the vertical aspects of sin. He writes,

One caution here: some evangelicals are taking on board the critique that postmodernism makes of evangelical Christianity and in response are adopting communitarian language. For example, though there is much that I as a Baptist and congregational Christian appreciate in his writings, some of Stanley Grenz’s materials have a troubling lack of reference to a vertical dimension to sin – that is, to the truth that sin is fundamentally against God (e.g., Ps 51). Again and again, it is described only in a horizontal dimension.

It is questionable if Dever’s tidy categorizing of sin into “vertical” and “horizontal” is biblically sustainable. Dever’s citing of Ps 51 in support of his point is questionable. While it is true that the Psalmist writes “Against you, you only have I sinned,” the Psalm arises out of Nathan confronting David for his adultery with Bathsheba and the subsequent murder of her husband Uriah. While David’s sin was an affront to his God anointed role, and thus to God, the “horizontal” aspects of this scenario are striking. It seems reasonable to argue that David’s sin was as much against the community that had entrusted him with the task of being

by what Dayton calls ‘convertive piety.’” Grenz, Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century, 23.

Hays, 197.

Ibid.


Ps 51:4 (NIV).
their king, as against God.\(^{104}\) Ironically, Dever might have strengthened Grenz’ point by the very example he chooses.

In his PhD dissertation, Peter Schemm suggests that in trying to correct a historic overemphasis on the transcendence of God, Grenz allows the pendulum to swing too far in the opposite direction, and transfers the focus from transcendence to relationality, so that the immanence of God dominates.\(^{105}\) This leads to the risk of inadequately distinguishing between the communal life of the Trinity and human community.

Schemm’s thesis should not be accepted uncritically. In a brief article published in 1993, Grenz argues that the key tug of war in theology in the twentieth century is between those who stress the transcendence of God (e.g. Barth) and those who stress God’s immanence (e.g. Liberation theologians). He suggests that one of the challenges for theologians at the transition point between the modern and post-modern eras is to “articulate anew the Christian conviction of the transcendent-immanent God.”\(^{106}\) As a way forward he postulates “God transcends our present circumstances from the vantage point of the telos or goal of the whole of reality. At the same time, God is immanent in our circumstances, sharing our present.”\(^{107}\) While Schemm believes that Grenz is not ultimately successful in balancing the paradox represented by divine immanence and divine transcendence, Grenz is mindful of the need to uphold both truths.

Wellum is sceptical of placing too much emphasis on community in theological construction. While his main reservation is with Grenz’ proposal to allow the community to serve as the arbiter of what the Spirit is saying to the church through the scriptures, his concern is broader, ...

finite human beings and communities are too historically situated and sociologically conditioned to ever yield a ‘God’s eye point of view,’ that is, an objective and universal viewpoint. Truth, in the end, cannot be what modernism hoped it was; rather it must be perspectival, provisional, local, and ultimately, what the community most values – pragmatic.\(^{108}\)

\(^{104}\) Grenz deals with the question of sexual abuse as an abuse of power and a betrayal of trust in his co-authored work, *Betrayal of Trust: Sexual Misconduct in the Pastorate*. While the focus is on the pastorate, the principles he outlines would also be applicable in the David-Bathsheba incident. Stanley J. Grenz and Roy D. Bell, *Betrayal of Trust: Sexual Misconduct in the Pastorate* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1995).

\(^{105}\) Schemm Jr., 121-125.


\(^{107}\) Ibid.


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If Grenz’ focus was on community without the orienting motif of eschatology, this criticism would be valid. As it is, Grenz’ clear articulation of the link between community and eschatology theoretically counters the fear that truth will be limited to the “perspectival, provisional, local and ultimately… pragmatic.”109 I say “theoretically counters” because an appeal to an eschatological orientation is easier to make than to implement. Given the tentativeness of the eschatological vision, how can we be certain of the precise building blocks of this vision? While it is true that ultimate reality is eschatological, how do we access this vision in this penultimate age? While the clues are contained in scripture, our interpretation of them is from a local perspective, albeit a perspective broadened by conversing together with the community of faith through the ages (the tradition of the church). It is not an issue easily resolved.110

6.4 ESCHATOLOGY AS THEOLOGY’S ORIENTING MOTIF

Eschatology as an orienting motif involves adopting a reverse hermeneutic, where the direction is from new creation to original creation, or put alternately, where everything is understood in the light of the end, rather than the beginning. The influence of his doctoral mentor, Pannenberg, is most clearly shown in Grenz’ adoption of eschatology as theology’s orienting motif. Echoing Pannenberg, in 1992 Grenz wrote, “truth is essentially historical and ultimately eschatological; it is what shows itself throughout the movement of time climaxing in the end event, which is anticipated in the present.”111

Given the influence of Pannenberg on his work, it is somewhat surprising that Grenz’ strong eschatological emphasis was not a major theme in Revisioning Evangelical Theology. While Grenz makes it clear that his integrative theme of community draws its content from the vision of the eschatological community, it is not a central refrain. Of the six major themes

109 Ibid.
110 For Grenz’ (in my opinion unsuccessful) attempt to do so, see Stanley J. Grenz, Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 244-248. For an excellent and sympathetic discussion of the same problem, but this time in relation to the theology of Pannenberg, see Christiaan Mostert, God and the Future: Wolfhart Pannenberg’s Eschatological Doctrine of God (London: T & T Clark, 2002).
111 Stanley J. Grenz, "The Irrelevancy of Theology: Pannenberg and the Quest for Truth," Calvin Theological Journal 27, no. 2 (1992): 309. While agreeing with Pannenberg on the central, orienting, role of eschatology, he expresses reservations about Pannenberg’s project, writing: “I applaud him for his attempt to create a systematic theology that arises out of the trajectory that begins with the Bible and runs through theological history, but I would favor a more evident, stronger indication of concern for the situation in which the theologian seeks to work. Nor am I totally comfortable with what appears to be my mentor’s thoroughgoing rationalism. Although I am drawn to his method, I would put greater emphasis on the idea of mystery and the place of the community of faith in the theological task.” Grenz, "The Irrelevancy of Theology: Pannenberg and the Quest for Truth," 310.
developed in *Beyond Foundationalism*, the motifs of Trinity and eschatology lacked significant development in the earlier programmatic work. Perhaps the later Grenz felt the need to cast his net more broadly than simply emphasising the motif of community, or more probably, he recognized how substantially these two later motifs support and fill out the motif of community.

In *Beyond Foundationalism*, Grenz and Franke systematically unpack their understanding of eschatology as the orienting motif for theology. They are keen to ensure that eschatology is not relegated to the status of an unrelated compartment within Christian truth, but rather that it “serves to orient all theological reflection.”

While appreciative of Moltmann’s work, and acknowledging him as providing “the paradigmatic eschatological theology,” Grenz and Franke are concerned that Moltmann lapses into an anthropological foundationalism by viewing hope as an ontological given, with the human person being seen as intrinsically hopeful, and are anxious lest this anthropocentric foundationalism might replace the specific biblical hope that should guide and direct human hope. They argue that substituting anthropological hope for biblical hope “reduces hope to wishful thinking” and that therefore “our theology of hope must view hope as particular, not generic.”

Viewing eschatology as dealing with the *telos* or ultimate purpose of existence, rather than a set of disconnected events that happen at the end, leads inevitably to the need to orientate all theology around the ultimate purpose and goal of creation. Perception as to why Grenz and Franke view this nonfoundationalist approach to eschatology as important is aided by considering models they warn against. They are particularly concerned that in evangelical circles eschatology tends to be viewed as a disconnected series of events, the timing of which

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112 Scripture, tradition and culture as sources for theology, and Trinity, community and eschatology as its motifs.
113 Grenz starts to develop a clearer eschatological emphasis in *Theology for the Community of God*. Whilst the theme of community dominates, he makes it clear that the themes of eschatology and community should be linked so that more strictly the integrative motif for his theology should be seen as “the eschatological community.” Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 30.
115 Ibid., 245.
116 They also mention other theologians influenced by this approach, e.g. Andrew Lester and Donald Capps, both of whom are pastoral theologians. Ibid., 247.
117 Ibid.
118 Ibid., 248.
119 Ibid., 249.
is controversial. They dismiss such an approach as inadequate, citing as an example Wayne Grudem’s characterization of eschatology as the compilation of what the Bible teaches about the major events yet to come in the history of the universe. Such a stance is inadequate in that it fails to recognize the pivotal role eschatology plays in providing a coherent theology that is consistently oriented toward the eschatological future of God. It is the focus on *telos* and the God whose purposes are reflected in the *telos* that makes a theology eschatological. In addition, a theologically significant eschatology, as opposed to the humanist myth of inevitable human progress, avoids the “bankruptcy” exposed by postmodernism in its critique of modern narratives with an anthropocentric orientation. Ultimately history is not our story, but God’s story. As Grenz and Franke write “history’s goal is nothing less than the realization of God’s purposes for creation.”

Grenz and Franke are also concerned that “Reformed Scholastic theologians tend to engage central theological questions from the perspective of eternity past.” They view this perspective as unnecessarily static and deterministic, thus,

> Events in time have no raison d’être except to reveal sovereign decisions made in eternity past. Even the *eschaton* becomes little more than the final event in a vast chain of happenings known already to God before the beginning of time.

They suggest that the more appropriate approach is to adopt a dynamic orientation toward the future, allowing future reality to break into and shape the present. While postmodernism has queried if ontology is passé, this more dynamic approach allows for the adopting of an ontology that shifts the focus from “being” to “becoming.” However, this is not to suggest a lapse into process theology, where the present is the determiner of the future, for the focus is on the role that the future, rather than the present, has in the shaping of reality. At this point Grenz and Franke swing more directly to the work of Grenz’ mentor, Pannenberg, and explore his eschatological ontology, which gives ontological priority to the future. The future is an existential reality to the extent that it gives direction to the present and allows us to transcend the particularity of any given moment. Via anticipation we are able to participate in the eschatologically objective world – the new creation of God. Through the constructive

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122 Ibid., 261.
123 Ibid.
124 Ibid., 265.
125 Ibid.
126 Ibid., 267.
power of language we inhabit a linguistically constructed world that sees and experiences reality from the perspective of eschatological realism.

Grenz suggests that theologians serve the Christian community as they explore,

The world-constructing, knowledge-producing, identity-forming ‘language’ of the Christian community. The goal of this enterprise is to show how the Christian mosaic of beliefs offers a transcendent vision of the glorious eschatological community God wills for creation and how this vision provides a coherent foundation for life-in-relationship in this penultimate age as we anticipate the glorious fullness of the eschatological new creation. In fulfilling this role, theology assists the community of Christ in its mandate of being the sign of the age to come.127

Grenz’ use of eschatology as theology’s orienting motif opens many creative doors.

It replaces the stress on the need to be “counter-cultural” that is often found in the writings of evangelicals. The focus is no longer on providing an alternate to the current societal values, but on retaining a consistent eschatological orientation. At times this leads to being affirming and embracing of certain aspects of culture; at other times it requires adopting a prophetic stance and distancing the faith community from contemporary cultural expression. The agenda is set by eschatological reality, rather than current cultural practice.

An eschatological orientation could also impact the agenda of the religious right.128 While more closely aligned to fundamentalism than to evangelicalism, the religious right adopts a culturally inconsistent stance. The apocalyptic versions of eschatology usually adopted by the religious right sometimes mute the ethical questions that an eschatological orientation should raise.129 The quest to identify and personify the anti-Christ, and thereby to stigmatise the enemy, discourages the asking of probing ethical questions. By contrast, an ethical focus on the life to be enjoyed with the triune God by the eschatological community (rather than on the apocalyptic process itself) predisposes toward a carefully reflective and nuanced social ethic.130

127 Ibid., 273.
128 Pierard notes that “The conservatism that constitutes the wellspring of modern-day Christian rightism has deep roots in the evangelical past. To be sure, evangelicalism contributed a positive vision of social reform... But there was an unpleasant side to the evangelical experience.” Richard Pierard, “The New Religious Right in American Politics,” in Evangelicalism and Modern America, ed. George Marsden (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1984), 162.
130 Grenz’ unease with the religious right is clearly shown in one of his earliest articles, Listen America, and to a lesser extent in Secular Saints. Stanley J. Grenz, "Listen America!: A Theological and Ethical
While the appropriateness of an eschatological orientation when considering topics such as social justice, the nature of the church’s life in society or interpersonal relationships is reasonably clear, it is far less obvious when dealing with what seem to be entirely “this worldly” concerns, such as human sexuality. Given that Matthew’s gospel announces that “At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; but they will be like the angels in heaven,” it is not immediately clear how Grenz will utilize an eschatological orientation in his own extensive ethical reflection in the realm of sexuality. However, Grenz displays consistency here, and manages to link the human sex drive to a deeper ultimate (and therefore eschatological) desire for communion and bonding with God. In Sexual Ethics: An Evangelical Perspective he writes,

Community with God, therefore, is the “last thing,” the telos or goal of God’s salvific activity and the goal of creation and history. As humans enter into fellowship with God, the design of the Creator in making sexual beings, beings who seek to form bonds, comes to completion.

Though he believes that “genital sexual activity has no place in the eschatological reign of God” he argues against adopting a vision of a nonmaterial, and sexless future, writing, “Sexuality is present in the form of the aesthetic sense, as is evidenced by the biblical vision of the beauty of the place of God’s eschatological reign. But of highest importance, sexuality remains present in the form of mutuality.” This understanding of human sexuality enables him to weave together his motifs of Trinity, community and eschatology.

Though Grenz structures Theology for the Community of God in a relatively innovative manner, by placing his reflections on eschatology at the end of the work he subtly undermines its ability to serve as the orienting focus for theology. While it is true that most


131 See for example the implications Grenz draws in Anticipating God’s New Community. In it he writes, “Our corporate life ought to point toward the perfect fellowship of God with humankind that will characterize God’s eschatological community.” Grenz, “Anticipating God’s New Community: Theological Foundations for Women in Ministry,” 602.


134 Ibid., 250.

135 Ibid., 251.

136 Not that we should assume that all questions are answered by this eschatological orientation. For example, if genital sexual activity has no place in the eschatological reign of God, why does Grenz pay so much attention to what genital activity may and may not take place this side of the eschaton? This question is considered in the next chapter.

137 Most notably, delaying the discussion of the role of scripture to the second half of the work, where he looks at it under the theme of pneumatology.
works in systematics follow chronological lines and place eschatology at the end,\textsuperscript{138} one has to ask in what way eschatology is empowered to orient all theological reflection if it appears as epilogue.\textsuperscript{139} In particular we could question why a systematics aimed at communicating with a postmodern audience follows such a neat linear pattern. As Grenz’ initial focal motif was simply that of community, with the motifs of Trinity and eschatology gaining in emphasis in his later work, we can only speculate if he would have reordered his systematics if it had been a later project.\textsuperscript{140} However, given that the discussion of eschatology as theology’s orienting motif is assigned the final chapter in Beyond Foundationalism, it seems unlikely. It appears to be a tension that Grenz never grappled with.\textsuperscript{141}

In defence of Grenz, we could argue that the terminal placement of eschatology helps to emphasise its historicity. If eschatological \textit{realism} is to provide the orientation for theological construction, it could be unwise to locate discussion of the eschaton at any point other than one that strengthens the concept of historical reality, as by doing so, one could create the impression that the eschaton serves as a wishful image rather than a certain hope.

\textbf{6.5 FOUR EVALUATIVE QUESTIONS}

In evaluating the effectiveness of Grenz’ focal motifs, we need to ask if they add support to the thesis proposition that “Stanley Grenz’ theological method effectively revisions evangelical theology.” The opening chapter of this thesis suggests that the proposition be tested against four key questions:

1) Does Grenz’ method make an \textit{original} contribution to evangelical theological construction?

2) Is Grenz’ theological method \textit{coherent and credible}?

3) Does Grenz’ method genuinely \textit{revision} evangelical theology?

4) Is Grenz’ method \textit{effective} in revisioning evangelical theology?

\textsuperscript{138} This is the scheme followed by Erickson, Grudem and McGrath.

\textsuperscript{139} Moltmann’s comments in this regard are memorable: “From first to last, and not merely in epilogue, Christianity is eschatology...” and a little later, “A proper theology would therefore have to be constructed in the light of its future goal. Eschatology should not be its end, but its beginning.” Jürgen Moltmann, \textit{Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology}, trans. James W. Leitch (London: SCM, 1967), 16.

\textsuperscript{140} Though no such re-ordering appears in his later \textit{Created for Community}, the popularized version of \textit{Theology for the Community of God}. Stanley J. Grenz, \textit{Created for Community: Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Living} (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998).

\textsuperscript{141} Though one of the last articles he published deals with “the non-linear linearity of theology,” though he applied it to Christology, not eschatology. Grenz, "Jesus as the \textit{Imago Dei: Image-of-God Christology and the Non-Linear Linearity of Theology."
We will apply these questions to his use of the three focal motifs of Trinity, community and eschatology, in theological construction. This evaluation, together with that offered of Grenz' use of the sources of theology in chapters 4 and 5, and the study of the implementation of his method in chapter 7, will form the basis for our final assessment of the validity of the thesis proposition.

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

As regards the originality of Grenz' motifs for theology, it is fair to say that his choice is primarily guided by the emphasis of others. All three of his motifs had a resurgence of interest in the second half of the twentieth century, an interest that has continued in the twenty first century. His selection gives his theology a contemporary rather than an original feel.

However, attaching the descriptor of original to Grenz' theology should not be restricted to original for the entire theological enterprise, but could mean original for the theological sector within which he works, evangelicalism. On this basis, a more affirming assessment of Grenz' originality can be made.

While Grenz' use of eschatology as an orienting motif owes more to his doctoral supervisor, Pannenberg, than to Grenz' originality, other key evangelicals have not been as quick to appropriate Pannenberg's insights. Thus e.g. while Erickson makes a few references to Pannenberg in his *Christian Theology*, they are largely limited to mildly critical comments on his Christological method.142 Grudem's *Systematic Theology* makes no mention of Pannenberg at all. McGrath's *Christian Theology* is more generous in its appropriation of Pannenberg, though his thinking cannot be seen as formative of McGrath's approach.143 Similar comments can be made about the way in which the three utilize Moltmann's thought, which has also been influential in shaping Grenz' eschatological focus.

Perhaps more noteworthy is the way Grenz utilizes the insights of Pannenberg and Moltmann. Whereas Erickson mentions their work largely to critique it, Grudem ignores it and McGrath discusses it as part of the overall story of the historical development of Christian theology.144

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144 McGrath's approach is significantly more sympathetic than Erickson's.
Grenz by contrast quotes it in support of the theological position he is developing. Unlike many evangelicals, Grenz is willing to utilize the insights of the broader theological fraternity. This willingness is part of the contribution he makes to the evangelical community. His use of substantial theologians from outside the boundaries of evangelicalism is part of the generous orthodoxy he seeks to model.

Grenz' use of eschatology as an orienting point for his theology stands in contrast to the use made of it by other key evangelicals. Grudem devotes part 7 of his work to the topic, calling it "The Doctrine of the Future" but handles it as a sequenced event. He moves from the return of Christ, to the millennium, to judgement and concludes with a brief chapter on the new heavens and new earth. The focus is on what will happen in the future, coupled with a discussion of some aspects of this that have proved divisive amongst evangelicals. There is no sense that the entire theological enterprise is structured around or oriented toward the motifs that flow from the eschaton. Whereas Grenz devotes a chapter to exploring the significance of the eschaton, there is no comparable chapter in Grudem's work. Indeed, rather than being the pinnacle of Grudem's theology, Grudem's final chapter on the new heavens and earth is one of the shortest of the 57 chapters that make up his text. While McGrath and Erickson have a wider perspective than Grudem, Grenz' work has a significantly stronger eschatological focus.

Though each of the motifs Grenz selects has had renewed interest, it is his clustering of the three that adds to the originality. It also reflects a development in Grenz' thinking. Whilst Revisioning Evangelical Theology is content to list community as the integrating theme in theological construction, the list has expanded to include Trinity and eschatology by the time Beyond Foundationalism is written. The expanding list raises the unanswerable question: would Grenz have continued to add to the list if his theological project had been completed?

In the light of the above, our overall assessment of Grenz' originality is that his use of his focal motifs is original within the evangelical context.

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145 For some examples, see Grenz, Theology for the Community of God, 64, 84, 104, 140, 843, 845.
147 Grenz, Theology for the Community of God, chp 24.
148 Albeit that the focus of each is different, community remaining the integrating motif, while the Trinity is now assigned the role of a structuring motif and eschatology that of the orienting motif.
6.5.2 Does Grenz’ use of the three focal motifs reflect a theological method that is coherent and credible?

It seems reasonable to evaluate Grenz against his own stated goal for developing alternate motifs for evangelical theology. In *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* he notes that evangelicals often utilize the image of the Kingdom of God as their integrating motif. He argues that in itself it lacks adequate content, and reasons that by making community the integrating motif, the image comes into sharper and more meaningful focus.\(^{149}\) His addition of Trinity and eschatology to the original sole proposal of community suggests that not everyone saw the full range of implications that flow from this motif, and that it therefore, like the image of the kingdom of God, needed development. Indeed, contra Grenz, we could argue that the link of eschatology to the motif of the kingdom of God is more self-evident than it is to that of community. Similarly, the link between the Trinity and the kingdom of God is more apparent than it necessarily is to that of community. Has Grenz’ modification therefore disrupted the elegantly simple but rich image that has undergirded the theological quest of most evangelical theologians for the last century? Is his replacement simply wordier and more cumbersome, without adding any significantly new insights?

To answer we should be clear of Grenz’ original intent. While he is willing to acknowledge the “appropriateness” of the motif of the kingdom of God,\(^{150}\) he believes that, “Kingdom theology suffers from at least one fatal flaw. It employs as its integrative motif a concept that it leaves undefined... In short, what is the world like when it is transformed by the in-breaking of the kingdom?”\(^{151}\) Of particular concern to Grenz is that, “The kingdom could simply be a reality in which the individual as individual can participate. Twentieth-century theology, therefore, maintained – even deepened – the role of modern theology as the support for the cult of the individual.”\(^{152}\)

While it is true that evangelicalism has often had an excessive focus on the individual, this relates more to its soteriology with its accompanying stress on the need for each individual to be converted.\(^{153}\) It is not clear why Grenz should accuse the motif of the kingdom of God of

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\(^{149}\) Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century*, 139-162.

\(^{150}\) Ibid., 147.

\(^{151}\) Ibid., 148.

\(^{152}\) Ibid., 150.

\(^{153}\) In writing on “conversionism” as one of the defining characteristics of evangelicalism, Bebbington says, “The line between those who had undergone the experience and those who had not was the sharpest in the world. It marked the boundary between a Christian and a pagan.” David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 5.
fostering individualism, though perhaps the association of the kingdom of God with the rule of God leads to the responsive thought of our individual obedience. It is however true that the motif of community disallows a radical individualism.

Interesting also is what Grenz does not critique. As he was devising a theology appropriate for a postmodern context one would have imagined he might have been uneasy with “kingdom” images simply because of the close mental association between “kingdom” and colonialism, authoritarianism and exploitation. While the content attached to the “kingdom of God” points in a radically different direction to that suggested by earthly kingdoms, the terminology could be critiqued for creating an unnecessary missiological barrier. If this was his concern, it is true that substituting community overcomes many of the difficulties. However, this is not a line that Grenz develops.

We could therefore conclude that while there are no obvious gains in Grenz’ shift from the more traditional motif of kingdom of God to Trinity, community and eschatology, the trio selected represent an elaboration of the concepts inherent in the original motif, and are expressed in a manner more likely to be acceptable to a postmodern context.

Methodologically, Grenz’ system is easily grasped. Three theological sources dynamically interact around three motifs, all under the guidance and illumination of the Spirit. Grenz’ selection of focal motifs is sourced by his trio of theological sources. Thus Trinity is adopted because it is biblical, finds support in the church’s tradition and is relevant to contemporary culture. The same can be said for both community and eschatology. The resulting theology is therefore not captive to one particular source or motif, and is able to move beyond foundationalism. When pushed, however, one has to ask if the move beyond foundationalism is more apparent than real. For example, how are we to decide what eschatological realism will look like? While no definitive answers can be given in this penultimate age, the guidelines we have are sourced from scripture. Following classic evangelical method, all suggestions are critiqued in the light of scripture. This sounds more like a chastened foundationalism than a genuinely postfoundationalist method.

Overall, in answering the question if Grenz’ use of focal motifs reflects a theological method that is coherent and credible, we can affirm that Grenz implements his system in a logically consistent manner, though our reservation that his method represents a chastened foundationalism rather than a postfoundationalist method, remains.

154 Grenz comes close to “proof-texting” when he speaks of the future eschatological world. See e.g. Grenz, Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era, 246-247.
6.5.3 Does Grenz’ use of the three focal motifs genuinely revision evangelical theology?

Because each of the motifs Grenz has chosen gained in prominence during the twentieth century, it would be unrealistic to suggest that he has revisioned theology by adopting any of the three images. More convincing would be the suggestion that his linking of the three motifs represents a genuine revisioning. Coupling this with his attempt to revision *evangelical* rather than other forms of theology, also increases the sustainability of the argument. While many theologians have ordered their systematics around an integrating motif, supplementing these with clearly articulated structuring and orienting motifs is less common. It leads to methodological clarity.

If Grenz theological method is to be accepted, it must be sufficiently continuous with traditional evangelical theology to be identified as evangelical. As Stackhouse succinctly puts it “Evangelical theology should be evangelical.”

Bebbington argues that the four key characteristics of evangelicalism are conversionism, activism, Biblicism and crucicentrism. Striking in Grenz’ method is that there is no obvious link to three of the four, viz. conversionism, activism and crucicentrism. While sources and motifs cannot be expected to cover every possible loci of theology, some omissions are less likely to be acceptable than others. Speaking from a historical perspective, Bebbington notes that “To make any theme other than the cross the fulcrum of a theological system was to take a step away from Evangelicalism.” Writing on the centrality of the cross, Stott claims that Christians perceive “the cross to be the centre of history and theology...also... the centre of all reality.” It is not so much that evangelicals are likely to reject motifs such as Trinity, community and eschatology, as it is that they are likely to wonder why there is no prominent place for either the cross or conversion in Grenz’ method. Evangelicals are more likely to be impressed by Richard Hays’ selection of community, cross and new creation as the focal images around which he constructs his understanding of the moral vision of the New Testament.

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155 Stackhouse, 161.
156 Bebbington, 5-17.
159 Hays, 193-205.
Perhaps this is an unintended consequence of the trinitarian rather than Christological focus in Grenz’ method. While Grenz attempts to follow Barth in weaving a close relationship between Christology and trinitarian theology, refusing to favour the one at the expense of the other, he has not necessarily been as successful.\textsuperscript{160} Offsetting this concern is Bebbington’s observation that American evangelicals place less stress on the centrality of the cross than do their British counterparts, though Bebbington is not willing for this observation to be pushed too far, and cites Billy Graham as not being willing to “be shifted from regarding the cross of Jesus Christ as his main theme” and follows with, “The redemptive work of Christ has been the focus of the habitual evangelical preoccupation with soteriology. The cross, rather than the incarnation, the example, or the teaching of Christ, has been the kernel of evangelical proclamation…”\textsuperscript{161}

Linked to the absence of what Bebbington calls “crucicentrism,” is the absence of a clear motif of “conversionism.”\textsuperscript{162} While it is true that Grenz is clear that the fellowship enjoyed with the triune God by the eschatological community results from salvation, while Hays is willing to stipulate “new creation” as a distinct and separate theological lens, Grenz fails to offer a motif which provides an obvious parallel. This is an issue for a theology that wishes to be seen as a revisioning of evangelical theology. As Stackhouse writes, “evangelicals cannot be evangelicals without endorsing the importance of evangelism.”\textsuperscript{163}

While the selection of Trinity, community and eschatology therefore represent a fairly original selection for evangelical theology, they do not necessarily provide sufficient continuity with traditional evangelicalism to be accepted by the movement. In fairness to Grenz, when he writes about the atonement and conversion, his insights are essentially traditional evangelical insights, though he does stress the communal implications of both.\textsuperscript{164} The concern might therefore be more about appearance than reality.

We can therefore tentatively affirm that Grenz’ three sources represent a genuine revisioning of evangelical theology, while noting a reservation at the absence of a motif that clearly points to the cross and conversion.

\textsuperscript{160} See Grenz and Franke, Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context, 188-190. Grenz, “Jesus as the Imago Dei: Image-of-God Christology and the Non-Linear Linearity of Theology.”


\textsuperscript{162} Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s, 3.

\textsuperscript{163} Stackhouse, 178.

\textsuperscript{164} Grenz, Theology for the Community of God, 443-461, 529-557.
6.5.4 Is Grenz’ use of the three focal motifs effective in revisioning evangelical theology?

One of the key indicators of effectiveness is the likelihood of Grenz’ views being embraced by the community whose theology he attempts to revision.

In this regard two major concerns emerge.

The first is that a shift from the kingdom of God to community as an integrating motif for theology could be interpreted as a move from a theocentric to an anthropocentric focus. The kingdom of God clearly places attention on the God whose kingdom it is. Community could be seen to place the emphasis on the participants in the community. If Grenz’ original proposal to have community as an integrating motif had not been supplemented by the addition of the motifs of Trinity and eschatology, this objection could be upheld. As it is, by the later addition of the Trinity as a structuring motif and eschatology as the orienting motif, the transcendent focus is underlined. The importance of this is reinforced when we compare Grenz’ *Theology for the Community of God* to Erickson’s *Christian Theology*. Erickson states that his integrating motif is “the magnificence of God.” While Grenz notes that this is a “soft” motif in Erickson’s work and is not clearly noticeable, Erickson’s choice, with its clear transcendent focus, is non-controversial for evangelicals.

More serious is the absence of soteriological images, particularly any that clearly refer to the cross of Christ. This is likely to be a source of concern for evangelicals, and could be seen as a compromise of the “convertive piety” that has characterised the movement.

On a more positive note, by selecting motifs that are gaining in prominence, Grenz helps to establish the contemporary relevance of his work. The motifs chosen are likely to be specially valued in a postmodern context, where the promise of community and hope match felt needs. That these flow from a triune God provides an “address” for the postmodern spiritual quest. The strongly relational nature of the motifs is also likely to find favour. As

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165 Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 78.
166 Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era*, 126.
168 For an exploration of the postmodern missiological context, see Brian Harris, "From 'Behave, Believe, Belong' to 'Belong, Believe, Behave' - a Missional Journey for the 21st Century," in *Text and Task: Scripture and Mission*, ed. Michael Parsons (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2005).
Grenz’ goal is to revision evangelical theology for the postmodern context, we should evaluate this part of his project as being effective.\textsuperscript{169}

In summary we can therefore say that Grenz’ use of his three focal motifs is likely to be effective for younger evangelicals, though more traditional evangelicals may question the absence of obviously soteriological images.

6.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored Grenz’ use of three focal motifs in theological construction, namely Trinity, community and eschatology. After examining Grenz’ understanding of each of the motifs and discussing some of the responses that his suggestions have elicited, the four evaluative questions outlined in chapter 1.4 are posed. In summary form the conclusions are:

1) Does Grenz’ use of the three focal motifs make an original contribution to evangelical theological construction? \textit{Yes, within the evangelical context.}
2) Does Grenz’ use of the three focal motifs reflect a theological method that is coherent and credible? \textit{Yes, though Grenz’ model represents a chastened foundationalism rather than a postfoundational method.}
3) Does Grenz’ use of the three focal motifs genuinely revision evangelical theology? \textit{Yes, while noting a concern at the absence of a motif pointing to the cross and conversion.}
4) Is Grenz’ use of the three focal motifs effective in revisioning evangelical theology? \textit{It is likely to be effective for younger evangelicals, though traditional evangelicals may question the absence of clear soteriological images.}

These conclusions are used to draw up the table of findings in chapter 8.1.

Our next chapter serves as a case study and explores the application of Grenz’ method in his book \textit{Welcoming But Not Affirming}.\textsuperscript{170} It provides a practical test of our thesis proposition “that Stanley Grenz’ theological method effectively revisions evangelical theology.”

\textsuperscript{169} Webber’s selection of Grenz as the theologian who best represents the concerns of what he calls “the younger evangelicals” helps to substantiate this conclusion. Robert E. Webber, \textit{The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World} (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 92.

CHAPTER SEVEN

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

Our thesis proposition is "that Stanley Grenz' theological method effectively revisions evangelical theology." In this chapter we test this against the ability of Grenz' theological method to revision the way evangelicals should respond to one of the major ethical issues facing them.¹

As is the case for the church generally, one of the most emotive and controversial questions facing the evangelical church is its response to the ethical questions that arise from homosexuality. So emotive is the issue that O'Donovan questions if there can be any fruitful debate on the matter. He writes,

A debate occurs when people take up the arguments that others have raised against them, and try to give serious answers. To do that they must think their opponents mistaken, certainly, but not wholly foolish or malicious. They must suppose that some misconception, or some partial truth not fully integrated into other truths, has limited their vision. They must accept the burden of showing how the partial truth fits in with other truths, or of identifying and resolving the misconception. This cannot happen while there is still a struggle for rhetorical dominance; that is to say, while each side hopes to win a monopoly for the categories in which they themselves frame the question.²

O'Donovan goes on to note, "I held back from engagement with this question, partly out of distaste at the sheer bad temper that it generated."³ O'Donovan’s caution should be heeded as we approach this topic. Objectivity can be elusive, and met with a sceptical "whose objectivity?" Perhaps this is the reason that Grenz appears to have been reluctant to write on the topic of homosexuality, noting in his preface to Welcoming but Not Affirming that it was his pastor who urged him to write the book "when I thought I might not."⁴

¹ For the reasons I opt to test Grenz' theological method against an ethical issue, see chapter 1.5.
³ Ibid., 22.
⁴ Stanley J. Grenz, Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), xii. Others have expressed similar reservations. Rae
Though evangelicals have usually been more strident in their condemnation of homosexual behaviour than other sectors of Protestantism, there are groups within evangelicalism who hold firmly to the title of evangelical while advocating for the legitimacy of homosexual practices. Most notable is the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Church (UFMCC). Tass observes that its statement of faith is based on the Apostolic and Nicene creeds and that it is “practically identical to that of the Evangelical Alliance.” Tass notes that the UFMCC justifies its acceptance of homosexual behaviour by arguments that fall into three categories, viz. science, scripture and experience.

In 1979, Robert Johnston linked the debate amongst evangelicals about homosexuality to a difference of opinion of the role of culture in theological formulation,

...it is the influence of contemporary culture that has forced evangelicals to reconsider their theological understanding of homosexuality. Moreover, it is in conflicting views concerning the theological usefulness of contemporary culture that one can discern the developing lines of division within evangelicalism concerning homosexuality in the church.

In analysing Grenz’ treatment of homosexuality we are able to more fully assess the role he allows culture to play as a source for theology, largely because the major clamour for evangelicals to change their understanding of homosexuality has not primarily come from either church historians or biblical scholars, but from those who are aware of the significant shift in public attitudes to homosexuality in recent years. What was once largely portrayed as a matter of individual personal morality is now more commonly seen as a human rights issue closely inter-woven with the question of social justice. The context in which evangelicals are trying to understand scripture and the traditional attitudes of the church to homosexuality has thus undergone considerable change. If culture is genuinely a source for theology, it

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and Redding seem representative when they write, “There are some theological questions which are not approached with any great joy but which we are nevertheless bound to address because they are the questions of the day.” Murray A. Rae and Graham Redding, "Introduction,” in More Than a Single Issue: Theological Considerations Concerning the Ordination of Practising Homosexuals, ed. Murray A. Rae and Graham Redding (Hindmarsh: ATF, 2000). v.


6 Ibid.: 79.


8 This is not to suggest that there is not lively debate amongst evangelicals as to either what constitutes a valid biblical approach to homosexuality or a valid understanding of the church’s tradition on the matter. It is simply to note that the more pressing questions seem to surround the role context and culture (or science and psychology) should play at arriving at an ethical response to the issue.

9 So e.g. Loughlin chastises the church for inconsistency in advocating for the rights of homosexuals outside the church while denying them to homosexuals within the church. Gerard Loughlin, "Gathered at the Altar: Homosexuals and Human Rights," Theology and Sexuality 10, no. 2 (2004).
would seem reasonable to expect that a changed cultural context might lead to different theological conclusions being drawn.

Not that we should assume that the evidence would automatically lead to evangelicals changing their attitude towards homosexuality. Jones and Yarhouse, while accepting that compelling scientific evidence to challenge evangelical understandings of homosexuality would need to be allowed to test and change both biblical and traditional teaching on homosexuality, go on to argue that no such evidence has been forthcoming. They make the methodological point that,

... given the clarity of Scripture, and given the historical consistency of the church's sexual ethic, the burden of proof is on those who want to change the church's historic position to make a strong case for change. Those who want to change the church's position have failed to date to produce a compelling case.\(^\text{10}\)

Earlier they had expressed their conviction that, "Science has nothing to offer that would even remotely constitute persuasive evidence that would compel us to deviate from the historic Christian judgment that full homosexual intimacy, homosexual behaviour, is immoral."\(^\text{11}\) In their opinion then, while they consider the biblical and historical material to be clear, they are willing to give weight to scientific evidence that might suggest the validity of an alternate understanding. They believe that at this stage no such evidence has been produced. While this is a contested area, our interest is in the weight Jones and Yarhouse claim they would be willing to attach to any undeniable scientific evidence.

In an earlier article, written together with Workman, Jones had made a comparable point as to the relevance of the behavioural sciences for theology, albeit that they hedged their bets both way,

We presuppose that the sciences, a potent force in contemporary culture, can and should influence the thought life of the Christian church... In avoiding the error of a radical rejection of dialogue with culture, however, the church must not overidentify with cultural influences or take its agenda from those influences.\(^\text{12}\)

They go on to note the work of Holifield,\(^\text{13}\)

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\(^\text{11}\) Ibid., 13.


Holifield (1983) has documented the tendency for the church, in times of doubt about its historic identity, to allow its mission and identity to be defined by psychological concepts and the broader influences of secular culture rather than by its own distinctive tradition.\(^\text{14}\)

They are concerned lest the same trend be followed in the debate about homosexual behaviour.

One change is that in ethical reflection, postmodernity typically shifts the focus from epistemology to hermeneutics. Rather than concretely knowing that, for example, homosexual behaviour is sinful, one would look for the hermeneutical justification for the conclusion. Evangelicals need to approach the question with caution, mindful that their own history has been one of too readily embracing an oppressive hermeneutic on the grounds that the epistemological issue at stake was clear. Evangelicalism’s muddled response in its attitude to slavery, and the ongoing defence by many evangelicals of a discriminatory attitude towards women, serve as salutary reminders that epistemological certainty can serve as a shield against facing the ethical implications of a particular stance.\(^\text{15}\)

A genuine revisioning of evangelical theology should learn from the mistakes of the past. For example, a commitment could be made to disallow an oppressive hermeneutic, which in the name of fidelity to the biblical text allows for exploitative and inhumane practices.\(^\text{16}\) Richard Hays’ argument that one needs to select hermeneutical lenses through which to read the biblical text, could be appropriated.\(^\text{17}\) Rather than berating the insights of Liberation theologians, a helpful turning point for evangelicals would be a careful listening to the concerns and insights these theologians bring.

\(^{14}\) Jones and Workman, "Homosexuality: The Behavioral Sciences and the Church," 213.

\(^{15}\) In the sense of being absolutely convinced that e.g. the Bible provides a justification for slavery or for excluding women from positions of leadership, or always disallows homosexual practices. It should be noted that those evangelicals who advocate traditional gender roles (the complementarian position), would claim that this is not discriminatory but that as it has a biblical mandate, it is ultimately liberating. See e.g. Fox-Genovese’s Kuyper lecture, “Women and the Future of the Family,” and Grenz’ rebuttal. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and others, Women and the Future of the Family, ed. James W. Skillen and Michelle N. Voll (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).

\(^{16}\) See e.g. Patterson, who outlines the bizarre but tragic biblical defences used to justify the racist executions in the American South. Orlando Patterson, Rituals of Blood: Consequences of Slavery in Two American Centuries (Washington: Civitas Counterpoint, 1998).

Grenz' most systematic treatment of homosexuality is in his book *Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality*. While *Sexual Ethics: An Evangelical Perspective* pays some attention to the ethical issues involved, and the co-authored work by Hoffman and Grenz, *Aids: Ministry in the Midst of an Epidemic* focuses on some key pastoral issues, from a methodological perspective, *Welcoming but Not Affirming* is a clearer example of Grenz' method in practice. *Welcoming but Not Affirming* therefore provides an ideal case study of Grenz' method in dealing with an issue that has been divisive amongst evangelicals. While some might question if it is fair to evaluate Grenz' theological method in a book that more clearly reflects his ethical method, Grenz himself would not be willing to sanction this divide. In *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* he stresses that theology must overflow into ethics, writing passionately that “Whenever theology stops short of this, it has failed to be obedient to its calling.”

The focus of this chapter is not to evaluate the validity of Grenz' stance on homosexuality, but whether his approach supports our thesis proposition “that Stanley Grenz' theological method effectively revisions evangelical theology.” Having said this, while engagement with the issues surrounding homosexuality is not the focus of this chapter, some engagement with them is inevitable, if only to check the credibility of Grenz’ claims.

We are now in a position to explore the effectiveness of Grenz' method in *Welcoming but Not Affirming*.

### 7.2 WELCOMING BUT NOT AFFIRMING

Grenz is willing for *Welcoming but Not Affirming* to be seen as an application of his method, and writes,

> In many respects, *Welcoming but Not Affirming* is a case study in theological ethics. Although the discussion focuses on one specific ethical question, the current debate about homosexuality raises central methodological issues pertaining to Christian ethics in general. These include such crucial but hotly

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20 The choice between Grenz' *Sexual Ethics* and *Welcoming but Not Affirming* was made on the basis that while the 1997 *Sexual Ethics* is theoretically a 2nd edition of Grenz' 1991 *Sexual Ethics*, in practice the changes from edition 1 to 2 are hard to spot. Grenz' method was not fully formed in 1991, and therefore *Sexual Ethics* does not reflect his later methodology, making *Welcoming but Not Affirming* a more appropriate choice.


contested matters as the nature of biblical authority in the church, the role of tradition in contemporary moral understanding, and the importance of current theories in the human sciences for Christian ethical reflection. In a sense, then, what emerges in this volume is an application of the foundational methodological proposal I set forth in *The Moral Quest: Foundations of Christian Ethics.*

The quote highlights his three sources for theology, namely the Bible, tradition and culture (if it is fair to read "the importance of current theories in the human sciences for Christian ethical reflection" as referring to the focal point of cultural input in this debate).

The structure of the book also suggests a close adherence to his theological method.

After a twelve page introduction on homosexuality and Christian sexual ethics, chapter 1 examines the topic of "Homosexuality in Contemporary Perspective." Here Grenz explores the shifting societal attitudes to homosexuality and focuses on causes of homosexuality. The search for a cause reflects an ideological bias, as the causes examined largely presuppose some form of pathology. A similar search for the cause or causes of heterosexuality is not undertaken. If one works from the premise that homosexuality reflects some form of shortfall, its practice is unlikely to be sanctioned. By contrast, if the premise is that homosexuality is a normal, albeit minority, preference, the ethical evaluation is likely to be different. Even as he embarks on the search for causes of homosexuality Grenz acknowledges that "since the mid-twentieth century the belief that homosexuality is a sexual orientation and that it may be the normal condition for some people has gained wide acceptance in professional and academic circles" but the implications of this statement do not impact what follows.

Grenz' decision to search for "causes" leads (probably inevitably) to the conclusion that there is, "Growing consensus within the scientific community that homosexuality is likely the product of both inheritance and environment." Critics would reply that there is as much

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23 Ibid., xi.
24 Ibid. This is not necessarily a self-evident conclusion. Attitudinal changes in society might be seen as a valid source, regardless of whether they are underpinned by social science theories or not.
25 Grenz is fully aware that he lays himself open to this charge: "I embark on this task conscious, however, that a number of writers look askance at the research into the 'causes' of homosexuality. They worry that these endeavours are intrinsically hostile to homosexual persons..." Ibid., 14.
26 The tendency to confuse a "minority preference" with an "abnormal preference" is one that must be avoided. Indeed, if homosexual people are a minority group, it could be argued that the ethical focus should shift to the safeguarding that the Bible encourages for vulnerable groups. The issue is then not one of preventing certain perverse behaviours, but of protecting a susceptible group as a matter of social justice.
28 Ibid., 24.
evidence to suggest that heterosexuality is the likely product of both inheritance and environment. By singling out causes of the one and not the other, Grenz stigmatizes before he gets to theologize. Taking an alternate view, New Zealand-based pastoral theologian, Philip Culbertson, notes that “In 1993, the Archbishop of Canterbury disassociated himself from a mission in London dedicated to healing homosexuality, saying, ’I am not aware that homosexuality is a disease which is in need of healing.’” Later Culbertson goes on to inform,

In today’s counselling world, the American Psychiatric Association of Social Workers, the American Psychological Association, the National Association of Social Workers, and the National Association for Marriage and Family Therapy state that it is unethical for members to treat gayness as an emotional disorder or to discriminate in any way on the basis of sexual orientation.

In setting the contemporary context, Grenz portrays two worlds, the one where homosexuality is an abnormal condition whose causes must be redressed so that the homosexual orientation can be changed, the other, one where the privileging of heterosexuality is seen as the root cause for widespread homophobia, and where the normality of homosexuality must be affirmed and celebrated. In such a world, any effort to change a person’s homosexual orientation is inappropriate.

Here we come to the heart of a dilemma in Grenz’ method. When it comes to the question of homosexuality, allowing culture as a source for theology (and theological ethics) simply produces an array of options. Which voices should be heeded? Consistent with Grenz’ method is his shift to a second source for theology, that of the biblical message. The cultural voices that are privileged will be those that cohere with the biblical message and the tradition of the church. While there is a certain “common sense” feel to this, it is not unproblematic. The cultural voices heeded shape the way that both the biblical text and tradition are understood. Alternate choices can lead to an alternate hermeneutic, as is demonstrated by the development of “Queer hermeneutics,” which reads both the biblical text and tradition in a different light.

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30 Ibid., 191.
31 For example, Gray Temple, using the grid of scripture, tradition and reason (what he calls “the three-stranded chord of Anglican authority”), arrives at very different conclusions to Grenz, and in a quest for “the grace of relational stability” argues for “same-sex unions as a sacramental option.” Gray Temple, *Gay Unions: In the Light of Scripture, Tradition and Reason* (New York: Church Publishing, 2004), 21, 129.
In chapter two Grenz begins his analysis of the biblical material on homosexuality. He is quick to affirm that “homosexual conduct is not a major theme in the Bible” but that Christian ethicists when examining the limited number of relevant biblical passages have “found in these texts a clear rejection of all genital homosexual behaviour.” He then notes that more recently “a growing chorus of exegetes” has voiced disagreement with these traditional conclusions and have argued that the text has been misread.  

From a methodological perspective, Grenz then makes an important comment when he states: “My intent is not to offer a complete exegesis of any one text, but to determine whether recent scholarship has provided sufficient new insight into these texts to warrant our rejection of the traditional interpretation.”

Two points should be noted.

Though Grenz views tradition as a source for theology, if “recent scholarship” can show traditional interpretations to be flawed, the implication is that the traditional stance will be ignored. At this point it is hard to see how tradition is a genuine source for theology. If it is a source only if it is deemed to be accurate in the light of another more definitive source, namely valid biblical interpretation, this seems to assign tradition little more than a supporting role when and if it is convenient.

Second, one needs to determine if “recent scholarship has provided sufficient new insights into these texts.” The obvious question is to ask how this will be determined. While the field of hermeneutics and biblical exegesis is its own speciality, what is noteworthy is what is not suggested. At the heart of Grenz’ methodological revisioning of the role of scripture in sourcing theological insights was the need to reclaim not only the doctrine of the inspiration of scripture, but its illumination by the Spirit. Grenz’ proposal is that this illumination comes to the faithful community of God in their historic and geographic locatedness and that it is pneumatomatically mediated and communally received.

Rather than this revisioned agenda being implemented when the text is approached, what follows is a standard evangelical exegesis of the text, which is assumed to be inspired and therefore able to be propositionally analysed to yield timeless truths and propositions. None of this is remarkable for evangelical ethics, but what is disappointing is that it falls well short of the revisioned evangelical theology that Grenz proposes.

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32 Grenz, Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality, 35.
33 Ibid., 36.
At another level, it raises the question of how Grenz' methodological proposals can be implemented. While it is easy to affirm the importance of allowing the biblical text to be illuminated to a located believing community able to discern that this is the word of God to them, in practice, this is difficult to do. Certainly when Grenz reflects upon a pressing ethical issue facing the evangelical church, he seems to find a more traditional evangelical method easier to work with. The critique is not necessarily of the concept, but of how practical it is. In essence, how does one concretize the more subjective aspects of the faith (what the Spirit is saying to us)? There is an inherent tension in trying to do so, and it is not clear how this tension can be resolved. While Grenz' method attempts to overcome individual subjectivity by locating illumination within a communal setting, communities, like individuals, are prone to subjective whims and bias. They are also often “stakeholders” in the outcome.

After promising to review recent scholarship, Grenz proceeds to do so, his study leading him to the conclusion that “scholars who propose that the church accept committed same-sex relationships have yet to produce a sufficient basis for revising the traditional belief that the biblical writers condemned homosexual conduct.” He allows for one possible loophole in his argument, namely that in their condemnation of homosexual behaviour “what the biblical writers were referring to in their contexts was so different from the modern phenomena that we simply cannot transfer their condemnatory response to the ancient phenomena to the present situation.” He returns to this issue after his examination of the church’s teaching on homosexuality through history. His willingness to examine the implication of the altered social context in which homosexuality is practiced is consistent with his proposal that culture and context be allowed a voice as a source for theology.

Chapter three sees Grenz utilize the source of tradition for his exploration of homosexuality. He examines the argument that while there is a widespread assumption of a uniform rejection of homosexuality in the church’s history, in actual fact a more nuanced reading of the church’s tradition is possible. His stated goal in this chapter is to “determine the extent to

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34 This is well illustrated by Gray Temple’s book where Temple claims to have heard a direct word from God (“My Trinitarian discernment is sometimes fuzzy, but it felt like the First Person”) instructing him that same sex unions are to be sanctioned, and then had that confirmed when another friend (also a theology graduate) claimed a comparable experience. Using Grenz’ method, Temple could claim that his experience was communally supported. Temple, 129.

35 Yoder tackles this question more fully than Grenz. His argument that communal discernment takes place via the interaction of agents of direction (prophets), agents of memory (scribes), agents of linguistic self-consciousness (teachers) and agents of order and due process (elders, bishops and overseers) helps to flesh out one possible way that communal discernment might take place in practice. See John Howard Yoder, The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

36 Grenz, Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality, 62.
which the church has consistently rejected homosexual behaviour as sinful, as well as to consider the significance of that rejection.\textsuperscript{37} His conclusion is that “explicit moral references to such behaviour in the Christian tradition were consistently negative,” and that “In each era, Christian moralists rejected the same-sex practices of their day.”\textsuperscript{38} Thus while acknowledging possible alternate readings of the church’s tradition, Grenz does not find them sufficiently compelling to be taken seriously. The answer to the question “which tradition” therefore seems to be “the dominant tradition.” While not surprising, it is hard to see how genuine revisioning can take place if only dominating themes are allowed to inform the discussion.\textsuperscript{39}

In chapter four Grenz returns to the topic of the Bible’s teaching on homosexuality, but shifts his focus to “raise the controversial matter of the authority of the Bible in Christian sexual ethics.”\textsuperscript{40} Grenz’ style in the book is often to raise “straw men” that can quickly be demolished to help strengthen an alternate point of view. In this chapter he considers proposals that the Bible is silent on homosexuality (passages such as Gen 19 and Judges 19 dealing more with rape and a failure of hospitality than homosexuality as such) or that it is partially silent (not recognizing homosexuality as a fixed sexual orientation, and therefore not necessarily condemning long term loving relationships between persons of the same sex) or that the Bible is simply incorrect in its attitude. Finding each stance inadequate, Grenz then turns to his preferred option of biblical normativity. He recognizes that the challenge of this approach is to find “what hermeneutical key can bring the Bible into constructive conversation with our contemporary situation.”\textsuperscript{41}

Rather than citing individual texts, Grenz suggests that a hermeneutical path is to explore biblical themes that capture the heart of the Bible’s message, and then to relate these to the ethical issues raised by homosexuality. Motifs he explores are those of covenant, love, justice and liberation.\textsuperscript{42} The rationale behind this approach is that the “part’ must be understood in the light of the ‘whole.’”\textsuperscript{43} The pitfall with this method, as Grenz is quick to point out, is that “a person’s prior conclusions about the ethical status of homosexuality often determine the

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 64.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 80.
\textsuperscript{39} This would be particularly true for a question like homosexuality. There is no serious doubt that heterosexuality is a majority preference. By virtue of its minority status, homosexuality is unlikely to receive a substantial or sympathetic focus in the church’s tradition. Grenz is willing to acknowledge that negative evaluations of homosexuality are often on the basis of obvious immorality (promiscuous rather than faithfully committed relationships), but does not seriously explore the implication of the church not accepting homosexuality as a permanent sexual orientation for a minority group.
\textsuperscript{40} Grenz, \textit{Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality}, 81.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 90.
\textsuperscript{42} These bear little obvious resemblance to the motifs of Trinity, community and eschatology that he suggests for theological construction. Ibid., 90-95.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 95.
answer” as to what is loving, just or liberating.\textsuperscript{44} He raises the specific question of whether freedom from homophobia (and thus freedom to embrace homosexuality) or freedom from homosexual desires constitutes liberation, and asks simply, “Which of these two visions of liberation ought we to embrace?”\textsuperscript{45}

Grenz suggests that the hermeneutical and methodological path forward is “to inform the contemporary debate by looking to the whole of scripture (and Christian tradition).”\textsuperscript{46} Given that this is what he has been attempting to do up until this point, it is hard to see why this will yield any additional breakthrough. However, at this stage he introduces an additional control mechanism, viz. that of a teleologically based ethic, which arrives at ethical decisions on the basis of “the context of our human telos as intended by God.”\textsuperscript{47} While this is not quite the same as using eschatology as an orienting motif for theology, it is consistent with it.\textsuperscript{48}

In chapter five, Grenz attempts to unpack the telos of human sexuality by unpacking the motivation behind the biblical texts that condemn homosexual behaviour. More specifically, Grenz attempts to understand why the biblical authors reject homosexual acts as unnatural by exploring “God’s intention for human life as depicted in the biblical narrative.”\textsuperscript{49}

Grenz places emphasis on the creation and union of male and female in the Genesis account as providing the normative pattern for human sexuality.\textsuperscript{50} He dismisses the view that a key reason for this was the importance of procreation for an agricultural people by arguing that the creation narratives continued to be appealed to by later biblical authors, even in an urban setting.\textsuperscript{51} The weakness of the “straw man” approach is evident here. Having dismissed one objection to utilizing the creation pattern as defining what should be normative\textsuperscript{52} he continues as though the falsity of one position establishes the validity of his own.\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 98.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 99.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 100. One is naturally tempted to ask how one decides what this telos is other than by again simply appealing to the whole of scripture and Christian tradition, which then takes us back to where we started.
\textsuperscript{48} A point apparently not appreciated by Haas who specifically criticises Grenz for failing to utilize an eschatological framework in his work on homosexuality. Guenther Haas, ”Perspectives on Homosexuality: A Review Article,” Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 45, no. 2 (2002): 506.
\textsuperscript{49} Grenz, Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality, 101.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 102.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 102-103.
\textsuperscript{52} He takes it even further, and is willing to link it to the concept of what is “natural” and “unnatural.” Methodologically it is a huge leap to link what is statistically more common to that which is “natural,” and that which is uncommon, to the “unnatural,” especially if the term implies a form of ethical evaluation, as it does when Grenz uses it. For example, it is not common for people to have an IQ of
Grenz then acknowledges a remarkable bias in his exploration when in his section on same-sex intercourse he writes: "My goal is to determine in what sense the act may be deemed unethical in and of itself. What is it about the practice that makes it morally suspect even when it occurs within the context of a stable homosexual relationship." Perhaps Grenz feels that his earlier exploration of the contemporary situation, the biblical texts and tradition gives him enough of a basis on which to dismiss the possibility that homosexual acts can ever be sanctioned, but this does give the impression that the debate is being closed before it has been fully opened.

Grenz suggests that same-sex sexual relationships fall short of the *telos* of human sexuality because they always fall short of embracing one who is truly "other." He attaches significance to the genital otherness of male and female and the natural complementarity between the sexes. His approach is based on physicality at this point, and he argues that it is important that the physical act "ritually enact the reality it symbolizes." This is that two "other" persons become one.

Philosophically Grenz is drawing from Barth who stresses that the interaction of similarity and difference between male and female marks the way in which human sexuality comprises the *imago Dei*. Grenz agrees with Frykberg who suggests that Barth saw a correlation of three I-Thou relationships, first, God in relationship with God's self within the trinitarian life, second, humans relating as male-female and third, God and humans in relationship. Each involves similarity and difference within an I-Thou structure. To the extent that homosexual relationships simply model similarity, they fall short of representing the *imago Dei*. However

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55 Why, for example, does Grenz not consider the possibility that the Genesis account paints a broad general picture of human relationships? Every possible exception cannot be mentioned, and as homosexuality is a minority preference, it is not surprising that it is not dealt with.


57 Grenz quotes Barth, "The man created good by God must have a partner in which he can recognize himself, and yet not himself but another, seeing it is not only like him but also different from him." Barth, 291. Quoted in Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei*, 298.
this perpetuates the myth that all men are intrinsically the same, and all women intrinsically the same, with the differences lying between the sexes. Only a radically reductionist model can support such a thesis. To the extent that Grenz’ focus is on genital differentiation, he is vulnerable to such an accusation.59

Grenz recognises three key meanings of the sex act within marriage, viz. a symbol of the exclusive bond within the marriage relationship, second a sign of the mutuality of the relationship and third an openness to the possibility of the creation of new life.60 Not wanting to place undue emphasis on the non-procreative possibility of same-sex intercourse, Grenz has to attempt to answer why the first two meanings cannot be met by a mutual, lifelong commitment between homosexual persons, and does so by attempting to unpack the symbolic meaning of sexual intercourse within a committed relationship. While his conclusion that only a committed heterosexual couple can portray an adequate “two persons united in one-flesh union”61 is used to substantiate his prior conclusion on the appropriateness of the church’s historic teaching that “rightly advocates chastity in the form of abstinence in singleness and fidelity in marriage,”62 his argument is unlikely to convince those not already convinced, partly because it rests largely on the physical characteristics of male and female genitalia.63 The argument seems to create more problems than it solves.64

59 Grenz implicitly replies to this concern by quoting Stackhouse “the marriage bond is a community of love between those who are ‘other.’ This means not simply ‘an-other’ person, but one who is truly ‘other.’” However this still hinges everything on genital difference. Grenz, Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality, 114. Max L. Stackhouse, “The Heterosexual Norm,” in Homosexuality and Christian Community, ed. Choon-Leong Seow (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1996), 141.

60 Grenz, Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality, 108.

61 Ibid., 112.

62 Ibid., 109.

63 Crassly put, that a penis most naturally fits into a vagina, and that any other configuration is unsatisfactory and does not lead to two “others” becoming one. To quote Grenz, in same-sex intercourse, “the specific body part each contributes to the act does not represent what distinguishes each from the other.” As such, Grenz argues that homosexual sex is not a symbol of wholeness. Limiting “otherness” to genital otherness seems reductionist, especially in a work arguing that deep significance should be attached to the sexual act. Using this logic, regardless of the depth of relationship between two people of the same sex, their genital correspondence would prohibit any sexual activity. The inference is that genital differentiation rather than relationship is the ultimate driver. Grenz would reply that genuine relationship would be severed if inappropriate sexual activity takes place. Thus “the moral difficulty emerges... in that the ‘targets’ of these desires are... friends.” Ibid., 111, 110-115, 121-122.

64 Using the same logic, masturbation would have to be labelled as taboo. Grenz is not prepared to go that far. In his Sexual Ethics, while he gives several warnings as to the potential dangers of masturbation, Grenz acknowledges that “masturbation does offer certain benefits” albeit that “it can only be accepted as a phase en route to a higher level of sexuality and sexual expression.” One asks why this “second best” option is acceptable as a stage of heterosexual development, but that the same logic of “second best is better than other options” is not acceptable in same-sex relationships. If as Grenz suggests, “masturbation is a better alternative than premarital sex” why is long term, committed same-sex intercourse within a covenant relationship not better than either aloneness or casual sexual encounters (of whatever nature)? Grenz, Sexual Ethics: An Evangelical Perspective, 214-215.
McCarthy is particularly critical of Grenz for attaching too much significance to the symbolic and ritual character of sexual intercourse and argues that by making the physical act decisive, Grenz skews the relationship of sex to marriage. He counters,

Actually, marriage is the key to the meaning of sex, rather than sex the key to the meaning of marriage. The practical aspects of marriage shape our lives and create the setting for fulfilling sex. Biblically, marriage, not sex, is the theological metaphor. The stable joining of two lives in marriage expresses steadfast love far more completely than does the sexual act.65

Grenz then asks if homosexuality can represent a stable and fixed sexual orientation. However, as he precedes it by discussion of the “naturalistic fallacy” that derives “an ‘ought’ from an ‘is,’” he makes clear his unwillingness to allow any findings in this regard to seriously impact his position.66

Arguing that the only option for sexual expression for homosexual persons is “fidelity within (heterosexual) marriage or abstinent singleness,” Grenz attempts to sidestep the accusation that such a formula confers celibacy on all homosexual persons by distinguishing between celibacy and abstinence.68 He argues that unmarried homosexual persons should commit themselves to abstinence, and that “abstinence in singleness” is a call made to all Christians, and that homosexual people should therefore not consider themselves specially singled out in this regard. However, this simply refuses to engage the issue that heterosexual persons whilst “abstinent in singleness” have a realistic hope that their singleness will end, while homosexual people, following the criteria for acceptable relationships as laid down by Grenz, do not.

In chapter six Grenz discusses the place of homosexual persons in the church. He begins by dismissing approaches that focus on “the most ‘pastoral’ response,” urging a focus on genuine

66 He writes: “Thus, even if homosexuality were indisputably ‘natural’ for certain people, this would not, in and of itself justify their engaging in same-sex practices.” However, as he does not stipulate any conditions under which it would justify same-sex practice, one is left with the impression that he is again building straw men because he wishes to demolish them, rather than because he is willing to engage the debate in a serious manner. Grenz, Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality, 117.
67 Ibid., 125.
68 Thielicke expresses the danger inherent in assuming that homosexual people who are unable to alter their orientation must have the gift of celibacy when he writes: “Celibacy cannot be used as a counterargument, because celibacy is based upon a special calling, and moreover, is an act of free will.” Helmut Thielicke, The Ethics of Sex, trans. John W. Doberstein (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1964), 285.
ethical reflection rather than "pragmatic, or even what appear to be solid, pastoral considerations."69 This seems to drive an unnecessary wedge between pastoral theology and ethics. In the 1930s Anton Boisen, founder of the clinical pastoral education movement, warned of the dangers of so focusing on the biblical and historical texts that one ignored the "human documents."70 Grenz' failure to heed this warning reflects a significant weakness in this work.71

Focusing primarily on "the moral status of persons living in stable same-sex relationships" Grenz explores four issues, viz. church membership, same-sex unions, ordination and civil rights.72

While willing to welcome abstinent homosexual people into church membership, Grenz states that "... the church... has a responsibility to nurture and also to admonish and discipline the wayward in its midst, including those who are not living in sexual chastity..."73 Earlier he had approvingly quoted Richard Hays' insight that "We live knowing that wholeness remains a hope rather than an attainment in this life. The homosexual Christians in our midst may teach us something about our true condition as people living between the cross and the final redemption of our bodies."74

Predictably, while Grenz sees no place for the church to bless same sex relationships in a way that might imply marriage, he is supportive of gay and lesbian persons enjoying "friendship bonds" where "their commitment to each other is not to be expressed through genital sexual acts."75

Grenz follows through his argument consistently in reasoning that struggling with homosexual desires is not a basis on which to exclude a person from ordination, but that "fitness for ordination... entails leading a chaste life in the midst of the experience of the

69 Grenz, Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality, 131.
70 "I was much concerned that theological students should have the opportunity to go to first-hand sources for their knowledge of human nature. I wanted them to learn to read human documents as well as books..." Anton T. Boisen, The Exploration of the Inner World: A Study of Mental Disorder and Religious Experience (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1936), 10.
71 It is particularly startling given his focus on "community" as an integrative motif for theology. How can community be an integrating motif if the stories of the community are neither heard nor privileged? This is a serious criticism that will be developed later.
72 Grenz, Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality, 133.
73 Ibid., 134.
74 Ibid., 133. The "them/us" nature of this quote is striking, as is the failure to ask the pastoral question, "How does it feel to serve the community as a sign of the elusiveness of wholeness?" Grenz is quoting from Richard B. Hays, "Awaiting the Redemption of Our Bodies: Drawing on Scripture and Tradition in the Church Debate on Homosexuality," Latimer 110 (1992): 29-30.
75 Grenz, Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality, 139.
brokenness of our desires.”76 Thus, provided a person follows Grenz’ guideline of fidelity in heterosexual marriage or sexual abstinence in singleness, Grenz sees no reason for exclusion from any area of the life of the church on the grounds of homoerotic impulses.

Does Grenz too readily accept a divide between sexual orientation and sexual practice? While most accept that individuals have little choice in the development of their sexual orientation, be it either heterosexual or homosexual, but argue that people are accountable for their actions, it raises the question of the moral status of the gap between what people feel and what people do. Scanzoni, while better known for being one of evangelicalism’s most sympathetic and permissive writers on homosexuality,77 points to the sub-biblical nature of such a split when she writes, “The Scriptures are quite plain in teaching that if an action is wrong, the longing to engage in that action is just as wrong (e.g., Matt.5:27-28; 1John3:15).”78 Evangelicals most commonly side step this issue by distinguishing between the generalized guilt of living in a fallen world (the fall explaining the distortion from the God intended ideal of heterosexual impulses), and the response to the particular temptations faced. While providing a partial answer, it does not overcome the implicit compartmentalization conditioned by the approach. As postmodern approaches to human personality stress holism, this is unlikely to impress audiences who have moved beyond modernity. Grenz never really addresses this point.

On the issue of civil rights Grenz states that “Patterning our lives after Jesus’ example includes adamant support of fair treatment for all persons in our society, including gays and lesbians.”79 While the tone of Grenz’ writing at this point is sympathetic, he is reticent to commit to any firm legislative changes, simply acknowledging that “justice within a relationship does not allow us to ignore the question of social and economic benefits to various types of living arrangements.”80 He suggests differentiating on the basis of those rights that safeguard couples and those that flow from the desire to protect marriage as a nurturing environment for children, indicating “that Christians might well support extending

76 Ibid., 147. For an alternate and more sympathetic perspective see Murray A. Rae, “In Earthen Vessels: Considerations Concerning Homosexuality and Ministry,” in More Than a Single Issue: Theological Considerations Concerning the Ordination of Practising Homosexuals, ed. Murray A. Rae and Graham Redding (Hindmarsh: ATF, 2000).
79 Grenz, Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality, 150.
80 Ibid., 152.
the former to participants in a variety of living arrangements, so long as the latter are reserved for marriage.”

Methodologically Grenz’ closing epilogue is significant. He accurately summarizes the situation facing the Christian church when he writes,

Several visions of the Christian community are currently vying for attention. Each of these seeks to preserve a dimension of the foundational, biblical narrative we share. And each has the power to shape the church in the immediate, if not long-term, future.

Proponents of an open stance toward homosexuality articulate one such vision. Their goal is to construct a community that is truly inclusive and that stands firmly on the side of the oppressed and marginalized of society.

...Because they are convinced this is where God is now at work in our world, proponents are attempting to mobilize the church to engage the battle in solidarity with gay and lesbian persons.

He goes on to examine the way proponents of an inclusive approach view certain biblical narratives as paradigmatic, exploring in particular the account of the conversion of Cornelius. Rejecting the suggestion that the prejudice and exclusion Cornelius faced parallels the situation faced by lesbian and gay people today, Grenz suggests “The question that divides discussion participants is: Is it proper for Christians to respond to homosexual urges by forming same-sex sexual unions?” To this question Grenz gives an unequivocal no.

Methodologically this is significant. In Revisioning Evangelical Theology as well as in Renewing the Center and Beyond Foundationalism Grenz warned of the danger of stressing biblical inspiration at the expense of biblical illumination. The Bible is the Spirit’s book and as the faith community reads it diligently, it is corporately led to perceive what God is doing in the world.

81 Ibid.
82 Ibid., 153-154.
83 Acts 10:1-11:18
84 “Few participants in the current debate deny that homosexual persons can be Christians.” Grenz, Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality, 154.
85 Ibid., 155.
87 E.g. “…we often collapse the Spirit into the Bible. We exchange the dynamic of the ongoing movement of the Spirit speaking to the community of God’s people through the pages of the Bible for the book we hold in our hands.” Grenz, Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century, 117.
Grenz' polite but firm rejection of the biblical insights of those who would be both welcoming and affirming to those engaged in same-sex sexual unions, indicates that he is not easily convinced by a plea of Spirit mediated biblical illumination by a Christian community. His exegesis of the Cornelius passage, supplemented by his fuller discussion of the biblical material, his examination of the tradition of the church and his understanding of the insights of contemporary culture, have led him to reject the possibility that same-sex sexual unions might have covenantal validity.

Grenz' use of an integrated (coherent) approach rather than of an unintegrated (foundationalist) approach is consistent with his method, but does raise the question of what his insistence on the importance of biblical illumination by the Spirit guided community might mean in practice. Any new insight is unlikely to meet the criteria of being consistent with the church's tradition, while new insights from the text are likely to be disallowed on the basis of traditional biblical exegesis. Certainly if this test case is representative, the method seems to produce little that is new, and it is hard to see how anything genuinely new would be allowed.

While this might be reassuring to opponents of Grenz' work such as Don Carson who fears that, "Grenz' reformulation of the doctrine of Scripture is so domesticated by postmodern relativism that it stands well and truly outside the evangelical camp (whether 'evangelical' is here understood theologically or socially/historically)," it falls short of allowing one to affirm the thesis proposition "that Stanley Grenz' theological method effectively revisions evangelical theology."

7.3 GENERAL ISSUES

Grenz is well versed in the social sciences and is well aware of constructionist views of reality. It is therefore a little surprising that he does not interact more fully with constructionist views of homosexuality. Waetjen articulates some constructionist views,

Homosexuality and heterosexuality... are modern orientations that presuppose the sociocultural constructs of sexuality. Both terms in fact originated a little more than one hundred years ago... Consequently, none of

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the texts of the Bible’s two testaments that deal with sexual deviance can or should be related to what today is being called ‘homosexuality.’

Working from a constructionist model, Thatcher looks to a day “after heterosexuality,” when the control mechanisms implicit in terms such as heterosexuality and marriage are superseded,

...heterosexuality has hitherto operated as an exclusive social institution, which together with marriage, has regulated all sexual contact. Heterosexuality has confined sexual expression between persons of different sexes: marriage has limited sexual expression to persons married to each other. Heterosexuality became compulsory. It was believed to have been ordained by God. Any homosexual expression could not therefore please God. Heterosexuality enforces itself by marginalizing lesbian, gay and bisexual people. ‘After heterosexuality’ means once heterosexuality was compulsory: now it no longer is. To utter the words ‘after heterosexuality’ is to be able to relativize another hitherto unquestioned institution; perhaps it is to see that the term itself belongs to the medical terminology of the late nineteenth century; that its purpose has been to enforce, to marginalize, to stigmatize. It is to entertain the possibility that the diversity of sexual orientation found amongst human beings is due to our having been wonderfully made by God. It is the possibility of straight, lesbian, bisexual and gay people being able to join together in worship and proclaim together in praise...

Thatcher constructs a portrait of marriage after patriarchy, heterosexuality and modernity. This construction is in response to the oppressive framework that Thatcher believes this trio imposes, and is an attempt to construct a model for Christian marriage for postmodern times.

Grenz has also failed to heed constructionist views of gender. Lea and Schoene are broadly representative of the voices coming from the social sciences when they write,

masculinity, hitherto the implied, culturally inscribed normative standard of all gender identifications, has once and for all lost its traditional transparency as the incontestable biological essence of unadulterated manly being and instead become visible as a performative gender construct, and a rather frail and fraudulent one to boot. Rather than denoting just one fixed, polarized point on a hierarchically oppositional axis of distinctly intelligible gender binaries, masculinity has been revealed to oscillate within a virtually limitless

In spite of Grenz’ commitment to develop a relevant theology for a postmodern era, *Welcoming but Not Affirming* fails to seriously engage and critique these issues. In other words, the voice of culture has not been heeded as a serious conversation partner. At this point the flaw is not with Grenz’ proposed theological method, but with his failure to fully follow through on his own proposal.

Grenz’ disallowing of constructionist views of homosexuality raises another issue related to the use of culture as a source for theology. Having three sources for theology simply compounds the hermeneutical dilemma – which understanding of scripture, which tradition and which view of culture? When focusing on culture, which discipline studying culture should be favoured? Is it sociology, or anthropology or psychology, and if a choice can be made, which lens within each of these disciplines should be adopted?

Grenz makes some progress toward an answer in his article “Culture and Spirit: The Role of Cultural Context in Theological Reflection.” In it he asks and answers,

How, then, can theology take culture seriously without imperiling the commitment to Scripture as theology’s norming norm? In other words, does not the call for a culture-sensitive theology undermine the classic Protestant focus on Word and Spirit? The answer to this question lies in pneumatology, more particularly in the construction of a theological link between culture and Spirit. The connection between culture and Spirit, in turn, lies in an understanding of culture as the Spirit’s voice.92

One has to ask how the theological link between culture and the Spirit is to be built. The model adopted in *Welcoming but Not Affirming* suggests that it is via classical biblical exegesis, a mainstream understanding of tradition and the selective use of culture, where only evidence that supports the insights from the first two sources is allowed.93 Ironically, this seems a most unpneumatological pneumatology.

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93 This is a strong accusation, but is seen in Grenz’ insistence, for example, that scientific research has not established that homosexual attraction “is either innate or an ineradicable trait that for this reason can be said to be normal for some persons.” Grenz, *Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality*, 32. Culbertson argues that such a position flies in the face of the findings of, amongst others, the American Psychiatric Association of Social Workers, the American
7.4 METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

It seems reasonable to evaluate Grenz' method by his own model for theological engagement. In Grenz' model the key sources are scripture, tradition, and culture, while the structuring motif is the Trinity, with community as the integrative motif and eschatology as the orienting motif. The Spirit is seen to work in such a way that the conversation of the three sources around the three focal motifs leads the community of faith toward insights appropriate for the time and context. It is now proper to evaluate Grenz' use of his own method to test if it supports the thesis proposition "that Stanley Grenz' theological method effectively revisions evangelical theology."

7.4.1 Scripture

Welcoming but Not Affirming pays close attention to the biblical material on homosexuality. Grenz examines both those texts that obviously deal with homosexuality, as well as those that could be seen to have a bearing on the topic.\(^4\) In addition, he tries to relate his understanding of the Bible's teaching on the broader topic of human sexuality to the questions raised by homosexuality. His examination is responsible though not exhaustive,\(^5\) and he operates from a traditional evangelical framework whilst being willing to examine alternate viewpoints. It is clear that he treats the authority of the text as a given and is not willing to dismiss any passages as ill informed or irrelevant.

Noting the variety and diversity of ethical modes present in the Bible, Hovey cites commands (such as you shall not kill), principles (do not resist one who is evil), practices (when you pray) and virtues (faith, hope, love) to be broadly representative.\(^6\) While Grenz does not limit his examination of homosexuality to those texts which are commands, the greater weight of

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\(^4\) The classic texts are Genesis 19:4-11, Judges 19, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, Romans 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10. Those with a less obvious but possibly significant relevance (what Grenz calls "the silent texts") include the alleged homosexual innuendo in the friendship between David and Jonathan (especially David's lament in 2 Samuel 1:26) and more generally the range of same sex friendships in scripture (e.g. Ruth and Naomi) as well as Jesus' silence on the topic. Grenz, Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality, 59.

\(^5\) Which is acceptable given that Welcoming but Not Affirming is only 210 pages long (and only 157 excluding notes and appendices). There are 15 pages of recommendations for further reading, suggesting that Grenz has researched the topic thoroughly.

his reflection is geared toward the explicit, rather than more implicit virtues and principles operating throughout scripture. As the postmodern turn has seen an unease with commands and a greater emphasis on virtues, this is at variance with what would be expected from a theology constructed to appeal to a postmodern context. If the balance had been different, it is possible that Grenz might have adopted a more open stance.

From an evangelical perspective there is nothing particularly remarkable about Grenz' exegesis or his conclusions. Given that Grenz claims to have revisioned the way evangelicals should understand biblical authority, this is unsatisfactory. For example, in Revisioning Evangelical Theology he writes, “A revisioned doctrine of Scripture must incorporate... the integral relationship between the Bible and the Spirit.”97 This pneumatologically mediated approach is to be supplemented with community discernment. Yet neither pneumatology nor community discernment play any noticeable role when Grenz comes to explore this topic.98

This is not being unnecessarily pedantic, as is highlighted if one explores the stance of the evangelical UFMCC that a homosexual orientation is God created and that traditional readings of supposedly anti-gay biblical texts are based on sexual prejudice and the failure to pay close attention to the context of the relevant passages. This challenges Grenz' insistent stance that it is the Spirit illuminated text, interpreted by the community, that is authoritative.

As a Christian denomination, the UFMCC cannot be accused of allowing individual subjectivity to dominate. They meet Grenz' criteria for being a community, and they claim to be guided by the Spirit illuminated scriptures received and interpreted by the UFMCC.

Clearly Grenz does not accept the stance adopted by this group, but his emphasis on the illumination of scripture by particular communities of faith make it difficult to see how he can reject their interpretation of scripture.99

While claims of openness to the illumination of the Spirit and community discernment have appeal, when it comes to dealing with this specific issue, Grenz does not appear to have carefully thought through the implication. Suggesting that this is an unfair criticism for a work on ethics as opposed to doctrinal formulation is inadequate as the major issues facing the church usually come in an ethical guise. Baptist theologian James McClendon takes this so seriously that in his theological method he argues that theological formulation begins with

97 Grenz, Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century, 114.
98 Grenz might reply that community discernment has taken place at the level of evangelicalism in general, which is usually condemning of homosexual practices.
99 For a thought provoking study of the process of discernment which led to two Baptist congregations adopting both a welcoming and affirming stance on homosexuality, and which led to their subsequent disaffiliation from their denomination, see Fred Glennon, "Must a Covenantal Sexual Ethic Be Heterocentric? Insights from Congregations," Persepectives in Religious Studies 28, no. 3 (2001).
an examination of ethics, suggesting that the lived out ethic of the church speaks more loudly of its belief system than any theoretical formulation.¹⁰⁰

7.4.2 Tradition

The use of tradition as a conversation partner in the formulation of a revisioned theology is interesting, as tradition will usually play a conservative role and point back to the status quo, rather than toward an embrace of the new or the novel. Exceptions can occur if the church’s earlier practice is in conflict with its current practice. As tradition is not static, this is always a possibility.

In his examination of tradition Grenz raises flickers of hope for the pro gay lobby, though he raises them only to destroy them. He systematically, though rapidly, works his way through different eras of church history.

While Grenz attempts to demonstrate that the concern about homosexual practice in the Patristic era extended beyond the widespread practice of pederasty in Roman society, almost all his examples are of the condemnation of men who defiled boys. Logic requires that this be seen as a different ethical issue, a point Grenz only partially acknowledges.

He continues his survey of church history, selecting what he considers to be representative examples of opposition to homosexual practice, while acknowledging that at some times the opposition was more pronounced than at others. Although acknowledging that at times practice was at variance with actual church teaching, he does not explore the potential implication of this.¹⁰¹ While Grenz’ concern is to demonstrate a consistent opposition to homosexual practice in the church’s history, he fails to critically engage the reasons behind the opposition. For example, he credits Thomas Aquinas with “perhaps the most carefully reasoned moral argument against homosexual behaviour constructed prior to the modern era,”¹⁰² but then suggests that Aquinas’ opposition is primarily because “these practices are devoid of the potential for procreation” without offering any critique of this line of argument.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ E.g. Grenz, Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality, 68. This reverts to the “which tradition?” question. Should it be tradition as it should have been according to official church teaching, or tradition as it was according to church practice? Alternatively expressed, should attention be paid to the gap between church teaching and church practice?
¹⁰² Ibid., 70.
¹⁰³ Ibid., 71.
If tradition is to be a source for theology and a serious conversation partner in a revisioned evangelical theology, it will need to be a more carefully critiqued tradition. Simply to note that the church has been opposed to some behaviours, without acknowledging the flaws in the rationale used to justify the opposition, is unlikely to birth an adequately revisioned theology.

A significant point that comes out of Grenz’ historical review is his awareness that the church has often seen the need to serve as a counter to the prevailing cultural practices. For example he writes, “In response to what they saw as the immorality of Roman society, Christian moralists took seriously the New Testament call to chaste living.” As Grenz suggests that culture, like tradition, is a source for theology, this helps to establish that it is not a naïve cultural adaptation that is being advocated. Indeed, Grenz indicates that being the church in a particular cultural and historical context often shaped the church’s response to ethical issues such as homosexuality. Where he lays himself open to critique is in his failure to allow for the shift in cultural context. Roman society might have accepted pederasty, but contemporary Western society sanctions it strongly. Not that Grenz does not acknowledge that some traditional reasons are flawed. For example, he rejects arguments that homosexual acts are wrong because they “involve the loss of life-carrying semen.” However, as Grenz does not believe this was a major reason for opposition to homosexual acts, the acknowledgement does not change his stance.

If scripture, tradition and culture serve as the three sources for theology, this will be true for the historical construction of theology. In reviewing tradition, it is necessary to assess the impact of cultural context at the time of theological construction. Part of the critique of tradition needs to be an assessment of the extent to which the then current cultural concerns impacted theological construction in a particular era. Where cultural context has changed significantly, this might reduce the usefulness of the insights from the tradition of the church. Indeed, when looking at the question of the use of tradition, we need to ask “which tradition?” Perhaps part of the answer should be “that tradition that forms in eras with a reasonably comparable cultural context.” For example, Grenz is willing to quote the opposition to homosexuality in the Penitentials as supportive of his argument of a consistent opposition to

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104 One would have imagined that it is here that culture as a source for theology would come into its own. This has been one of the key roles culture has played in shifting attitudes towards slavery and women.
105 Grenz, Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality, 66.
106 In other words, if the opposition to homosexual practice was primarily an opposition to pederasty, this is no reason to conclude that there should be opposition to homosexual acts between consenting adults.
107 Grenz, Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality, 75.
homosexuality, but does not critique the broader view of sexuality demonstrated in the Penitentials.\textsuperscript{108} Given, for example, that the Penitentials condemn engaging in intercourse in the wrong posture,\textsuperscript{109} it is difficult to see how its views are likely to relevantly inform the construction of a sexual ethic for a postmodern era. Put bluntly, we need to be willing to acknowledge that at times the teaching of the church has been absurd. Only seriously critiqued tradition is helpful in theological construction.

While Grenz' review of tradition establishes that opposition to homosexual behaviour has been sustained, he is less successful in establishing a clear moral basis for the church's opposition. At times the reasons appear to have been spurious. However, the major insight Grenz takes from the review is that opposition has been consistent. This alone does not seem to be an adequate interaction with the church's tradition to allow for the creation of a revisioned evangelical theology. If tradition is interacted with uncritically, the status quo will almost inevitably remain.

7.4.3 Culture

In his review of Grenz' *Renewing the Center*, Carson expresses concern that Grenz would go too far in accommodating Christian faith to the prevailing cultural context. He asks: "At what point do biblically faithful Christians confront and contradict the world in its current opinions, instead of reshaping the 'gospel' so as to parrot the world's agenda."\textsuperscript{110} Bloesch expresses a similar concern when he writes, "My problem with Grenz is that he sees mainly promise in cultural achievements and not also deception and self-aggrandizement... In a viable biblical, evangelical theology culture is neither deified nor demonized but relativized."\textsuperscript{111}

Perhaps Carson and Bloesch should have allowed themselves to be reassured by *Welcoming but Not Affirming*, for though Grenz examines culture as the embedding context for his reflection on homosexuality, his reading of culture is selective and cannot be seen as a driver of his theological stance. In some respects this is the most disappointing part of *Welcoming but Not Affirming*. While the radical shift in Western attitudes to homosexuality is readily acknowledged, it is not at all clear that the shift makes any impact on Grenz' conclusions. If it

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 68.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{110} Carson, 52.
does, it is limited to the cosmetic realm of ethos, where Grenz argues that homosexual persons should be treated with kindness and empathy.\footnote{112}

Notable is Grenz’ refusal to see homosexuality as a fixed orientation or disposition. If this were acknowledged, it would be hard to disallow culture a dominant voice in the ethical and theological issues surrounding homosexuality. True, Grenz does consider the possibility that homosexuality is an orientation, but cautions against the “dangers that lurk in the use of the contemporary language of sexual orientation”\footnote{113} while earlier he had cautioned against the “naturalistic fallacy,” that is, to argue from ‘what is’ to ‘what ought to be.’\footnote{114} In short, he disallows any significant ethical implication to flow from it. Proponents of gay theology find this unsatisfactory. Thiselton is broadly representative of their stance when he writes, “there is no biblical text about ‘homosexuality’ understood as a ‘condition’ or ‘orientation.’”\footnote{115}

The failure of current cultural insights to be a serious driver for Grenz’ theological reflection on homosexuality raises the question of what precisely Grenz means when he includes culture as one of three sources for theology. Grenz comes closest to a clear statement in his discussion of the theological method of Donald Bloesch when he writes,

I find myself – contra Bloesch – sympathizing with Brunner in his famous dispute with Barth... Consequently, I am willing to speak of culture as a source for theology (to the horror of some evangelicals), albeit not in the sense of being the normative standard determining the nature of the gospel message itself but as a conversation partner that as theologians we must take seriously in our constructive articulations of the “faith once delivered.”\footnote{116}

\footnote{112} This is the ‘welcome’ suggested in the books title. It also extends to a limited support to attaching some legal rights to those living in alternate domestic partnerships, though Grenz is insistent that these arrangements should not be confused with marriage. This seems to be as far as he is prepared to go to back his claim that “Christians’ chief interest must always be the maintenance of justice in every type of human relationship.” Grenz, Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality, 150-152.

\footnote{113} At this point he draws on social constructionists to support his stance, suggesting that using the language of sexual orientation “may encourage a significant group of people to construct, perhaps prematurely, their personal identity (the self) on the basis of these socially based cognitive tools.” This is a selective use of social constructionist theories, and does not discredit the disappointment expressed in 7.3 that Grenz does not interact more fully with social constructionist views of homosexuality. Ibid., 123.

\footnote{114} Ibid., 118.


If this remains a little vague, *Welcoming but Not Affirming* makes it clear that Grenz in no way allows culture to be "deified,"[117] and that the more serious question to ask is if Grenz actually allows culture anything more than a selective and token input. While culture serves as a modest formative factor in Grenz' theological construction, his classifying it as a "source" is misleading.

Williams summarizes traditional evangelical reservations about the use of the social sciences in the debate on homosexuality when he writes, "When the social sciences have the first word, the Bible may have the second word, but the social sciences will be the final arbiter as they select what of the Bible is relevant for us."[118] In spite of Grenz' attempt to move beyond the foundationalism implicit in Williams' statement, the trio of conversation partners envisioned by Grenz seems to allow for only one dominant voice. In this discussion, Grenz barely allows the cultural voice a whisper.

### 7.4.4 Trinity

There is no obvious trinitarian structuring in *Welcoming But Not Affirming*, nor does the doctrine of the Trinity appear to make any major contribution to Grenz' thought on the matter.[119] This is not true of all who write on homosexuality. Stuart writes:

> We like to believe that ‘underneath we are all the same’ but what that can often mean is that we believe that underneath everyone is like us, because to be like us is to be truly human. This allows us to isolate our cultural assumptions from criticism and to associate all difference which challenges those assumptions with ‘falling short’ or sin. Difference and diversity are not antithetical to God, whom we worship as Trinity and in whose image we are made, who takes historical contingency into the heart of his divine being.[120]

It would be unfair to conclude that the absence of trinitarian structuring in *Welcoming But Not Affirming* implies that Grenz' proposal that it be seen as a structuring motif for theology lacks

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[119] Though Grenz' belief that homosexual sex cannot reflect the wholeness implicit within the Trinity, and is thus a failure to reflect the *imago Dei*, is a significant factor in his negative critique of homosexual behaviour.
merit. In several of his other works, Grenz utilizes trinitarian structuring more obviously and effectively.121

Perhaps more serious is the failure to be guided by trinitarian imagery. If the “not good for the man to be alone” of Gen 2:18 is a universal motif, it applies to both hetero and homosexual persons.122 Grenz and Franke note that “perhaps the most significant development in the contemporary renaissance of trinitarian theology has been the emphasis on relationality.”123 Grenz is willing to allow that “Christian gay or lesbian persons might well enjoy caring, loving, supporting, and affirming friendships” but is unwilling to see these as anything more than “friendship bonds.”124 For Grenz, the potential for sexual activity is the aspect that is of greatest concern in homosexual relationships, and he writes “The sexual aspect is precisely the dimension of same-sex relationship that the church cannot bless without sanctioning sinful conduct.”125 One wonders if Grenz is not attaching too much significance to sex at this point. In Pauline theology it is love, not sex, that is the greatest virtue, and it is love, not sex, that lasts forever.126 Given the asexual nature of the trinitarian life, and given that the trinitarian life provides the eschatological model for human relationships, one wonders why same-sex friendships need to be seen as lesser than heterosexual marriage relationships.127

The argument could be taken in the opposite direction. Supporting Grenz, we can note that his deep commitment to relationships flows from his commitment to allowing the Trinity to serve as a model for the structure for human relationships. While Grenz is anxious that no same sex genital activity is sanctioned, he is clear that both homo and hetero sexual persons need to be in meaningful relationships and to be welcomed as part of the community of faith. Same sex genital activity is simply one of many activities disallowed by the faith community. The invitation for the individual to be part of the community remains, as does the responsibility for the faith community to accept those seeking entrance, regardless of the challenges they face. The faith community is to model a counter cultural sexual ethic, a mandate Grenz acknowledges as being a “challenge” while noting “we face it best together.”128 Provided

123 Grenz and Franke, Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context, 193.
124 Grenz, Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality, 139.
125 Ibid., 143.
127 One could accept different, but not lesser.
homosexual persons are not involved in same sex activity, Grenz sees their status as being the same as any other member of the faith community.  

7.4.5 Community

Grenz’ proposal that community serves as the integrating motif for theology has no obvious outflow in this work. While in Welcoming But Not Affirming Grenz argues for a ‘welcoming, yet not always affirming, community’ where we face our challenges “best together” and “assist and rely on each other,” the text fosters a “them/us” mentality and is clearly written from a heterosexual perspective. While the narratives of gay people are occasionally and fleetingly mentioned, the absence of serious engagement with their stories is striking. This leads to the obvious question of how community can be considered theology’s integrating motif if the stories of those most affected by the issue at hand are left unheard.

It also raises the question of how committed Grenz is to the articulation of a theology appropriate for a postmodern context. In describing postmodern views of truth, Grenz discusses the importance of “participatory truth” to those operating from a postmodern perspective, as well as the conviction held by postmoderns that “truth is connected to narratives.” The absence of significant communal narrative interaction in Welcoming but Not Affirming is a departure from a method Grenz proposes as being appropriate for a postmodern context.

Franke has argued that a nonfoundationalist theology “requires the opening of theological conversation to the voices of persons and communities who have generally been excluded from the discourse of Anglo-American theology.” If the failure to listen to the narrative voice of those most impacted by homosexuality is a departure from a method suitable for a postmodern context, it is also a departure of the method advocated for a postfoundationalist theology.

129 And even if they were to be involved in same sex activity, Grenz would argue that the welcome remains, though there would be no affirmation of their sexual behaviour. Thus welcoming but not affirming.


131 Grenz comes closest when he dedicates the volume to Paul Couillard, a “Christian who is gay” and “knows firsthand what it means to experience the grace of God.” While the dedication is touching, it is clearly selective. Grenz is engaging with someone who follows the path he suggests, but is not engaging with those who do not... Ibid., xii.


133 Ibid.: 690.

In *Beyond Foundationalism*, Grenz and Franke examine Ferdinand Toennies’s work, *Gemeinshaft und Gesellschaft*. Toennies’s distinction between the community (*Gemeinshaft*) where relationships are intimate and holistic, and the society (*Gesellschaft*) where social order is constructed by contracts and formal obligations, is relevant. While Grenz’ view of community is partly shaped by Toennies’s concept of *Gemeinshaft*, *Welcoming but Not Affirming* gives the impression that Grenz has been willing to settle for *Gesellschaft*. By focusing on the conditions under which gay people may be both welcomed and affirmed in the Christian community, Grenz creates the impression of a closely boundaried community, where compliance with the required behaviour is more of a driver than personal narrative or relationship.

In addition, while Grenz is convinced that only covenantal heterosexual coupling can symbolize the wholeness of two others becoming one, the community motif might have helped him to broaden his horizon. While at an individual level, the coupling of covenantally committed heterosexual others might imply wholeness, at a communal level it does not. It is helpful to distinguish between the “generalized other” and the “concrete other.” The communal life of the church includes a range of covenantally committed relationships, and Grenz’ work would have benefited by, for example, interacting with Graham, who after acknowledging her indebtedness to the work of Benhabib and Haraway, writes,

> I would argue that an adequate model of practical knowledge will exhibit a bias towards *alterity*, diversity and inclusivity. This is at the heart of an understanding of ‘disclosive’ practice which must take account of our situatedness (especially in terms of our embodiment), will be appropriately open to *alterity* (otherness) and is evinced by the provisional nature of both practice and the knowledge it embodies, rather than ‘foreclosive’ practices, exercising premature or authoritarian appeals to absolute truth.  

In trying to break the impasse between egalitarians and complementarians in the debate on women in leadership, Grenz argues from a communally based understanding of the *imago Dei* writing,

> At creation the triune God designed humankind to mirror the unity-in-diversity and mutuality that characterizes the eternal divine reality.

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Consequently neither the male as such nor the isolated human — whether male or female — is the image of God. Rather than being an individual possession, the imago Dei is a corporate or social reality. It refers to humans in relationship or humans in “community.”

Provided community is not to be understood as clique, there is no clear reason why a communal representation of the imago Dei should not include homosexual couples. In summary, Grenz’ portrait of community seems defectively uniform.

7.4.6 Eschatology

Establishing an eschatological orientation in a text that deals primarily with human sexual conduct, is challenging. If sex is a “this worldly” activity, the relevance of the eschaton to sexual behaviour is not clear. If anything, it would seem to suggest that as sexual conduct has no place in eternity, it is of limited long term significance. Superficially it would seem reasonable to conclude that so long as relationship is committed and significant, other factors are of secondary importance. However, Grenz will have none of this, and in Sexual Ethics argues strongly for a link between sexuality and eschatology. He argues that the drive toward human bonding is ultimately indicative of the desire to bond with God. It is therefore important that the drive is expressed in a wholesome manner, one that potentially serves as a sign of the eschatological bond between Creator and creation. He does however acknowledge that,

...issues of human sexuality must be kept in proper perspective... as an expression of human sexuality, marriage belongs to the present order. It will be laid aside, when the eschatological reign of God comes in its fullness. Marriage and issues related to it, therefore, must never be treated as having ultimate status in themselves.

There are areas Grenz leaves unexplored. While oriented towards eschatological reality, the church lives in a fallen world. Given that the ultimate is denied until eschatological reality breaks forth, it seems reasonable to assume that the church will often have to live with optimal rather than ultimate ethical solutions. Though truthfulness will characterize eschatological relationships, living in a fallen world sees the scriptures sanction both the

140 Thus Stuart argues, “In the end gay is not good, straight is not good, no one is good but God alone... The Church as the community of the redeemed must play out gender and sexuality in such a way as to reveal their lack of eschatological significance.” Elizabeth Stuart, Gay and Lesbian Theologies: Repetitions with Critical Difference (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 114.
142 Ibid., 257.
untruthfulness of the Hebrew midwives\textsuperscript{143} and the prostitute Rahab.\textsuperscript{144} Clearly untruthfulness is not a virtue, but the biblical passages appear to view truth telling as a lesser moral obligation than that of saving human life. Thus both the Hebrew midwives and Rahab are rewarded, not for deceit, but for discerning and acting upon that which was of greater ethical import.

If we accept that Grenz is correct in arguing that the sex act of a covenantantly committed heterosexual couple is most able to closely represent and "ritualize exclusivity" and thus point to the "exclusivity of the relationship God desires to have with us," and that a same sex committed exclusive relationship is not capable of providing "a vivid symbolic declaration of the monogamous nature of the biblical ideal for marriage," we still need to ask what is the optimal ethical sexual behaviour open to persons with a same sex orientation.\textsuperscript{145} While Grenz' answer would be that total abstinence is required, there are no obvious reasons why this should be so. Thielicke contemplates the ethical options available to persons with a same sex orientation and leaves open the possibility that a faithful and committed covenant relationship might be the optimal option for some.\textsuperscript{146} If eschatology is to serve as an orienting motif, the obligation is to shape behaviour to most closely represent that reality, without deluding oneself that a perfect representation will ever be possible.\textsuperscript{147} One could argue that the depth of relationship experienced in a committed same sex relationship is of greater ethical importance than the genital sexual acts that are a part of the relationship. Indeed, with eschatology as orienting motif, we are perpetually reminded of the provisionality and inadequacy of all human efforts and relationships.

Put differently, an eschatological orientation could provide an empathetic and permission giving motif for those with a same sex orientation who are seeking an optimal ethical solution within their context. However Grenz does not use it in this way. Though eschatological orienting is not absent from the text, it is not a dominant motif. The question of whether Grenz has been able to utilize his own method therefore re-emerges.

\textsuperscript{143} Exodus 1:15-22 \textit{The Holy Bible: New International Version.}
\textsuperscript{144} Joshua 2 ibid.
\textsuperscript{145} Grenz, \textit{Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality}, 113.
\textsuperscript{146} Thielicke, 285.
\textsuperscript{147} This is also true of heterosexual relationships. Torrance e.g. writes, "It must be stressed that we are emphatically not suggesting that homosexual marriage within the Church is \textit{invariably} or \textit{normally} or even \textit{ever} 'properly functional' and thus an unambiguous witness and proclamation of God's creative purposes for the New Humanity. Heterosexual marriage between a couple is only \textit{ever} true, 'properly functional' and thus 'natural' \textit{by grace alone}..." Alan J. Torrance, "On Determining Whether Homosexuality Is to Be Endorsed Theologically," in \textit{More Than a Single Issue: Theological Considerations Concerning the Ordination of Practising Homosexuals}, ed. Murray A. Rae and Graham Redding (Hindmarsh: ATF, 2000), 181.
Guenther Haas’ essentially favourable review of Grenz’ work raises this question. We have questioned if Grenz gives adequate room to his own stated commitment to culture as an embedding context for theology. Haas asks if Welcoming But Not Affirming takes seriously Grenz’ stated commitment to eschatology as “theology’s orienting motif.”148 Haas notes that it has become increasingly common to ignore the specific biblical injunctions against homosexuality via an appeal to the redemptive or eschatological ethic that supercedes the creation ethic found in the Bible. By using passages such as Gal 3:28, those who focus on eschatological reality have pointed to a future order where loving social relationships of mutuality and equality are key. This expectation has led to many overriding the specific biblical injunctions regarding slavery and different gender based roles for men and women. Noting that Grenz often makes use of the eschatological ethic in his writings and that he cites it as theology’s orienting motif, Haas reprimands Grenz,

Given this emphasis, not only by Grenz but also by many other evangelical writers on the primacy of the eschaton for shaping church theology and morality today, it is imperative for Grenz to demonstrate why a similar appeal cannot be used to justify dismissing the biblical injunctions concerning homosexuality (parallel to those concerning slavery and the role of women), so that homosexual practice can be accepted today in the community of the kingdom.149

The criticism might be overstated and one suspects that a gender-based agenda is driving the critique. Certainly Grenz has argued that same-sex relationships fall short of the telos of human sexuality (an argument he develops fairly fully in chp 5). Male domination of women is also the result of the fall. It is thus both same sex relationships and oppressive gender relationships that will disappear at the eschaton – for then the purpose of creation will be fully realized.

Yoder suggests another outflow from an eschatological orientation in ethics when he reminds us that “the limits our moral systems impose on our moral possibilities need not be the last word.”150 Elsewhere Yoder has cautioned that what he calls “methodologism” distorts the nature of knowledge by artificially attempting to fit it within coherent structures. He cautions that it limits our ability to deal with God’s freedom. Like Grenz, Yoder is seeking for an alternative to foundationalism in both ethics and theology, but has been more successful in allowing eschatology to provide a tentative rather than restricting voice.151 Rather than a

148 Grenz and Franke, Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context, 239.
149 Haas: 506.
strident appeal to eschatological realism, this approach allows for an element of eschatological surprise, and thus calls for humility and provisionality in devising all ethical systems.

7.5 FOUR EVALUATIVE QUESTIONS

The opening chapter of this thesis suggests that the proposition “that Stanley Grenz’ theological method effectively revisions evangelical theology” be tested against four questions:

1) Does Grenz’ method make an original contribution to evangelical theological construction?
2) Is Grenz’ theological method coherent and credible?
3) Does Grenz’ method genuinely revision evangelical theology?
4) Is Grenz’ method effective in revisioning evangelical theology?

We will systematically pose these questions in relation to Welcoming but Not Affirming to see if the thesis proposition can be supported.

7.5.1 Does Grenz’ method as applied in Welcoming but Not Affirming make an original contribution to evangelical theological construction?

While Welcoming but Not Affirming has proved to be a popular work amongst evangelicals, its conclusions are not original. It could be seen as a contemporary apologetic for the traditional evangelical opposition to any form of same sex genital sexual encounter. It upholds traditional interpretations of biblical texts that have been the main motivators for the opposition by evangelicals to all homosexual acts, though it does add to these an exploration of aspects of the church’s tradition, as well as a limited interaction with some contemporary cultural perspectives.

It could be argued that the motivation for Grenz’ opposition to all homosexual acts includes aspects that are novel for evangelicals. Welcoming but Not Affirming is an elaboration of the argument against homosexuality that Grenz makes in his Sexual Ethics. In it Grenz suggests that while Christian responses to homosexuality tend to fall into one of four categories, namely that they are either intrinsically evil, essentially imperfect, to be evaluated

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152 It was awarded eleventh place in the Christianity Today 1999 Book Awards.
153 Grenz, Sexual Ethics: An Evangelical Perspective.
in terms of their relational significance, or that they are good and natural,\textsuperscript{154} his approach leads to a different outcome.\textsuperscript{155} He then attempts to validate his claim by restating the reasons behind his opposition, but it is hard to see why Grenz feels he does not fit into Kosnik's category\textsuperscript{156} of those who believe that homosexual acts are essentially imperfect.\textsuperscript{157}

One way of assessing originality would be to compare Grenz' work to some of the older evangelical discussions on homosexuality. As Johnson explores the same four categories of response that Grenz outlines, his chapter on homosexuality in \textit{Evangelicals at an Impasse} provides an interesting comparative source, especially as Johnson is careful not to take a personal stance but simply to outline the debate amongst evangelicals as it existed in the 1970s.\textsuperscript{158} Johnson proposes that evangelicals have reached an impasse on the question of an ethical response to homosexuality due to the unresolved question of the influence that contemporary culture should play in theological construction and in formulating ethical responses.

While the names of the theologians involved in the debate have changed in the two decades that separate Johnson's work and Grenz', what is most striking is how similar the content of the debate has remained. If Johnson's work is to be seen as representative of the work undertaken by evangelicals in the 1970s, the only area that Grenz seems to have explored a little more fully is that of the church's traditional responses to homosexuality. It is therefore not possible to conclude that Grenz' method has led to an original contribution being made to this debate.

\textbf{7.5.2 Is Grenz' theological method, as applied in \textit{Welcoming but Not Affirming}, coherent and credible?}

Grenz' study of homosexuality is largely undertaken from an integrated theological perspective. The disciplines of biblical studies, church history, Christian ethics and theology interact together in a manner that reflects solid theological integration. A muted voice in the theological interplay is that of pastoral theology, a notable omission given the very personal nature of the issue explored. While it is true that Grenz does spend time reflecting on the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{154} These are the categories discussed in Anthony Kosnik, \textit{Human Sexuality: New Directions in American Catholic Thought} (New York: Paulist, 1977), 200-209.
  \item \textsuperscript{155} Grenz, \textit{Sexual Ethics: An Evangelical Perspective}, 237.
  \item \textsuperscript{156} Ibid., 237-240.
  \item \textsuperscript{157} Grenz, 131-132, outlines a similar categorization in \textit{Welcoming But Not Affirming}, but this time works from Nelson's taxonomy. James B. Nelson, \textit{Embodiment} (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978), 188-199.
  \item \textsuperscript{158} Johnston, 113-145.
\end{itemize}
church’s need to be a welcoming community, he consistently writes from an institutional perspective. He seems unable to script the perspective of the “other,” a key ingredient in any pastorally sensitive and responsive work.

Another marginalised voice is the missiological one. While the text has been written in response to the growing public clamour for a reassessment of possible ethical responses to homosexuality, other than for writing with a sympathetic tone, concessions are not made. Grenz believes this to be appropriate when it comes to homosexuality, and thereby demonstrates that while he allows for a trio of conversation partners in theological construction, culture’s voice is the softest.

Absent from Welcoming but Not Affirming is any clear elaboration of the meaning of pneumatological mediation in ethical construction. Grenz’ conclusions are unambiguous, and other than for the believing community being left scope for discerning the manner of its welcoming but not affirming receipt of people with a homosexual orientation, subjectivity plays no part.

The particular voice assigned to culture seems to be limited to that of having raised the question. As homosexuality is not a major biblical theme, nor a major refrain in the church’s tradition, the reason for the exploration seems to flow directly from the insistence within Western culture that issues related to homosexuality be re-examined. The sourcing of topics for theological investigation from contemporary issues is only a small step removed from Tillich’s more existentially driven method of correlation.159

Welcoming but Not Affirming helps to clarify the way Grenz envisions the three theological sources interacting in theological construction. As this is not always clear in Beyond Foundationalism, which oscillates between acknowledging a hierarchy between conversation partners and denying the need to pit the one against the other, the clarification is important. While Grenz speaks of three sources for theology, Welcoming but Not Affirming makes clear that for Grenz the Bible is the primary source for theological construction, tradition and culture serving, at best, as secondary sources. As was noted when we applied the comparable question in chapters five and six of this research, Grenz’ method therefore probably should be seen to represent a chastened form of foundationalism.

Grenz assigns a modest role to his focal motifs in *Welcoming but Not Affirming*. However, as I have explored Grenz’ motifs I have attempted to show how they can be utilized to support either a conservative or a more daring agenda. While in *Welcoming but Not Affirming* Grenz’ choices are consistently conservative, there is no obvious reason for them to be so. All three of his focal motifs can be used to support a pro-gay position. Adding content to sources and motifs involves hermeneutical decisions.

In his largely affirming evaluation of Hauerwas’s *With the Grain of the Universe*, Grenz writes,

Contrary to what many theologians assumed in the wake of the Enlightenment, there is no epistemic standpoint external to the practice of faith by appeal to which the truth of Christian convictions can be assessed. In such a situation, the truth of Christianity can only be ‘established’ in a seemingly circular manner. This occurs through the faithfulness of the church (in the form of Christian witnesses) in living out those convictions...

The observation is valid, but leaves one to question why Grenz does not more readily acknowledge that the “epistemic standpoint” from which he has approached this topic has been fashioned by the interpretive grid provided by the evangelical community in which he has been shaped. For his theology to communicate with a postmodern era it will need to pay greater heed to the shifting cultural voices. Clearly we must allow for a certain dialectical tension between evangelical theology and contemporary culture, but *Welcoming but Not Affirming* gives the impression that the interaction has been purely between theologian and believing community. From the epistemic standpoint of the average postmodern, Grenz’ views are likely to be bewildering. If Grenz’ retort is that ultimately biblical rather than cultural concerns should reign, one has to push back and ask why he then considers culture to be a source for theology or why he feels his approach is postfoundationalist. While culture is allowed to raise questions, its insights do not genuinely source Grenz’ conclusions. Culture might help shape the direction of the discussion, but ultimately Grenz’ preoccupation is with the answer provided by the Bible. This is therefore a form of foundationalism, albeit a chastened foundationalism.

160 Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church’s Witness and Natural Theology* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2001).
7.5.3 Does Grenz’ method, as reflected in Welcoming but Not Affirming, genuinely revision evangelical theology?

We have already demonstrated that Welcoming but Not Affirming does not revision evangelical attitudes to homosexuality, but rather encourages retention of the status quo. This does not mean that other aspects of Grenz’ project do not demonstrate genuine revisioning, but simply that in this particular test case, no significant revisioning is present.

Though no new ethical conclusions flow from Welcoming but Not Affirming, as our focus is on Grenz’ theological method rather than on his attitude to homosexuality, we need to ask if his method (as opposed to his conclusions), has birthed a revisioned version of evangelicalism. We have noted that while Grenz has paid significant attention to the theological sources of scripture and tradition, he has allowed culture a limited voice. In addition, by limiting the range of images allowed to flow from his focal motifs, he has restricted the possibilities inherent in his method. Instead of the certainty linked to eschatological orienting, he could have focused on eschatological humility and tentativeness (‘Now we see but a poor reflection... then we shall see face to face’). While this is not to suggest that no ethical statements can be made with certainty, it is to suggest that the issues surrounding homosexuality are sufficiently complex for a more provisional approach to have been appropriate. Likewise, the integrating motif of community could have explored the richness that minority preferences can bring to community, while the structuring motif of the Trinity could have seen Grenz take more seriously the shortcomings of having to face life alone.

As regards continuity and discontinuity with traditional evangelicalism, lines of continuity are far more apparent than are lines of discontinuity. The discussion of contemporary issues, such as the legal status of same-sex unions supplemented with just a hint at the debate around the desirability of gay couples being allowed to adopt children, simply reflects the shifting nature

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162 By contrast, Grenz’ presentation of the complementarian position in the debate amongst evangelicals on gender relationships, and more particularly, the question of the ordination of women, does reflect a genuine revisioning that flows directly from his motifs of Trinity, community and eschatology. Grenz, “Anticipating God’s New Community: Theological Foundations for Women in Ministry.”


164 Grenz would argue that he has answered this. He is clear that people with a homosexual orientation are to be fully welcomed into the community of faith, and thereby end the aloneness that is the lot of those who are not communally connected. He is even supportive of same sex friendship bonds, and so long as no sexual union results, is willing to go so far as to suggest that “the biblical writers celebrate the loyalty and devotion that can arise between two people of the same sex.” Grenz, Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality, 139.
of the debate, rather than actually making an original contribution to it.\(^{165}\) This does not necessarily reflect a flaw within Grenz’ method. If he had allowed culture a louder voice (and his method suggests that he should have), it is probable that his conclusions would have been discontinuous with traditional evangelical voices on several points. However, as this is not an area that Grenz felt needed to be revisioned, he has listened to his own sources selectively.\(^{166}\) Given the creative possibilities inherent in his method, we should not therefore conclude that Grenz’ method cannot revise evangelical theology, but rather that in this instance it has failed to do so.

7.5.4 Is Grenz’ method, as applied in *Welcoming but Not Affirming*, effective in revisioning evangelical theology?

If by effective we mean that Grenz has effectively revisioned an evangelical response to homosexuality, the material covered allows us to offer a negative to any such suggestion. If, however, we mean that Grenz’ work is likely to win the approval and support of the majority of evangelicals, our assessment can be more positive. A solid conclusion would be that *Welcoming but Not Affirming* is a reassuring work rather than a work of ethical revisioning. As it does not challenge the evangelical status quo on this issue, it is not a work of effective revisioning.

Although not supportive of our thesis proposition “that Stanley Grenz’ theological method effectively revisions evangelical theology,” in itself, it does not disprove the thesis. Grenz does not suggest that all areas of evangelical theology are in need of revisioning. Rather than a revisioning of the content of evangelical theology, his concern is often for the ethos of the movement. If this is the major concern, *Welcoming but Not Affirming* is a modest contribution. However, while the tone is more generous than that sometimes adopted in evangelical texts, it is not unique. The tone of Alex Davidson’s *The Returns of Love*, Lewis Smedes’ *Sex for Christians* and John White’s *Eros Defiled*, each written from an evangelical

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\(^{165}\) Ibid., 150-152.

\(^{166}\) One could compare Grenz’ attitude to homosexual practice to his attitude to divorce. Whilst the biblical material on divorce is capable of a highly restrictive reading, Grenz, like most evangelicals, places his stress on biblical themes such as grace. As such, he is open to divorced people remarrying and serving in any office (for which they are appropriately gifted) within the church. Generally, evangelicals have been willing to heed the cultural voice when they have assessed their response to divorce. Grenz, *Sexual Ethics: An Evangelical Perspective*, 117-145.
perspective in the 1970s, are as empathetic as that adopted by Grenz. An empathetic tone is therefore not enough to justify the conclusion of revisioning in this area.

7.6 CONCLUSION

Our thesis proposition is "that Stanley Grenz' theological method effectively revisions evangelical theology." As this chapter has explored the usefulness of Grenz' method in establishing an ethical response to homosexuality appropriate for a postmodern era, a certain irony has become increasingly apparent. Grenz has provided a response that is likely to win warm approval from evangelicals, but he has done so at the cost of the consistent implementation of his theological method. There is nothing in his response to suggest that on this issue he has moved beyond a chastened form of foundationalism. He utilizes the insights of tradition, culture, Trinity, community and eschatology when, and only when, they support the foundational pillar of scripture. Pneumatological mediation is not seriously entertained. Grenz' conclusions are consequently pedestrian and little more than a charitable restatement of what evangelicals have always stated.

While it might well be that Grenz' conclusions are appropriate for a revisioned evangelical theology, they do not automatically flow from a consistent application of his method. It is not that his method is not capable of being applied differently, but that in this instance he has opted for a conservative application of his method.

In summary form, the answers to our four questions are:

1) Does Grenz' method as applied in Welcoming but Not Affirming make an original contribution to evangelical theological construction? It is not possible to conclude that Grenz' method has led to an original contribution being made to this debate.

2) Is Grenz' theological method, as applied in Welcoming but Not Affirming, coherent and credible? Yes, if his goal is to adopt a chastened foundationalism. However, the slogan "beyond foundationalism" implies a desire to move further than this.

3) Does Grenz' method, as reflected in Welcoming but Not Affirming, genuinely revision evangelical theology? His method has creative possibilities, but in this instance fails to produce any.

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168 It is not within the brief of this research to suggest what an appropriate evangelical response to homosexuality should be.
4) Is Grenz' method, as applied in *Welcoming but Not Affirming*, effective in revisioning evangelical theology? His method, as applied in this instance, is likely to reassure evangelicals, rather than to genuinely revision their stance.

These conclusions are used to draw up the table of findings in chapter 8.1.
PART THREE

EXTENDING THE THEOLOGICAL METHOD OF STANLEY J. GRENZ: A CONSTRUCTIVE PROPOSAL
CHAPTER EIGHT

BEYOND GRENZ: TOWARDS A GENUinely REVISIONED EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

Evangelical theology must take seriously the poetic as a mode of theological exploration and engagement, alongside and interwoven with the conceptual and the empirical... - Trevor Hart¹

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The findings of the previous chapters place us in a position to more rigorously test the research proposition “that Stanley Grenz’ theological method effectively revisions evangelical theology.” While Grenz’ sources for theology, linked with his motifs and undergirded by pneumatological mediation communally discerned, provide considerable impetus towards the revisioning of evangelical theology, asking the four evaluative questions at the end of each of chapters four to seven leads to mixed results in assessing the validity of the thesis proposition. Many of the conclusions fall into the category of “yes, but with reservations” or “yes, but only in a minor way.” On one occasion the conclusion is that while his method has creative possibilities, in the trial case it fails to produce any.² The table below briefly summarizes the outcome of asking each of the evaluative questions at the end of chapters four to seven. While the tabulation of the results is of necessity reductionist, it establishes that while the trend is towards the affirmation of the thesis proposition, there is reserve about affirming it wholeheartedly.

Table 1: Summary of findings from four evaluative questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does Grenz’ method make an original contribution to evangelical theological construction?</th>
<th>Chp 4, Source: Scripture</th>
<th>Chp 5, Sources: Tradition and Culture</th>
<th>Chp 6, Motifs: Trinity, Community and Eschatology</th>
<th>Chp 7, Trial Case: Welcoming but Not Affirming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>A minor contribution. While initially Grenz’ model seems radical, when the qualifications he attaches to the use of tradition and culture are factored in, the model is less original.</td>
<td>Yes, within the evangelical context.</td>
<td>It is not possible to conclude that Grenz’ method has led to an original contribution being made to this debate.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Is Grenz’ theological method coherent and credible? | Yes, though with minor reservations. | Yes, though Grenz’ model represents a chastened foundationalism rather than a postfoundational method. | Yes, though Grenz’ model represents a chastened foundationalism rather than a postfoundational method. | Yes, if his goal is to adopt a chastened foundationalism. However, the slogan “beyond foundationalism” implies a desire to move further than this. |

| Does Grenz’ method genuinely revision evangelical theology? | Yes, it is both sufficiently continuous while also suggesting a refocus on some underdeveloped areas. | Yes, a modest contribution. | Yes, while noting a concern at the absence of a motif pointing to the cross and conversion. | His method has creative possibilities, but in this instance fails to produce any. |

| Is Grenz’ method effective in revisioning evangelical theology? | Yes, for certain sectors of evangelicalism, especially postconservative evangelicals, younger evangelicals and Pentecostal evangelicals. Yes for certain sectors does however imply no for others. | Almost. If he were to redesignate tradition and culture as resources or formative factors for theological construction, it is likely that the answer could be affirmative. | It is likely to be effective for younger evangelicals, though traditional evangelicals may question the absence of clear soteriological images. | His method, as applied in this instance, is likely to reassure evangelicals rather than to genuinely revision their stance. |
In this chapter I explore ways in which this qualified or modest affirmation of the research proposition can be strengthened, so that a more genuinely revisioned evangelical theology results. My intention is not to produce an alternative to Grenz' model, but rather to complement it. The result is therefore not discontinuous with Grenz’ approach and remains strongly Grenzian, though it does attempt to move beyond Grenz. The question that shapes this chapter is simply: “What additions, modifications or clarifications to Grenz’ method are needed to result in a positive revisioning of evangelical theology?”

This is supplemented with a second question relevant both to Grenz and all evangelical theologians: “Does the context in which evangelical theologians operate make the revisioning of evangelical theology possible, and if not, what changes are needed to make it possible?”

8.2 QUESTION ONE

Our first key question is: “What additions, modifications or clarifications to Grenz’ method are needed to result in a positive revisioning of evangelical theology?” My contention is that Grenz’ model needs to be supplemented by two additions, first the adoption of the control belief that the gospel liberates and second the addition of the cross as theology’s gathering motif. These two proposals are discussed below.

8.2.1 Proposal One: Adopt the Control Belief the Gospel Liberates

8.2.1.1 Rationale for adopting the gospel liberates as a control belief

In spite of Grenz’ proposal to adopt three sources for theological construction, examination of his method reveals that while scripture serves as a source, both tradition and culture operate as “formative factors”3 rather than as genuine sources. Put differently, scripture is seen as a source with authority,4 while tradition and culture are sources of information or resources. Thus in examining the application of Grenz’ method in Welcoming but Not Affirming it becomes clear that while Grenz is willing to interact with the insights of church tradition and

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4 Previously evangelicals have been willing to appeal to sources of authority. Martyn Lloyd-Jones’ text Authority has been influential in evangelical circles. However the postmodern turn has seen a flight from authority. Van Huyssteen notes the postmodern “resistance to any form of authoritarian (also epistemological) domination.” While this perhaps explains Grenz’ reluctance to acknowledge that he ascribes authority to scripture but not to tradition or culture, it leads to confusion as to the status of each of his sources for theological construction. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Authority (London: IVP, 1958). J. Wentzel Van Huyssteen, Essays in Postfoundationalist Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 75.
culture, their contributions are assessed on the basis of their perceived fidelity to scripture. As the reverse is not true (i.e., the validity of scripture’s contribution is not determined by it corresponding to the insights of the church’s tradition or culture), it is hard to justify Grenz’ belief that this is not a form of foundationalism.

While it is clear that Grenz desires to move beyond a crass foundationalism (where only what the Bible says is of any relevance), he has not given sufficient attention to the manner in which the conversation between scripture, tradition and culture should be undertaken. A more nuanced approach would provide some guidelines on how to decide the appropriate “volume” for each conversation partner. Volume might well be related to the topic under investigation. Thus, for example, while Grenz significantly restricts culture’s voice in his investigation of homosexuality, one would have imagined that as the coverage of the topic in both scripture and church tradition is cursory in comparison to the intense investigation of homosexuality undertaken by the social sciences over the last twenty years, the reverse should have been the case. If a genuinely postfoundational method were being used, this would be a topic on which culture (in the form of the social sciences) would have a significant (though not exclusive) voice.

A further problem is that the lack of clarity on the way in which the conversation partners are to interact sometimes leads to the adoption of circular arguments. For example, we decide on the validity of the interpretation of a passage of scripture on the basis of the church’s traditional interpretation of the text, but we critique the validity of the tradition on the basis of scripture.

If Grenz’ method is to move beyond the soft (or chastened) foundationalism he embraces, clarification of the rules for the conversation between the sources of theology is needed. While a genuinely postfoundational method is likely to keep its rules to the minimum, those that are adopted should be articulated, to ensure transparency.

Nicholas Wolterstorff’s concept of “control beliefs” is useful at this point. Wolterstorff notes that certain beliefs, be they religious, philosophical, biblical or other, exercise “control” over what can and will be believed. He writes, “Everyone who weighs a theory has certain beliefs as to what constitutes an acceptable sort of theory on the matter under consideration. We all

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have these control beliefs." Control beliefs lead us to reject certain sorts of theories, while they are also instrumental in the theories we devise. He notes, "We want theories that are consistent with our control beliefs. Or, to put it more stringently, we want theories that comport as well as possible with those beliefs." Rather than attempt to eliminate control beliefs, Wolterstorff argues that they should be acknowledged and embraced. Thus he suggests that in theology "the belief-content of the theologian’s authentic commitment ought all the while to be functioning also as control over his theory-devising and theory-weighing."

Using Wolterstorff, we can ask what control belief should be adopted to help adjudicate between the differing sources available for theological construction. Examination of Grenz reveals that his control belief is that all theories need to be evaluated in the light of scripture. To move this beyond foundationalism, he suggests that it is scripture in interactive conversation with tradition and culture, but this soon leads to a circular argument.

More helpful would be the adoption of a control belief that is allowed to act as a lens through which the contribution of all sources of theological construction is filtered. Attempting to adopt scripture as both a control belief and a source does not work, as a control belief cannot operate on the same level as a source unless only a single source is allowed. Grenz’ attempt to adopt scripture as one of three sources while at the same time assigning it the role of the control belief, is consequently flawed.

The logical question therefore becomes, “Is there a control belief that can be adopted that is consistent with evangelicalism and which can effectively adjudicate between the differing sources for theological construction?” My proposal is that evangelicalism taps into that which it believes most deeply, namely that the gospel, the evangel, is, as the word literally means, good news. This can be expressed in a number of different ways. Some slogans come to mind: “It isn’t the gospel if it isn’t good news.” Or Grenz’ own contribution “participating in what frees.” A suitable synthesis is the gospel liberates.

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6 Wolterstorff, 63.
7 Ibid., 64.
8 Ibid., 82.
9 For example: Which reading of scripture? That which is appropriate for the embedded cultural context. But which cultural context? That which is consistent with scripture…
11 He uses the expression in an article with the same title and which suggests that the truth of the gospel is ultimately that which frees and liberates. Stanley J. Grenz, "Participating in What Frees: The Concept of Truth in the Postmodern Context,” Review and Expositor 100, no. Fall (2003).
An objection needs to be considered at this point. Is the adoption of a control belief simply another name for foundationalism? While the question cannot be lightly dismissed, I would argue that in this instance, it is not. A highly specific and restrictive control belief could be seen as an alternate name for an indisputable foundation, but in this case the control belief adopted is that *the gospel liberates*. While this could be interpreted as a propositional statement, (the truth of which needs to be defended), it is better to view it as a statement encapsulating an ethos and projecting a vision. The filtering is on the basis of this broad and expansive ideal. Its edges are soft, and allow for the incorporation of new and fresh insights. Rather than a foundation from which all other insights flow, the control belief *the gospel liberates* is enriched and deepened by its interaction with sources for theological construction such as scripture, tradition and culture.

The adoption of *the gospel liberates* as the control belief needs further explanation. At the finest moments in their history, evangelicals have been at the forefront of meaningful social change. Evangelicals readily attribute the abolition of slavery to the evangelical convictions of William Wilberforce and the support he gleaned from the evangelical Clapham sect. Likewise they attribute measures to protect children, the promotion of religious liberty, and the establishment of multiple humanitarian and educational programmes to those who were motivated by a vision of Christian faith that had been forged within the evangelical camp. An undergirding belief was that *the gospel liberates* those who respond to it, and that this liberation finds expression both in the present moment and throughout eternity.

There is also a shadow side. Sectors of evangelicalism have been supportive of a right wing agenda, which has revealed itself in, sometimes tacit but sometimes obvious, support of racism, sexism, homophobia, militarism, ecological and economic exploitation as well as cultural insensitivity. Whilst evangelicals tend to shift the blame for these associations to fundamentalism rather than evangelicalism, this optimistic reading of their own history is unwarranted.

Adopting Smith’s expression “the great reversal,” in his book of that title Moberg argues that while the historic trajectory of evangelicalism follows a liberating and socially committed

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12 For a partisan account not limited to the role played by evangelicals, but providing a useful overview of the way evangelicals understand their own contribution, see Alvin J. Schmidt, *Under the Influence: How Christianity Transformed Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001).
13 Jim Wallis laments, “Evangelicals in this century have a history of going along with the culture on the big issues and taking their stand on the smaller issues. That has been one of the serious problems of evangelical religion. Today, many evangelicals no longer just acquiesce to the culture on the larger economic and political issues, but actively promote the culture’s worst values on these matters.” Jim Wallis, *The Call to Conversion* (Herts: Lion, 1981), 25.
path, controversy between fundamentalists and modernists in the first part of the twentieth century saw a divide between evangelism and social concern. Evangelicals such as Ron Sider and John Stott have made similar observations. The Lausanne Congress of 1974, often cited as a watershed conference for evangelicalism, stressed the close relationship between the gospel and social concern. It attempted to redress an imbalance that was perceived to have entered the evangelical arena.

Evangelicalism’s inconsistent track record in the social arena is reflective of an underdeveloped theological method. Williams suggests a possible reason when he writes,

But it remains that the word evangelical in practice, if not in principle, has a polemical definition whether we think in terms of the Protestant Reformation or modern evangelical-liberal differences. This means we have often concentrated our thoughts on what makes us distinctive. And this has frequently, though not always, resulted in attending more to dogmatic than to moral theology or, if you prefer, doctrine rather than ethics.

Whilst evangelicals usually cite biblical references to justify doctrinal and ethical stances, the lens or grid which drives the selection of the supporting biblical material is rarely acknowledged or examined. Acknowledging and privileging the control belief the gospel liberates as the lens through which all assertions are filtered would result in a transparent and consistent method. In suggesting the gospel liberates as the control belief, I am siding with McClendon’s insistence that theology and ethics (and the morality that flows from it) cannot be divorced. McClendon goes further and suggests that “ethics comes first.” A critiquing lens calls for accountability for the morality that inevitably flows from all theological construction. While the control belief ultimately critiques what is proposed, the lens adopted shapes construction at all stages.

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16 Usually abbreviated to this title, but strictly “The International Congress of World Evangelization” held in Lausanne, Switzerland, July 16-25, 1974. It is best know for the resulting “Lausanne Covenant.”
Grenz comes closest to suggesting a control belief in *The Moral Quest* when he proposes comprehensive love as the content of the Christian ethic. However he does not go so far as to suggest that theological construction should be critiqued in the light of comprehensive love. It would only have required him to take a small step to do so. While it would be possible to adopt comprehensive love as a control belief, *the gospel liberates* provides greater focus than comprehensive love, which sounds a little too general.

What does it mean to say *the gospel liberates*?

The expression should not be confused with Liberation Theology, which at best has met with lukewarm approval by evangelicals, and at worst, has been dismissed as being sub-biblical and driven by sub-Christan ideologies. A particular concern has been that Liberation Theology inverts the order of theological construction, allowing the concrete situation to so dominate that the insights of biblical revelation become subservient to the demands of the present.

While a precise definition of *the gospel liberates* would be counter to the desire to produce a postfoundationalist theology, and some openness must remain to enable the insights of scripture, tradition and culture to continue to shape the understanding of the expression, several biblical motifs can be coupled with insights from the church’s tradition and contemporary culture to indicate the likely direction in which this control belief will evolve.

Jesus’ claim that he came to enable people to enjoy life in all its fullness and his promise that if he sets us free, we will be free indeed, are pivotal sentiments. When evaluated against the backdrop of his healing ministry, his challenge to the religious status quo of his day, his proclamations of forgiveness, his teaching and his multiple acts of compassion, they help to shape our understanding of his incarnation. The meaning of the incarnation comes into even sharper focus when interpreted in the light of his crucifixion and resurrection. A focus on the crucifixion prevents a one-sided presentation of the human condition. It reminds us of the

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21 The expression has broadened over the years to embrace a wide variety of theologies, including, amongst others, black theology (both from the North American and South African contexts), Latin American theologies, Western European theologies of hope, feminist theology and gay theology. Each has its distinguishing features, but share in common the identification of a situation of human oppression to which the gospel speaks a liberating word.
22 For a mediating response, see J. Andrew Kirk, *Theology Encounters Revolution* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1980).
23 John 10:10
24 John 8:36
reality of human depravity, pain and bondage. The sinless Christ becomes the crucified one. While we should not rush too quickly from crucifixion to resurrection, the resurrection is the prime sign of liberation. The chains of death are broken. The gospel liberates...

This Christological focus helps to ensure that when we say the gospel liberates it is the gospel that shapes our understanding of liberation. In other words, liberation is not a stand-alone concept, but one that must be interpreted in the light of the gospel.

The history of the church further enriches our understanding of what the expression means. After two thousand years of church history, we now readily affirm those parts of our history that fill us with pride, whilst simultaneously lamenting those era’s that fill us with shame. We enthuse over the multiple acts of compassion and mercy shown in our history. We shrink from the Crusades, the Inquisition and our complicity in the spread of Colonialism. As we reflect on our history, the contours of what the gospel liberates might mean come into sharper focus. Equally, we recognise the need to denounce militaristic and oppressive interpretations of the biblical text, and learn from the way some texts have been abused in the past.

Our culture also presses back to deepen our understanding. Thus, for example, whilst we can affirm the Apostle Paul’s courage in backing and supporting the return of the runaway slave Onesimus,26 our culture rapidly reminds us that a more radical denouncement was required – that of the repudiation of slavery altogether. In this instance our history gives us cause to celebrate, reminding us that as a result of the leadership of evangelicals such as William Wilberforce, this liberating path was eventually followed. Paul’s tentative start was pushed to its logical conclusion.

One of the pressing quests of our day is for an answer or answers to the question, “What does it mean to be human?” Whilst theologians readily remind us that the answer is linked to an understanding of what it means to be imago Dei, the insights of the social sciences are helping to accelerate our understanding of this concept. Grenz’ The Social God and the Relational Self is an excellent example of this interplay between theology, sociology and psychology.27 Again, an understanding of what the gospel liberates means is deepened by this discussion.

How would adopting the control belief the gospel liberates work in practice?

25 Lest we lapse into a trite triumphalism.
Each of Grenz’ sources for theology is susceptible to the “which” question. Scripture is a source for theology, but which reading of scripture will be privileged? Tradition is a source for theology, but which tradition will be privileged? Culture is a source for theology, but which cultural voice or voices, will be privileged? Acknowledging a hermeneutical bias toward liberation helps answer these valid questions, and allows for a methodological transparency that is otherwise missing.

It also helps to answer the question of the “volume” of the voice of each conversation partner in theological construction. Privileging a hermeneutic of liberation allows shifting volumes for each conversation partner, depending on the issue at stake. We are quick to respond (not uncritically) to those voices that point in a liberating direction. Thus e.g. in ethical reflection on homosexuality, the voice of culture, and especially those cultural voices that are seriously engaged in helping to understand sexual identity, should be allowed a strident voice. This is not to attempt to mute the voice of scripture, but it is to be ready to acknowledge that this is an ethical issue scripture deals with obliquely and fleetingly. On this issue, the cultural voice alerts us to the subtlety of the debate in a way that scripture does not. Alerted to the subtle innuendoes unpacked by culture, the conversation is then able to deepen, as broader biblical themes can be called into play to interact with the insights of the social sciences. The conclusions should not be anticipated in advance, nor should they be fossilised. New insights might lead to the conversation reaching a yet deeper level. Genuine conversation thus takes place within a framework that can validly claim to be postfoundationalist.

8.2.1.2 Implications of adopting the control belief the gospel liberates

While there are numerous potential implications from adopting the control belief the gospel liberates, I will discuss the six that I consider to be the most pertinent.

The first is that if the gospel liberates, we allow the questions “why?” and “why not?”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer opens his Ethics with the memorable statement, “The knowledge of good and evil seems to be the aim of all ethical reflection. The first task of Christian ethics is to invalidate this knowledge.” Bonhoeffer elaborates that at origin, humanity knew only God.

28 I am using “bias” to help provide a range of descriptors. However, as bias has a pejorative tone, my inclination is to opt for the more positive “privileging” or the more neutral, “preference.” However described, the goal is to attain methodological transparency.
From the unity of that relationship, all else was known. Original sin saw humanity attempt to acquire knowledge of good and evil outside of connectedness with God. The inference is that an attempt to engage in ethics outside of a close relationship with God is flawed. Likewise, the ethical task needs to be embarked upon from a position of humility. Only God truly knows the difference between good and evil. Humanity’s efforts to acquire such knowledge have flowed from sinfuless.

Bonhoeffer’s call should be heeded. While the desire to know the right ethical response in each situation is understandable, ultimately the Bible points to the futility of all our efforts to package and label and draw tidy conclusions. Tentativeness and humility should therefore be key characteristics of the ethical quest. Tentativeness implies the willingness to examine and critique one’s own assumptions and practices. It suggests hesitancy about drawing lines too firmly or inflexibly. It leads to a willingness to continue exploring and questioning. It allows the questions “why?” and “why not?”

If evangelicals are to be more than “fundamentalists with better manners” the serious questioning of evangelical assumptions needs to be allowed. Though Grenz does not suggest reason as a source for theology, if evangelical theology is to transcend the fundamentalism with which it is often associated, the role of reason and valid questioning should be affirmed. In defending the use of reason in “the threefold chord” of scripture, tradition and reason in Anglican thought and life, F.F. Bruce writes, “The wisdom of the Anglican emphasis on reason is readily appreciated when one considers the possibilities that become actual when Scripture is applied unreasonably or tradition is defended or rejected on irrational grounds.”

This is not to be trapped in modernity, but to recognise that postmodernity is not the denial of rationality, but rather recognises the limitations of rationality, where reason has a role, albeit that it is no longer a definitive role. The postmodern shift may see evangelicals swing from areas traditionally defended, such as the physical resurrection of Jesus or the historical reliability of the Bible, to a serious questioning of evangelical ethics. Conservatism has sometimes been the driver of evangelical ethics, with a default drive of suspicion against the new. This has not always been the case, and evangelicals have made many constructive

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contributions towards social change. This aspect of the evangelical heritage needs to be reclaimed. A genuinely revisioned evangelical theology will need to seriously engage the shifting ethical focus of postmodernity, and acknowledge the appropriateness of deconstructionism that seeks to uncover the power holders behind each ethical stance. While Grenz’ ethical method as outlined in The Moral Quest shows promise and moves from a deontological to a teleological orientation, his conclusions continue to steer towards the status quo, leaving the impression that they represent little more than a gesture to the new, without genuinely being open to serious reevaluation. A willingness to question established practice, and to filter it through the control belief that the gospel liberates, could see significant shifts being made.

A second implication of adopting the gospel liberates as a control belief, is that an oppressive hermeneutic is disallowed.

Amongst other things, disallowing an oppressive hermeneutic implies allowing for the messiness inherent in many of the biblical texts. A hermeneutical choice needs to be made as to whether such texts will be justified or if they will be treated as oppressive texts validly recording the tragedy of our fallen and imperfect world, and not intended as paradigmatic passages for the people of God. Rather than undermining the doctrine of the inspiration of scripture, this deepens the concept, as God allows his people to be exposed to the depth of the fallen and muddled world in which he works.

Martin lays down the gauntlet when he suggests, “any interpretation of scripture that hurts people, oppresses people, or destroys people cannot be the right interpretation, no matter how traditional, historical, or exegetically respectable.” It is a challenge that a genuinely revisioned evangelical theology needs to be responsive to, and one that a theology which acknowledges a control belief that the gospel liberates, is in a position to face.

34 I am not suggesting that any biblical passages are inherently oppressive, but that certain passages have been interpreted in an oppressive manner. The trajectory of scripture should be the focus, rather than isolated passages.
36 Early in his career Grenz had recognised the danger of allowing theology to justify exploitation when he wrote, “No theology, therefore, regardless of how many Bible verses it quotes, can properly be called ‘biblical’ which proclaims fragmentation rather than reconciliation, which relegates any segment of humanity to second-class status in the church. It is tragic that Christian theology continues to be used to support discrimination and racism, sexism and patriarchy, practices which will be challenged in increasing intensity in the future.” Stanley J. Grenz, "A Theology for the Future," American Baptist Quarterly 4, no. 3 (1985): 262-263.
The concept of a control belief such as *the gospel liberates* finds support even in some conservative quarters. Thus in spite of his work reaching relatively conservative and traditional conclusions, Webb calls for a “redemptive-movement hermeneutic.” This would be one that recognizes the dangers of a static hermeneutic that fails to recognize the “partially realized ethic in the formation of Scripture.” Thus e.g. he argues that in context, slavery provided something of a social welfare network. “However, a redemptive-movement hermeneutic argues that these good values need to be sustained through a non-embedded framework if at all possible.”

Some simple questions spring to mind once an oppressive hermeneutic is disallowed. For example, evangelicals have often been supportive of the death penalty, but opposed to euthanasia. Denying an oppressive hermeneutic would see the questions surrounding these two issues being reframed. We might simply ask, “if the gospel liberates, why are we willing to take life to punish, but not to bless?”

A third implication of adopting *the gospel liberates* as a control belief is that it would allow social evolution to deepen our insight. We may need to be willing to acknowledge that Pauline, Petrine and Johannine perspectives may not be the last word on many issues. Undoubtedly they serve as a fruitful springboard and usually brilliantly encapsulate the heart of the issue at hand, but just as evangelicals allow for progressive revelation within scripture, they should be open to the possibility of progressive social evolution through time.

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38 Ibid., 255.
39 Ibid.
40 While not all evangelicals adopt the same stance on these issues, John Jefferson Davis is representative of many. On euthanasia he writes, “The euthanasia mentality sees man as the lord of his own life... Christians are to be shining lights... offering to the dying not deadly poisons, but rather neighbour love and hope of life eternal.” On capital punishment he writes, “On balance, the Bible favors the retention of the death penalty... The death penalty protects society from the hardened murderer and is an appropriate and fitting punishment for the most heinous of crimes.” John Jefferson Davis, *Evangelical Ethics: Issues Facing the Church Today*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1993), 173, 188. Lewis Smedes is far more guarded in his assessment of capital punishment, concluding “The Sixth Commandment surely inclines us against capital punishment. The person who assaults human life is, for all his guilt, still human. But there is evidence that capital punishment might sometimes be society’s only way to defend itself, or its people.” Lewis Smedes, *Mere Morality* (Herts: Lion, 1983), 132.
41 This is not an attempt to reduce the complexity of the debate surrounding these two (separate) issues into a slogan, but is an attempt to show how reframing with a hermeneutic that self consciously privileges the theme of liberation, helps establish a different starting point.
42 This is part of the rationale behind Webb’s call for a “non-embedded framework.” Webb, 255.
Johnson argues that the world scripture imagines is simultaneously larger and smaller than the ordinary world of human endeavour. It is larger as it imagines a world which is contained by God “which makes it the biggest of all possible worlds” but it is smaller because the particularity of its time and context places limitations upon what people could discuss or contemplate.43 Extending Johnson’s thought, while the Pauline vision of a world where there is neither male nor female, Jew nor Greek, slave nor free is both inspiring and undoubtedly inspired,44 the outworking of that vision is better grasped in the larger world of the 21st century than it is in the oppressive context in which Paul lived and laboured. Contemporary applications may be more creative and more true to the sentiment than Paul himself envisioned.

It is this meaning which Pinnock calls for when he suggests that we search not just for the past meaning of texts, but also for their future meanings. He writes,

... we need to cultivate an eye and an ear, not only for the meanings of human authors in their various historical settings, but also for the directions and trajectories that belong to the flow of God’s historical redemptive project. While making use of literary and historical scholarship, we are not the prisoners of the textual past, but listen for the word of the Lord and watch for the fulfilment of God’s promises that are still outstanding.45

Later Pinnock writes, “The full significance of the Christian message was not actualized in the life of the early Church. The need for Christians, individually and corporately, to grow as hearers of the word of God remains, because interpretation is an unfinished task.”46

Grenz is aware of the work of Paul Ricoeur, whose work on textual intentionality is relevant here.47 Ricoeur suggests that the meaning of a text does not lie behind it, but in front of it.48 The narrative text has a moulding role, with the meaning of the text being linked to the possible worlds it can create. Approaching the text in this dynamic way unleashes the creative potential inherent in the text. Grenz’ appeal for an eschatological orientation has relevance here. Liberation is ultimately an eschatological category, and we should treat as provisional and tentative any policies or practices that we adopt along the way.

44 In the classic evangelical sense of the word.
46 Ibid.: 73.
47 Grenz and Franke, Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context, 74, 76.
A fourth implication of adopting *the gospel liberates* as a control belief, is that it would result in a transition from viewing truth as a static control mechanism to viewing truth as a pneumatologically mediated concept.

While it is appropriate to summarize Grenz’ method as being built around the sources of scripture, tradition and culture, and focused around the motifs of Trinity, community and eschatology, an equally key ingredient is that the sources and foci are pneumatologically mediated. For all the subjectivity potentially inherent in this concept, it invites evangelical theology to be open toward the transcendent. Truth is not a static control concept, but is spoken afresh into the changing scenarios of life. That is not to say that what is sinful in one era is the route to blessedness in the next, but it is to recognise the interactive and creative elements involved in discerning truth.

When supplemented with *the gospel liberates* as a control belief, the subjectivity is directed. The community of faith serves as the arbiter of what constitutes a liberating hermeneutic. The trio of provisos that we attach to discerning truth is that we supplement theology’s sources of scripture, tradition and culture with (1) communal and (2) pneumatological mediation, which is (3) unlocked by the control belief that *the gospel liberates*.

A fifth implication of adopting *the gospel liberates* as the control belief through which all theological construction is critiqued, is that it helps provide focus for the integrating motif of community. On its own, community is a flexible concept. Oppressive communities can be strongly communal. Indeed, the strength of many communities is linked to them being communities of exclusion. They hold together because they deny entry to “others” who do not meet the restrictive entry requirements. In times of warfare, the “othering of the enemy” is a common practice, but more subtle “othering” often takes place. Religious communities are not exempt from the practice. Evangelicalism’s stress on the pivotal role played by conversion often leads to a “them/us” mentality.

Grenz attempts to limit this danger by linking the motifs of community, eschatology, and Trinity. The triune God who heralds in the eschatological community, is the God who liberates and invites us to participate in that which frees. While not all are part of the Christian community, the community intentionally structures itself as a community of welcome and embrace. It gathers around the cross, which serves as a reminder that the welcome is substantiated by the incarnated God who has sacrificed and suffered on our behalf. This, however, is not a community who welcomes to exploit, but a community who
welcomes to liberate. All communal practices therefore need to be evaluated in the light of their potential to liberate.

Allowing liberation to serve as a lens through which communal practice is critiqued provides practical guidelines for ecclesiology. Bebbington cites activism as one of the leading characteristics of evangelicalism. A key driver of the growth of the movement, it has a potential shadowside. Bebbington mentions the 90-100 hours routinely worked by those in the nineteenth century Wesleyan ministry, and the consequent need to maintain a “Worn-Out Ministers’ Fund.”49 The control belief that the gospel liberates helps to ensure that activism does not degenerate into abuse.

A sixth implication of adopting the gospel liberates as a control belief, is that it empowers eschatology to encourage courageous dissent.

Grenz is well aware that evangelicals have often reduced eschatology to little more than an ill-tempered debate over chronological time lines.50 Whilst his own portrayal of eschatology operates at a different level, Grenz’ eschatological orientation falls short of the possibilities inherent in such an approach. Linking Grenz’ stress on eschatological realism to Moltmann’s theology of hope would enhance the potential of eschatology to serve as a pointer of ultimate liberation, and a motivator toward that vision. It is this potential that Moltmann stresses.51 For Moltmann, hope provides the courage to live in the light of ultimate reality. By looking from the future back to the present, we find the courage to anticipate future reality in the present. It is this refrain that comes through in his The Experiment Hope. At the end of the work he approvingly quotes a verse from a poem of Ingeborg Bachmann,

The uniform of the day is patience
And its only decoration the pale star
Of hope over its heart...
It is awarded
For desertion,
For bravery in face of the friend,
For betraying all unworthy secrets

49 David Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 10-12.
51 Grenz critiques Moltmann for adopting hope as an ontological given, claiming that he sees the individual as being intrinsically hopeful. He argues that the approach represents a form of anthropological foundationalism, concluding that “the anthropologically focused, foundationalist approach reduces hope to wishful thinking.” While there is some validity in Grenz’ reservation, he risks missing the wider arena that Moltmann’s approach opens. Grenz and Franke, Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context, 248.
and the disregard of every command.52

The prophetic potential of “the experiment hope” is clear in Moltmann. Although Grenz attempts to transcend the individualism that often limits evangelicalism, his failure to embrace the prophetic role of theology often sees his agenda driven by issues of micro rather than macro ethics. He focuses on sexual ethics, but not on ecology, social justice or economic inequity. While his decision to focus on sexual ethics is acceptable, a revisioned theological method needs to demonstrate that it can operate on a wider canvas. His eschatological orientation is capable of articulating a theology that is prophetic at a societal level, but it is not a capacity he explores. The younger Grenz had indicated that this would be part of his agenda.53 Perhaps if he had lived longer, he would have been able to deliver on his earlier vision.

For a genuinely revisioned and socially relevant theology, eschatology is best interpreted with a method that adopts liberation as its control belief. It ensures that the resulting theology is prophetic rather than escapist.

8.2.2 Proposal Two: Adopt the Cross as Theology’s Gathering Motif

The key question we are considering in 8.2 is “What additions, modifications or clarifications to Grenz’ method are needed to result in a positive revisioning of evangelical theology?” My first proposal is to adopt the gospel liberates as a control belief. The second is to add an additional focal motif to Grenz’ trio of Trinity, community and eschatology, namely the cross as theology’s gathering motif. If the motifs are ordered, I would suggest that this motif comes first.

8.2.2.1 Rationale for adopting the cross as theology’s gathering motif

Grenz believes that theologians should not see themselves apart from the community of faith for which they theologize. While accepting a distinction between personal faith and theology, Grenz argues that theology “is called forth by faith, as Christians seek to reflect on the reality of faith.”54 Theological construction should reflect that which is of first importance to the

53 See Grenz, "A Theology for the Future."
54 Stanley J. Grenz, Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1993), 81. Also, “the theologian... speaks from the perspective of
community of faith. No symbol of the Christian faith is more widely recognised than the cross. It is the sign around which the church through the ages has gathered. Evangelicals believe that the cross refers to an actual and salvific event. They also believe that the Christian faith cannot be understood apart from the cross. John Stott reflects the conviction of most evangelicals when he speaks of “the centrality of the cross.”

By proposing that Grenz' model be extended by adopting the cross as theology’s gathering motif, I am arguing for the addition of a symbol or image that both helps to draw the community of faith together, and which holds Grenz' other three focal motifs together. Grenz argues that theology needs to be for the community of God. But what brings the community into existence and how is it held together? Evangelical piety insists that this is the result of Christ's work on the cross. Overlooking the cross as one of the focal motifs in theological construction not only risks alienating the evangelical community for whom Grenz is suggesting a revisioned theology, but also neglects to answer the motivational question. When asked why they would forsake all to follow Jesus, evangelicals have traditionally responded, “because he loved me enough to die for me.” Christian allegiance begins with the capture of the heart. Assuming such commitment as a given is presumptuous, and overlooks the crucicentrism that has traditionally been central to evangelical theology. It also robs theological construction of one of its richest motifs.

Grenz does not ignore the cross. At times he attaches a broad and inclusive significance to it. He links it to the creating of community, painting community in expansive terms when he writes,

Jesus died to purchase our redemption and bring us to God. These images come together in the metaphor of interpersonal relationships. Jesus died in order that we who were enemies to creation, to each other, and above all to God might enjoy reconciliation and fellowship – that is, “community.”

In spite of the significance Grenz attaches to the cross in passages such as this, taken as a whole, the cross is not a dominant theme in his theology.

Utilizing the cross as a gathering motif for theology should not be understood as pitting Christ’s incarnation against his death. The cross was the result of the way he lived among us.

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a personal faith commitment and participation in the life of the community.” Grenz, Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century, 75.
The resurrection was God’s triumphant answer. No artificial divides should be introduced. The cross as a gathering motif accepts an implicit Christological focus in theological construction. It helps to rectify any imbalance suggested by utilizing the Trinity as theology’s structuring motif. While Grenz attempts to follow Barth in refusing to draw a line between Christology and the Trinity,\(^5\) in practice his Christology is underdeveloped. Perhaps if his theological project had been completed, this would have been rectified. As it was not, it is necessary to point to the gap.

The cross as the gathering motif in theological construction serves as a reminder of the manner of life to which the Christian community is called. The constructed theology will be both incarnational and prophetic. Moltmann reminds us that “the theology of the cross is none other than the reverse side of the Christian theology of hope.”\(^5^8\) Willing to serve, to suffer and to challenge, it will be quietly hopeful of resurrection, and will thus ultimately be a theology of glory. It will interpret the tradition of the church in the light of its faithfulness in walking the way of the cross. It will remember that resurrection follows crucifixion, but cannot bypass it. The cross is a reminder of the cost of establishing community, and of the value that should therefore be attached to it. The cross is a reminder that salvific, communal liberation is not an optional extra, but the agenda of the triune God. Viewing the cross through the control belief that the gospel liberates ensures that the work of the cross is viewed holistically.

As such, the cross as theology’s gathering motif should be seen as the first of the motifs. It is the motif from which the other three draw content. It is for this reason that Moltmann subtitles his book The Crucified God with the wordy but insightful, The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology. Trinitarian structuring is inadequately directed without the Christological focus implicit in the cross as theology’s gathering motif. In a similar manner, the integrative motif of community lacks substance if seen outside of the context of incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection. Outside of the gathering motif of the cross, eschatology can be reduced to trite triumphalism, which would then be a dangerous orienting motif.

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5. Grenz summarizes Barth’s position, writing “Barth’s Christocentric, revelational trinitarianism emerges... from his conviction that the Christian conception of God does not begin with a generic monotheism to which Christology is added as a later point. Instead, the Christian understanding of God begins with the Son through whom God is revealed as Father, and it is through the revelation of the Son that God is known as the triune one.” Grenz and Franke, Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context, 189.

8.2.2.2 The cross and convertive piety

As Grenz adopts Dayton’s characterization of evangelicalism as a movement driven by convertive piety, he should accept that any theological method that effectively revisions the movement needs to feed both the convertive and the pietistic aspects of the movement. While Grenz places a fair emphasis on evangelical spirituality, his focus on the movement’s convertive emphasis is not as clear. Although it is true that his desire that evangelical method be relevant to a postmodern era finds its roots in a missiological concern, missiology is otherwise not a clear driver of his method. His attitude towards the possibility of salvation through other religions is a little ambiguous. Historically the conviction amongst evangelicals that a clear commitment to the Christian faith is the only means of salvation has been a motivator for mission. Christopher Wright suggests that rather than finding the biblical basis for mission we should find the missiological basis for the Bible. The Bible’s existence stems from missiological concern, “mission is what the Bible is all about.” If Wright’s assessment is accurate, any theological method adopting scripture as a source should be strongly missional.

The tension becomes clearer when we remember that for Grenz, theology is for the community of God. It is an in-house activity. If the focus of a new theological method is primarily to construct the ground rules for theological discussion within a historically and culturally located community of faith, it falls well short of the missional engagement that characterizes the convertive piety that lies at the heart of evangelicalism. Evangelicalism is more likely to embrace a method that is outwardly focused and missional. Thus though evangelicals have been mixed in their response to Pannenberg, they are usually sympathetic to the apologetic and missional basis of his theological method.

59 Grenz, Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century, 23.
Carson replies to Grenz’ implication that Christian community “provides the basis for community in the truest sense” with “But on what ground do Christians claim that their vision for community-building is best? Isn’t that merely a communitarian conclusion? Would, say, a Muslim community concur?” D.A. Carson, "Domesticating the Gospel: A Review of Grenz’s ‘Renewing the Center’" in Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times, ed. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 54.
62 For example, though he is often critical of Pannenberg, see Erickson’s sympathetic discussion of Pannenberg’s approach to the resurrection. Millard J. Erickson, Christian Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 668-672.
While motifs of Trinity, community and eschatology are potentially missional, the missiological implications of the cross are clearest. Focusing on the cross, evangelicals proclaim, "Jesus died for you and me..." It is hard to see how a theological method can be described as *evangelical* if this aspect is overlooked. The cross and the gospel are inseparably related. Without the cross, there is no basis for the control belief that *the gospel liberates.* Selecting the cross as the first focal motif in theological construction should therefore be seen as a natural choice for evangelical theology.

### 8.3 QUESTION TWO AND THE EMBRACE OF THEOLOGICAL IMAGINATION AS A CREATIVE SPACE

Our second key question is: "Does the context in which evangelical theologians operate make the revisioning of evangelical theology possible, and if not, what changes are needed to make it possible?"

Before attempting to answer this, the prior question of whether evangelical theology can be revised, should be asked. Chapter two discusses the heresy trial faced by Clark Pinnock, the dismissal of staff at most of the Southern Baptist Theological Colleges\(^63\) and the generally fractious environment in which evangelical theological construction takes place. Chapters four to seven note that opposition to Grenz' proposals has sometimes been very sharp.\(^64\) The research has also observed the tendency to negatively label those with whom one disagrees. Such an environment is not conducive to ingenuity. In the light of this, it is possible that evangelicalism is a movement that is not capable of being revisioned. It might be intrinsically conservative, and in the original sense of the word conservative, be committed to conserving its beliefs and traditions. While changed context leads to change in even the most traditional institutions, where movements are resistant to change, significant revisioning is less likely. If this is the case, any attempt to revision evangelical theology within this context, will not succeed.

In attempting to answer the question we are best guided by the movement's history. Noll, Bebbington and Rawlyk argue that four key generalizations can be made from the history of evangelicalism since the eighteenth century. They suggest that:


1) Since its origins in the mid-eighteenth century, evangelicalism has always been a diverse, flexible, adaptable, and multiform movement.\(^5\) If this generalization is valid, and the movement has historically been diverse\(^6\) and able to embrace change,\(^7\) a revisioning process is consistent with the movement’s historical trajectory.\(^8\)

2) Evangelicalism is, and has always been, shaped by its popular character.\(^9\) If this is true, it indicates the basis on which a revisioning project is likely to be embraced (its popular appeal).

3) Though evangelicals claim to be antitransitional, the movement is built around strong traditions. Current controversies, in essence, usually reflect divisions from the past.\(^10\) If this claim is correct it implies that traditional divides within evangelicalism are deeply rooted, and revisioning projects might therefore only be effective for certain sectors of evangelicalism.\(^11\)

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\(^{56}\) Even though discouraged by the current trajectory of evangelical thought, David Wells readily acknowledges that evangelicalism has always been a diverse movement. He writes, “older evangelicalism never was the simple, monolithic thing that it was often represented as being. . . . Not all revered the mild generic Calvinism that became more or less synonymous with what evangelicals were thought to believe or thought they ought to believe. Arminians and those self-consciously Reformational, such as the Missouri Synod of Lutherans and the Orthodox Presbyterians, typically saw themselves as outsiders to this world. The minimal Calvinism of establishment evangelicalism was too much for Arminians, too little for robust Presbyterians, and too wrong headed for confessional Lutherans.” David F. Wells, “On Being Evangelical: Some Theological Differences and Similarities,” in *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond*, ed. Mark A. Noll, David Bebbington, and George A. Rawlyk (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 389.


\(^{58}\) Stewart argues that we should “be more prepared than formerly to speak about Evangelicalisms, i.e., varying expressions or manifestations of the evangelical faith in different centuries or eras as well as in diverse cultures.” Kenneth J. Stewart, “Did Evangelicalism Predate the Eighteenth Century? An Examination of David Bebbington’s Thesis,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 77, no. 2 (2005): 152.

\(^{59}\) Noll, ed., 8. Nigel Wright suggests that “Evangelical culture, despite the claims that it is middle class, is largely generated from the grassroots, even more so since the impact of the charismatic renewal. It is a folk culture...” Nigel Wright, “Re-Imagining Evangelicalism,” in *The Post-Evangelical Debate*, ed. Graham Cray et al. (London: Triangle, 1997), 108.

\(^{60}\) Noll, ed., 8-9. They note, e.g., that charges made by traditional evangelicals against Pentecostals and Charismatics are similar to the charges of “enthusiasm” made against John Wesley.

\(^{61}\) For example, Grenz’ attitude to tradition could draw fairly different responses from different sectors of evangelicalism. Alister McGrath argues that while the mainline Reformation was sympathetic to tradition when it was understood as traditional methods of interpreting scripture, and that the Reformers held the patristic writers in high esteem, they contrasted with some of the representatives of the Radical Reformation, who saw no place for tradition in Christian theology. McGrath argues that, recognized or not, the same debate divides evangelicals today. He writes, “Evangelicalism is a complex movement and contains within itself elements that are either directly influenced by or sympathetic to both the mainline and Radical Reformations. A person should expect, therefore, to encounter in contemporary evangelicalism the tensions whose origins lie within the Reformation – such as the tension concerning the role of tradition.” Alister E. McGrath, "Engaging the Great Tradition: 250
4) Creative communication networks have sustained the transnational character of evangelicalism and given it much of its distinctive shape. While valid, this generalization has less obvious direct relevance to our research.

In summary, based on the characterizations made by Noll, Bebbington and Rawlyk, an effectively revisioned evangelical theological method should not be intrinsically impossible so long as it has popular appeal to at least some of the traditions within evangelicalism. However, this does not explain the strength of the opposition to some of Grenz’ proposals. The sense of suspicion currently displayed towards the innovative and the new suggests a dislocation from the longer trajectory of the movement. Before evangelical theology can be revisioned, it might need to reclaim these aspects of its heritage. It will also need to tackle the underlying concern, representatively expressed by Cray when he wonders if “post’-evangelicals quickly become ‘ex’-evangelicals.” The fear that change represents a betrayal or desertion of evangelical identity is widespread and needs to be addressed.

In answering question two I am simply making an appeal for a change of heart within those who are stakeholders in evangelicalism. My proposal is that we allow imagination to serve as a space within which theological construction takes place. Until such a space is allowed, or better still, actively encouraged, it will be difficult for any project aimed at theological revisioning to take root and flourish. If evangelical theologians need to constantly worry that their efforts might see them blacklisted or expelled from their teaching positions, innovation and creativity will be early victims.

I recognise that the suggestion is potentially hazardous. Some associate “imagination” with “imaginary,” in the sense of fictitious. This is not the meaning intended here. In proposing imagination as a “space” rather than a “source” the implication is that we are dealing with ethos more than building blocks. The imagination embraced should be theological. In other words, it should springboard from the richness of the theological heritage. It should explore

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and savour the imagery of the Christian faith. It should allow for the sensory, the intuitive and the rational.

It is perhaps symbolic that Jonathan Wilson, Grenz’ successor as the Pioneer McDonald Professor of Theology at Carey Theological College, chose theological imagination as the theme for his inaugural address. Wilson suggests that he is seeking for a theological imagination that is evangelical and ecclesial, clarifying that in selecting evangelical as a quality of theological imagination he is not referring to a particular Christian culture, but that “evangelical as a quality of theological imagination identifies the reality of the gospel as the only source of life for theological imagination. In this way evangelical names and claims not an identity but an aspiration...” Viewing evangelical as an aspiration is not dissimilar to adopting the control belief that the gospel liberates. It suggests that we imagine a world shaped by the reality of the good news of the gospel, and allow theological construction (and indeed, all Christian living), to take place in the light of that vision.

In his work on the role of imagination in theology, Hart notes the futility of pretending to disentangle “the imaginative from the rational, the empirical, the moral” and postulates that, “The intellect is not an imagination-free zone.” Later he argues that, “imagination is not just at the core of what it means to be Christian but more significantly at the core of what it means to be human.” Without imagination, models remain lifeless and rigid. Imagination provides the lubrication and creativity required to straddle the gap between theory and varying contexts. Imagination helps new worlds spring into being. New projects are initially conceived in the imagination. Imagination is therefore a necessary ingredient of all genuine revisioning.

Johnson speaks of the link between the world scripture creates and imagination when he writes,

If Scripture is ever again to be a living source for theology, those who practice theology must become less preoccupied with the world that produced Scripture and learn again how to live in the world Scriptural produces. This will be a matter of imagination, and perhaps of leaping.

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75 Jonathan R. Wilson, Theological Imagination: Evangelical and Ecclesial (Vancouver: Carey Theological College, 2006), Pioneer McDonald Professor of Theology Inaugural Address.
76 Ibid., 3.
77 Hart, 193.
78 Ibid., 198-199.
79 Johnson, 3.
While I fully agree with Johnson that imagination enables us to live in the world scripture creates, I do not concur that theology must reduce its interest in the world that produced scripture. However, imagination – ideally communal imagination – is the way to access that world. Narrative approaches to scripture help us to journey back and forth in time. Kathryn Tanner reminds us of the helpfulness of viewing scripture as a popular text. Drawing from Augustine, she argues that "the Bible is not a difficult text but one whose style makes it accessible to all."80

Imagination makes it possible to access the wide range of possible meanings inherent in the text. This is not to discredit the Bible’s authority. Working from Grenz, I would argue that its authority has a pneumatological basis. The Bible is the Spirit’s book. As the community approaches it with an open heart and an open mind, its imagination is captured afresh by its message. This is the work of the Spirit. Second, as Grenz also argues, the Bible’s authority is beyond dispute because of the role it plays in the Christian community. It is the constituting text of the community, and can therefore never be relegated to a secondary role.81

Affirming imagination as the space within which theological construction takes place empowers a new listening to the text. It is a listening that involves more than reason alone. It moves us beyond the methodology of modernity to a method appropriate for a postmodern context. Instead of listening for propositions that resonate with our existing positions, we are free to listen to the voices of the minor characters. We are invited to imagine what they would say or report. We are also to attempt to feel what they might feel, see what they would see and argue as they would argue. This is not to bypass conscientious biblical exegesis, but rather to affirm some aspects that should be an integral part of responsible exegesis.

There is an intentional vagueness to the suggestion that imagination is the space within which theological construction best takes place.

Some may view it as adopting Tillich’s method of correlation, with the situation raising existential questions, which the theologian as philosopher hears and then attempts to answer in terms faithful to the original Christian message. Imaginative listening is required in that approach. However, while this is a possible interpretation, it is not a necessary one. Others might argue that it implies an openness to the work of the Spirit, which is an integral part of

81 See e.g. Grenz, Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century, 113-128.
Grenz' method. While affirming the importance of the role of the Spirit in theological construction, again, this is not the necessary interpretation of imagination as creative space.

Implicit in the suggestion is a freedom to feel the mystery of Christian symbols, a freedom to explore minor players in the church’s tradition, as well as in the biblical narrative. It could, e.g. involve listening to the voices of the Egyptian mothers who lost their children as a prelude to the exodus. Or the mothers whose firstborn sons were slaughtered by Herod. It could involve imagining the voices of Philistine wives whose husbands were killed in battle. Or the voice of the lame and infirm who were not present when Jesus passed through town. It could involve imagining a theology which starts at the cross, sweeps back to creation and fall, rushes ahead to the eschaton, and in the light of each of these images, attempts to construct a theology for the present, a theology where the gospel liberates serves as a control belief. The beauty of imagination as creative space is that it allows creation before dismissive evaluation.

This is not equivalent to “anything goes...” Imagination as creative space initially critiques its offspring through the control belief that the gospel liberates. This belief is informed by the conversation between scripture, tradition and culture. The motifs of Trinity, community and eschatology either bring the construction into clear and beautiful focus, or reveal it to be shallow and lacking in substance. All this takes place within the shadow of the cross. The motif of the cross will not allow us to settle for any model that is less than prophetic, missional, redemptive, compassionate, incarnational and ultimately, liberating.

8.4 CONCLUSION

Posing the evaluative questions at the end of each of chapters four to seven leads to a modest affirmation of the research proposition “that Stanley Grenz’ theological method effectively revisions evangelical theology.” Reservations as to whether Grenz’ method genuinely represents a move beyond foundationalism were noted, as was the disappointment that the implementation of Grenz’ method did not produce any obviously new insights.

As a result, question one asks if it is possible to amend Grenz’ model in such a way that a stronger affirmation of the thesis proposition can be made. Two tangible suggestions are made to supplement Grenz’ method.

The first is that the control belief that the gospel liberates be adopted. If accepted it would serve as the lens through which all theological construction is evaluated. It would help to
adjudicate as to the appropriate volume of each of theology’s conversation partners, the decision being made on the basis of the particular issue under consideration. It would also provide an ethical focus and direction for a revisioned evangelical theology.

My second proposal is that the cross be adopted as theology’s gathering motif. Evangelicals believe that without the cross there is no gospel. Crucicentrism has historically characterised the movement. The cross as theology’s gathering motif adds Christological content to the control belief that the gospel liberates. It also ensures that Grenz’ three focal motifs are directed in a manner consistent with evangelical theology. As such, it should be viewed as the first of the focal motifs.

Both the addition of a control belief and a gathering motif are intended to complement Grenz’ method, rather than to replace it or to diminish its significance. Both are consistent with the direction set by Grenz’ method, and strengthen it significantly. In my opinion, with their addition we are able to affirm the thesis proposition.

Question two asks if the context within which evangelical theologians operate allows for the revisioning of evangelical theology. Noting that the current environment is not conducive to creativity, an appeal is made for a change of ethos. The suggestion is that imagination be adopted as the space within which evangelical construction takes place. This is not tantamount to suggesting that anything goes, for the control belief that the gospel liberates remains as the lens through which theological construction is evaluated. An imagination rooted in the best of the evangelical tradition (as determined by the control belief the gospel liberates) but simultaneously released to explore the depth of the Christian faith, in conversation with scripture, tradition and culture, guided by motifs of Trinity, community and eschatology, and regularly regathering around the cross, could lead to an ever deepening appreciation of and insight into the Christian faith. If this kind of theological imagination is allowed to flourish, evangelical theology could enter an era of renewal and relevance...
CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This research tests the proposition “that Stanley Grenz’ theological method effectively revisions evangelical theology.” In examining this proposition the overall aim, as outlined in chapter 1.2, was to investigate evangelical theological method by exploring the method of a particular evangelical theologian, Stanley Grenz, and to utilize the findings to suggest a model for evangelical theological construction. Three goals emerged from this.

The first was to investigate evangelical theological method. In spite of the rapid growth of evangelicalism there is a paucity of serious reflection on its theological method. In addition, the transition from modernity to postmodernity, with the accompanying call for a postfoundationalist rather than a foundationalist method, necessitates fresh engagement on the topic. This research has made a contribution towards this by critiquing a particular theological method and suggesting modifications to it.

The second goal was to explore evangelical theological method through the input of a particular evangelical theologian, Stanley Grenz. Though evangelicalism is a growing force within Christianity, it has produced few theologians whose work is of a sufficient standard to justify serious research. Grenz is an exception to this generalization. While his writing has started to attract attention, it has not been evaluated holistically. His sudden death also left his theological project incomplete. This research has therefore highlighted the work of a specific evangelical theologian. In doing so, it has unpacked some issues faced by evangelical theologians in their theological construction.

The third goal was to further the quest for a revisioned evangelical theology. By using Grenz as a window through which issues facing evangelical theologians can more clearly be seen, the research highlights issues faced by evangelical theologians as they attempt to theologize in a postmodern context. At the start of the research it was unclear if the research proposition would be affirmed or disproved. In the end, only a modest affirmation of the proposition was possible.1 Chapter 8 proposes additions to Grenz’ model which make a stronger affirmation of the research proposition possible. It thereby makes a contribution towards the quest for a genuinely revisioned evangelical theology.

1 See chapter 8.1.
To test the research proposition and to reach the goals set, this research follows a simple structure.

Chapter one begins with a narrative introduction to the birth of the research, before outlining its goals and purpose. A historical sketch of Grenz explores five converging streams that influenced his development. The research proposition is then introduced as are the four evaluative questions posed at the end of each of chapters four to seven to help assess the validity of the proposition. The method and outline of the research is then summarized.

Chapter two roots the research with an examination of evangelicalism, working from the assumption that an understanding of evangelicalism is required before an assessment can be made if a particular theological method revisions it. The contested nature of the historical trajectory of evangelicalism is explored, as are some of the tensions resulting from the rapid growth of the movement. The complexity of arriving at a statement clearly articulating the essence of evangelical identity is demonstrated, and two representative issues currently dividing evangelicalism are discussed to give an appreciation of the "texture" of the movement. A further two issues facing evangelicalism, the shift to the postmodern context and doubts about the epistemological underpinnings of foundationalism, are identified as being of special relevance to this research and are explored.

Chapter three, the literature review, examines the primary sources for this research. Whilst a broadly representative overview of Grenz’ publications is given, those works with direct relevance to his theological/ethical method are privileged, and considered in greater depth. Whilst of necessity reductionist in its coverage, the chapter highlights the broad sweep of Grenz’ work and points to several works by Grenz which have received little attention.

Chapters one to three constitute part one of the research and provide the necessary background for the testing of the thesis proposition. More direct examination is then undertaken in part two, made up of chapters four to seven.

Chapter four examines the first source Grenz suggests as a conversation partner for theological construction, scripture. His understanding of the role scripture plays in theological construction is unpacked, and responses to his proposal examined, before the four evaluative questions are posed. The chapter notes that Grenz’ clear understanding that scripture serves as the primary voice in theological construction (the norming norm), whilst reassuring for evangelicals, weakens his argument that his method genuinely moves beyond foundationalism. At best, the distance moved is modest.
Chapter five adopts a similar approach to chapter four, and examines the remaining sources Grenz suggests for theological construction, tradition and culture. Though each source is examined discretely, and the mixed responses to Grenz’ understanding and use of each source noted, the chapter acknowledges that in Grenz’ model the interactive nature of the sources is important. Grenz’ stress that each source be pneumatologically mediated is explored, as is the difficulty in dealing with the subjectivity inherent in this approach, even when pneumatological mediation is linked with communal discernment. While recognising that the interactive nature of Grenz’ model allows Grenz to argue that his method moves beyond foundationalism, the evaluative questions suggest that it would be more appropriate to describe Grenz’ method as adopting a “chastened” or “soft” foundationalism.

Chapter six investigates the three focal motifs Grenz uses in theological construction. The motifs of Trinity, community and eschatology have each had a resurgence of interest since the second half of the twentieth century, so Grenz’ choice of these three is neither intrinsically original nor controversial. The chapter explores the manner in which Grenz applies these motifs, and some of the responses that this application has elicited. In applying the four evaluative questions to assess the validity of the thesis proposition, questions emerge around the absence of certain motifs, rather than the flaws in the motifs chosen. In particular, the question is raised whether the absence of the motifs of the cross and of salvation weaken the attempt to revision evangelical theology.

Chapter seven evaluates the usefulness of Grenz’ model in exploring a key ethical issue facing evangelicals, homosexuality. Though Grenz applies his method consistently in his exploration of the topic, his conclusions are essentially a repetition of traditional evangelical views. The chapter acknowledges that this could be because this is an area where Grenz feels revisioning is unnecessary, but notes the selective use made of culture as a conversation partner in the resulting theological construction, as well as the limited range of meanings attached to the focal motifs Grenz suggests. The chapter asks whether Grenz fails to revision an evangelical response to this issue, not because his method does not allow it, but because his epistemic starting point serves as a filter as to what each source can unearth or each motif represent.

Part two of this research, made up of chapters four to seven, is therefore an exploration of Grenz’ theological method. It also tests its relevance in a particular trial case. By so doing, it seeks to meet the first two goals of the research by examining evangelical theological method.
through the method of a particular evangelical theologian. It also unearths issues that need to be addressed if evangelical theology is to be effectively revisioned.

Part three of the research, made up primarily of chapter eight followed by a brief summary and conclusion in chapter nine, aims to meet the third goal of the research by adding to Grenz’ model and thereby contributing towards the revisioning of evangelical theology.

In pulling the various streams of the research together, chapter eight argues that the thesis proposition can only be affirmed with reservations. It suggests that this is not because Grenz’ method is incapable of leading to a significant revisioning of evangelical theology, but because Grenz has limited the range of its application, and does not push the boundaries of his method. It suggests additions to Grenz’ method that could lead to the proposition being affirmed more strongly. It advocates for two clarifications/modifications to Grenz’ method, and supplements these with an appeal for a changed context within which evangelical theological construction takes place, a context where theological imagination is encouraged. It suggests that if this changed context can be birthed, Grenz’ method, complemented by adopting the control belief that the gospel liberates and the gathering motif of the cross, can lead to a genuinely revisioned evangelical theology. The modifications should not be seen as discontinuous with Grenz’ method, but rather as resources to focus the direction Grenz’ method takes. Nor should they been seen as trumping Grenz’ method. The resulting method remains predominantly Grenzian.

In concluding, it remains only to highlight how the goals of this research have been met and the contribution it makes.

The first and central area where this research attempts to make a contribution is in the realm of evangelical theological method. Grenz’ conviction that evangelical method needs to move beyond the foundationalism that has characterized the movement, is valid. Grenz’ method of engaging the three theological sources of scripture, tradition and culture as conversation partners gathered around the three focal motifs of Trinity, community and eschatology, the conversation and theological construction resulting being pneumatologically mediated and communally discerned, helps to move evangelicalism beyond foundationalism. However, because the terms of engagement for the conversation are not clearly articulated, in practice Grenz allows his method to lapse back towards foundationalism. Scripture’s voice is privileged, which at times leads to the voices of tradition and culture being ignored. The reverse does not take place, which makes it difficult to affirm that this is a genuinely
postfoundational method. Rather it should be seen as representing a soft or a chastened foundationalism.

To move Grenz' method beyond the foundationalism he seeks to avoid, this research suggests adopting the control belief *the gospel liberates*. This control belief, by articulating that which evangelicals most deeply believe, helps to ascertain the appropriate volume of each conversation partner in theological construction. The belief that *the gospel liberates* helps to filter the input of each theological source. Oppressive understandings of scripture, tradition or culture are disallowed in advance. In addition, supplementing the focal motifs with the gathering motif of the cross helps to ensure that the theology constructed remains true to its evangelical roots. Eschatology without the cross can lapse into triumphalism, while the structuring motif of the Trinity without the cross can lead to a weak Christology. Likewise, community without the focal motif of the cross, can lead to an inadequate ecclesiology and missiology. By adopting the control belief that *the gospel liberates*, evangelical theologians can move beyond the defensive and sometimes erratic stances adopted by the movement, and have the confidence that the theology they articulate is genuinely liberating and life affirming. It thus enables evangelical theologians to engage in theological dialogue with those who fall outside of the parameters of the movement. It also results in a theological method appropriate for a postmodern context. The addition of the control belief that *the gospel liberates* helps to ensure that the model is genuinely interactive and responsive to context. Because the content of liberation is not presumed in advance, it represents a significant move beyond foundationalism. Each theological source can help to further the search for the liberation implicit in the gospel message. In addition, by treating theology (proper) and theological ethics seamlessly as well as motivating that the insights of pastoral theology be taken seriously, the method advocates an interdisciplinary approach, which is appropriate for a postmodern context.

In examining Grenz' theological method, the research therefore advocates that his method be adopted, but that it be extended by the addition of the control belief that *the gospel liberates* and the gathering motif of the cross.

The second goal was to highlight the work of a significant evangelical theologian, which this research has clearly done by focusing on Grenz' work and method. In focusing on Grenz, the aim was to view his work holistically, which has been achieved both through the literature

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2 Chapter 7.2 notes the danger of placing a wedge between theological ethics and pastoral theology, while 7.4.5 and 7.4.6 note that the pastoral implications of the motifs of both community and eschatology can be used more empathetically than Grenz has chosen to do.
review in chapter 3, and the overall assessment of his project. Although the focus has been on his theological method, the research has interacted with a wide range of his work, and provides a valid picture of his theological contribution. The research recognises that Grenz' sudden death at the age of fifty five has left aspects of his theological project incomplete and some issues unresolved. In assessing the validity of the research thesis “that Stanley Grenz' theological method effectively revisions evangelical theology,” it concludes that only a modest affirmation of the proposition can be made, largely because Grenz fails to clarify how the three sources for theological construction will interact. By failing to examine the implications that flow from continuing to assign a veto role to scripture, Grenz is unable to convince that he has constructed a method that moves significantly beyond foundationalism. Supplementing the tools Grenz uses for theological construction with the control belief that the gospel liberates and by adding the gathering motif of the cross, results in a method that moves well beyond foundationalism. It is a method born from convictions that evangelicals hold most dearly.

The third major goal of this research was to make a contribution towards the quest for a genuinely revisioned evangelical theology. By examining the responses to Grenz' method, the limitations imposed by the context in which evangelical theologians operate became apparent. In highlighting these restrictions this research suggests that evangelicals work to create an environment where theological imagination and vision are valued, and not treated with scorn and suspicion. While rigorous evaluation of all proposals should not be avoided, it is possible to nurture an ethos that encourages innovation and creativity. At present, this is not part of the ethos of evangelicalism, though historically the movement has been characterised by flexibility, adaptability and change, and there is therefore no inherent reason why such a change should be impossible.

Grenz' theological project makes a modest contribution towards the goal of revisioning evangelical theology. By adopting a trio of sources for theological construction, and supplementing these with three focal motifs, as well as by stressing the role of the Spirit in guiding the community of faith and also emphasising the holistic spirituality that should characterise evangelical theology, Grenz has constructed a theological method that enables evangelicals to embark upon their task in a postmodern, postfoundational context. If evangelicals are also able to affirm their control belief that the gospel liberates, and are therefore willing to disassociate themselves from all practices that oppress and hinder life on

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this planet,\textsuperscript{4} while at the same time they gather around the cross, and allow their theology to be informed and shaped by the rich and multiple challenges that flow from this motif, a revised evangelical theology can be birthed. If this theology can be constructed in an interdisciplinary environment characterised by an atmosphere of openness, respect, creativity, reverence and hope, Grenz’ dream of a revised evangelical theology may be realised.

\textsuperscript{4} Life in the broadest sense of the word, and not restricted to human life.
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