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STANLEY GRENZ'S RELATEDNESS AND RELEVANCY TO BRITISH EVANGELICALISM

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INTRODUCTION

Stanley Grenz did not have a close, direct relationship with British evangelicalism. After university and seminary education in the US, he took doctoral work in Munich (1976-78) before returning to North America for a short pastorate (1979-81) that allowed him to teach adjunct theology courses in Winnipeg. This continued until he received a post at the Midwestern seminary of his denominational upbringing in 1981.¹ On his early theological journey, then, Grenz effectively passed over the British context. He neither studied nor taught in Britain. By the end of his life, his career and ministry only led him to England once in 1997² and to Scotland on a different occasion in 2003.³ One might wonder about the significance of an essay on Grenz and British evangelicalism. Although the query would contain very little understanding of Grenz's deep interest in the 'worldwide, multicultural phenomenon' that marked 'the global evangelical ethos' he was interested in,⁴ which warranted his attention and shaped his work as a theologian.

A conscious awareness of the connectedness to the 'global village' making up the 'evangelical family'⁵ prompted Grenz's desire to be conversant with, among others, the British scene. He has been keenly related to British evangelicalism since the early 1980s. While transatlantic theological cross-pollination is nothing new within evangelicalism, it is

¹ Sioux Falls Seminary, Sioux Falls, SD, USA (formerly North American Baptist Seminary).

² Here he gave the annual Laing Lecture at London Bible College (now London School of Theology), 'Christian Integrity in a Postmodern World'.

³ Further details of Grenz's trip to the UK can be found in an earlier version of this paper, presented at *The Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism in Britain Project*, 16 June 2009, The Royal Foundation of St. Katharine, London, England (PDF: <<http://bit.ly/91jFRT>> accessed 19 April 2010).

⁴ Stanley J. Grenz, 'Die Begrenzte Gemeinschaft (the Boundaried People) and the Character of Evangelical Theology,' *JETS* 45/2 (June 2002), p. 312.

⁵ Stanley J. Grenz, 'Postmodern Canada: Characteristics of a Nation in Transition,' *Touchstone* 18/1 (Jan 2000), p. 27; Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), p. 11.

a quality that marked part of the relationship of Stan Grenz and British evangelicalism. Accounting for this connection is the central aim of this paper, which will be structured in three parts. The first explores specific trinitarian developments within the UK that Grenz found both helpful and instructive for his own development. Next, phenomena reflective in UK developments that later began to emerge within North American evangelicalism's recent history are explored, which also include Grenz's personal involvement in (and reception of) the theological happenings across the pond. The third part highlights ways that British evangelicalism benefited from and can still learn from Grenz's work. While a plea for continued British-American conversation is not the primary purpose of this paper, key components of Grenz's program uniquely lend themselves to those who desire to engage and articulate serious theology that serves the church's mission for today. Accordingly, this final section will look at the British reception of Grenz, and suggest further possibilities for continued engagement.

2. THE RESURGENCE OF BRITISH TRINITARIANISM

2.1. *British Trinitarian Theology*

After Barth the resurgence of trinitarian theology had long been underway on the European continent, notable in the works of Rahner, Moltmann and Pannenberg, among others. And while trinitarian engagement was not absent in the latter half of twentieth century Britain, as seen at least in the work of Thomas Torrance for example,⁶ like so much else in recent trinitarian theology, it occurred more or less as a result of Barth's influence and in no way independent of it.

The attempt at a thoroughgoing recovery of the doctrine of the Trinity in recent British theology seems to have primarily occurred amidst the work of the British Council of Churches' Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine Today. This group met ten times from Nov 1983 to May 1988 and produced three volumes under the heading, *The Forgotten Trinity*.⁷

⁶ Paul D. Molnar, *Thomas F. Torrance: Theologian of the Trinity* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010) and seen early in Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (London: SCM, 1965), and later, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being, Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), yielding a fuller trinitarian exposition which Grenz considered 'the last comprehensive Trinitarian theological offering of the century' in *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), p. 3.

⁷ London: The British Council of Churches, 1991. Vol. 1 contains the Study Commission's report; vol. 2 is a Study Guide on the report's main issues;

The work of the BCC occurred in light of the observation that the doctrine of the Trinity had receded in British history before then, as reflected in a noticeably dominant *unitarian practice* of worship, correspondingly inadequate models of theology, and the lack of correlation between human and divine personhood, which James Torrance noted in the first essay of the Study Commission's published papers.⁸ Each of these unfortunate descriptions, it was deemed by Torrance and others, belonged to the influence of Enlightenment thinking which, by its key tenets, had given birth to Western individualism.

This observation made way for a renewed interest in the more Eastern social model of the Trinity which began to penetrate British theology. In particular, Colin Gunton, noted as 'a major figure in retrieving... the Trinity from the periphery and returning it to the center of British theology',⁹ began to integrate the Cappadocians into systematic theology.¹⁰ And yet until the early-mid 1980s, this feature was virtually absent from Gunton's work on the Trinity, which was much more Barthian (ie, Augustinian or Western). In Gunton's earlier works, before the integration of aspects of Zizioulas's thinking, there is 'an awareness that the Trinity matters to Christian doctrine, unusual enough in 1970s English-language theology', but not much more.¹¹

2.2. *British Trinitarian Praxis*

Gunton serves as a case in point of the weight of influence that fully relational accounts of the Trinity began to have on British trinitarian thinking resultant largely of the BCC work, and primarily Zizioulas's influential ideas.¹² It seems like this turn toward the relational Trinity, away from

vol. 3 contains ten papers from the Study Commission's meetings.

⁸ James B. Torrance, 'The Doctrine of the Trinity in our Contemporary Situation', *The Forgotten Trinity* (London: Inter-Church House, 1991), vol. 3, pp. 1–17.

⁹ John Webster, 'Systematic Theology After Barth', in *The Modern Theologians*, 3rd edn, ed. by David F. Ford and Rachel Muers (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p. 259.

¹⁰ A point recently acknowledged by John D. Zizioulas himself in *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church*, ed. by Paul McPartlan (London: T&T Clark, 2006), p. 124, n. 40.

¹¹ Stephen R. Holmes, 'Towards the Analogia personae et relationis: Developments in Gunton's Theology of the Trinity', in *Essays in the Theology of Colin E. Gunton*, ed. by Lincoln Harvey (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2010), forthcoming.

¹² See references to Zizioulas in *The Forgotten Trinity*: James Torrance, 'The Doctrine of the Trinity in our Contemporary Situation', p. 16; Colin Gun-

Barth's, largely arose from a desire for a transcendent basis to serve as a corrective for societal ills. In Gunton's words, as his thought began to shift: 'Essential is that the notion of God as triune makes it possible for us to see the origin and rationale of *all things* neither in ourselves nor in an undifferentiated and heteronomous unity',¹³ And therefore a social model of the Trinity could solve the problems of 'alienation' resultant from Enlightenment thought, which would then lead to a more appropriate basis for theological ethics,¹⁴ inviting further clarification for a better (relational) theological anthropology drawn from a pastoral thrust.¹⁵

The pastoral implications of the relational models of the Trinity were not only serving theological ends, but also interacted with and perhaps paved part of the way for engagement with some of the most pressing ethical issues on the horizon within British evangelicalism, including controversial issues such as women's ordination,¹⁶ homosexuality,¹⁷ and engagement with postmodernism.¹⁸ Beyond this, the social Trinity began

ton, 'The Spirit in the Trinity', p. 123; Andrew Walker, 'The Concept of the Person in Social Science: Possibilities for Theological Anthropology', p. 137; and Costa Carras, 'The Doctrine of the Trinity in Relation to Political Action and Thought', p. 159. If not engaging Zizioulas directly, each of these essays engages other Eastern thinkers, either in ancient or recent history.

¹³ Colin E. Gunton, *Enlightenment and Alienation: An Essay towards a Trinitarian Theology* (Basingstoke: Marshall Morgan and Scott, 1985), p. 88 (emphasis mine).

¹⁴ Gunton, *Enlightenment and Alienation*, pp. 97–101.

¹⁵ E.g., Paul S. Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2000).

¹⁶ Though the ordination of women had been part of churches within the Baptist Union of Great Britain, along with the Methodist, Nazarene, and Pentecostal traditions since The Great War, it would become sanctioned by the Church of England with the 1993 Ordination of Women Measure, and is still somewhat of a controversial issue among British evangelicals.

¹⁷ Soon to be raised particularly by the late Anglican Evangelical homosexual advocate, Michael Vasey in *Strangers and Friends: A New Exploration of Homosexuality and the Bible* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995). I am grateful to Steve Holmes for this reference.

¹⁸ To some degree, this had already been engaged in Gunton, *Enlightenment and Alienation*, but would be further probed in Lesslie Newbigin, 'Religious Pluralism: A Missiological Approach' (see this essay in Paul Weston (ed.), *Lesslie Newbigin: Missionary Theologian: A Reader* (London: SPCK, 2006), pp. 172–84), and Andrew Walker, *Telling the Story: Gospel, Mission and Culture* (London: SPCK, 1996).

informing *doxology*, as reflected in the works of James Torrance¹⁹ and his son Alan, whose own critique of Zizioulas is quite devastating.²⁰

Beyond the anthropological, ethical and doxological roles that the resurgence of trinitarian theology served in Britain, it also served a missional role. And yet this missional emphasis began to pulsate at least thirty years prior to the BCC's efforts, in the writings of the South Indian missionary, Lesslie Newbigin.²¹ Certainty about the precise influence Newbigin may have had on Gunton is not clear, but the request he made to Newbigin to write the 'Foreword' of *Enlightenment and Alienation* gives some clue, as does Newbigin's other participation in BCC work,²² and their mutual attachment as United Reformed Church ministers.²³ Early in his BCC essay James Torrance also referred to Newbigin's assessment of the British trinitarian demise.²⁴

Part of a further reflection on the trinitarian resurgence within British evangelicalism concerns the recent phenomenon dubbed by many labels, among which are the *emerging church* or *deep church*.²⁵ The practitioners

¹⁹ James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996), pp. 18–25. James Torrance elsewhere highlighted the Triune God as not only the object of our worship but also the *agent* by which 'our worship is seen as the gift of participating through the Spirit in Christ's communion with the Father' ('The Doctrine of the Trinity in our Contemporary Situation', p. 7).

²⁰ Alan J. Torrance, *Persons in Communion: Essay on Trinitarian Description and Human Participation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), pp. 283–306.

²¹ Grenz noted that the recent root of at least one trinitarian ecclesiological metaphor (i.e., Nation of God–Body of Christ–Temple of the Spirit) is seen in British theologian Arthur W. Wainwright (1962), but finds it earlier in Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of Faith* (New York: Friendship, 1953); see Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 466 n. 10.

²² Other BCC work in the early 1980s gave birth to Newbigin's book, *The Other Side of 1984* and the BCC's 'Gospel and our Culture' program. For account of these developments see Weston, 'Introduction', in *Lesslie Newbigin: A Reader*, p. 13.

²³ While Gunton worked in the context of a legacy Newbigin established, he occasionally references Newbigin in his work. See both Colin E. Gunton, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Essays Toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), pp. 13, 32; and his *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 2nd edn (London: T&T Clark, 2006), pp. 162–3.

²⁴ 'The Doctrine of the Trinity in our Contemporary Situation', p. 5.

²⁵ See a discussion of the development of this phenomenon in the UK and significant aspects of these terms in Luke Bretherton, 'Beyond the Emerging Church', in *Remembering Our Future: Explorations in Deep Church*,

within the UK stand in the stream of these British developments, have been highly reflective of Newbigin's writing,²⁶ and see the doctrine of the Trinity as deeply informing their work.²⁷ This has come about often in the works of those same practitioners and theologians who were involved in the earlier charismatic movement in Britain, but who recognized its serious theological deficiencies²⁸ and had indeed found a much more sustainable substance in trinitarian theology,²⁹ especially as explored anthropologically through *imago dei*,³⁰ which reflects the Trinity, accessible through the man Jesus.³¹

ed. by Andrew Walker and Luke Bretherton (London: Paternoster, 2007), pp. 30–58.

- ²⁶ See the comments by Jason Clark (former coordinator of Emergent-UK, which was an affiliate organization to the US's Emergent Village): 'You have to read Newbigin, if you want to do missiology and theology in a postmodern context' <http://jasonclark.ws/2004/02/02/leslie_newbigin/> accessed 12 June 2009. Paul Weston also stated that Newbigin is "essential reading" for contemporary missional engagement (personal email correspondence, 9 July 2009).
- ²⁷ This also was seen in a recent presentation by Pete Ward and Paul S. Fiddes, 'The Dance of the Warrior Bride: Theological Reflections on Observed Worship' (Society for the Study of Theology 2009 Conference, Amersfoort, The Netherlands, 31 March 2009), whose presentation task was to observe 'an act of worship' and then provide 'a theological "reflection" arising from Trinitarian theology', which attempted to 'discern the nature of what is taking place from the perspective of a trinitarian theology'. An obvious critique of Ward and Fiddes is that the worship event of young people in Thurso, Scotland (2002) may not have had worshippers with any sort of trinitarian theology at all (or even belief in God as Trinity), which would then seem to challenge the integrity of a trinitarian description or accounting of the empirical activity as part of the worship at the event.
- ²⁸ Tom Smail, Andrew Walker, and Nigel Wright, *Charismatic Renewal: The Search for a Theology* (London: SPCK, 1993).
- ²⁹ See Alister McGrath, 'Trinitarian Theology', in *Where Shall My Wond'ring Soul Begin: The Landscape of Evangelical Piety and Thought*, ed. Mark A Noll and Ronald F. Thiemann (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 54-55, which highlights the earlier book by Thomas A. Smail, *The Forgotten Father* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1980) as offering a trinitarian emphasis over giving primacy to Christ or the Spirit.
- ³⁰ Andrew Walker, 'The Concept of the Person in Social Science', pp. 137-57; and Tom Smail, *Like Father, Like Son: The Trinity Imaged in Our Humanity* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005).
- ³¹ Walker, 'The Concept of the Person in Social Science', p. 154; and Smail, *Like Father, Like Son*, pp. 61-2.

3. THE RESURGENCE OF NORTH AMERICAN TRINITARIANISM

3.1. The Mainline and Ensuing US Evangelical Interest

Consistent with the sharing of ideas that has taken place between European and North American Protestant theologians, a largely one-directional movement,³² Claude Welch predicted (1952) that the doctrine of the Trinity was about to become 'mainstream again because of the insights being proffered by Barthian theology',³³ Welch was not the only American who turned to Barth for help with this, but so had others, including Robert Jenson in the early 1960s.³⁴ The doctrine of the Trinity continued to be a part of North American mainline theology in the 1970s (in a sort of 'retrofitting' way)³⁵ with process theologians. The 1980s saw continual discovery of trinitarian theology, with continued work by Jenson,³⁶ whom Pannenberg called 'one of the most original and knowledgeable theologians of our time', and American David Hart called "our" systematic theologian',³⁷ The progress trinitarian thinking began to make was enhanced with visiting professorships to the US by Pannenberg, and Moltmann, and their increasing influence, along with the steady contribution by Jenson, and quite simply that 'most theologians writing in North America either trained in Europe or at least in European traditions',³⁸

³² I am thinking in particular of the incredible influence from Barth, Pannenberg, and Moltmann on the N. American theological landscape during the second half of the twentieth century, not just resulting from published works, but also from extended visits and lectureships. The unilateral nature of this trinitarian reception may find at least one exception in Pannenberg's dialogue with process theologians.

³³ Ted Peters, 'Trinity Talk: Part I', *Dialog* 26/1 (Winter 1987), p. 44. Peters cites Welch's doctoral dissertation, *In His Name: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (New York: Scribner's, 1952).

³⁴ John Webster, 'Systematic Theology After Barth', pp. 256-58. Jenson's first book engaging with the Trinity was *Alpha and Omega: A Study in the Theology of Karl Barth* (New York: Nelson, 1963).

³⁵ By 'retrofitting', Peters points out the 'encumbered' and 'rather formal task' of attaching 'existing process categories to the trinitarian symbols' ('Trinity Talk: Part II', *Dialog* 26/2 [Spring 1987], pp. 134-5).

³⁶ Including *The Triune Identity: God According to the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982); and with Carl Braaten, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

³⁷ Wolfhart Pannenberg, 'Review of *Systematic Theology: Volumes I and II*', *First Things* 103 (May 2000), pp. 49-53; David B. Hart, 'The Lively God of Robert Jenson', *First Things* 156 (October 2005), pp. 28-34.

³⁸ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity: Global Perspectives* (Louisville, Westminster John Knox, 2007), p. 154.

And then in the early 1990s the doors flung wide open with abundant publication on the Trinity,³⁹ eliciting seemingly unlimited trinitarian engagement, and not always in the most helpful places.

By Nov 2004, according to Fred Sanders, there were no evangelical authors (especially from the US) doing 'significant work' in the field of trinitarian studies.⁴⁰ This assertion might be contested by the works of at least a few American evangelicals stretching back into the mid-1990s⁴¹ (certainly from a number of British *evangelicals*).⁴² It was also during the mid-1990s that practitioners from the US emerging church (in its variegated shades, though particularly those involved with the Young Leaders Network) 'who were part of the early missional conversation had been influenced by men like Lesslie Newbigin and were discussing the role of the church in culture'.⁴³ It is uncertain, however, how much of Newbigin's trinitarian basis for mission was a part of what summoned a robust engagement with the doctrine of the Trinity. Tony Jones of Emergent Village spoke of seeing a 'robust trinitarianism' in Emergent that may perhaps be 'a legacy of Stan [Grenz]'.⁴⁴

³⁹ See Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991); Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992); and Ted Peters, *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993).

⁴⁰ Fred Sanders, 'The State of the Doctrine of the Trinity in Evangelical Theology', *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 47/2 (Spring 2005), pp. 153-4.

⁴¹ E.g., Millard J. Erickson, *God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995); Open Theists like Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996); perhaps Miroslav Volf, "'The Trinity is Our Social Program": The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement', *Modern Theology* 14/3 (July 1998), pp. 403-23; and *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). Also, see the transatlantic contributions in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed. *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: Theological Essays on Culture and Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

⁴² E.g., Alister McGrath, *Understanding the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990); and Alister McGrath, 'Trinitarian Theology', in *Where Shall My Wond'ring Soul Begin*, pp. 51-60 (see his nuanced description of US and British evangelicals, pp. 51-52), along with those British theologians who might not be opposed to the label, 'evangelical,' like Gunton and Smail.

⁴³ This information divulged from one of the early leaders involved in this organization, Mark Driscoll. Personal email correspondence with Driscoll (12 May 2009).

⁴⁴ Personal email correspondence with Tony Jones (18 May 2009).

3.2. Grenz's Contribution

While parallel developments were taking place on both sides of the Atlantic by the 1990s, Stan Grenz was becoming a leading voice in North American evangelicalism.⁴⁵ His early works, none of which would have been read widely (or at all) in Britain, were specifically dealing with either ethical, eschatological, or ecclesial matters, all of which were written to have direct bearing on the life of the church at the time.⁴⁶ As such, these early works carried interesting (sometimes subtle) trinitarian hints and emphases.⁴⁷

Throughout Grenz's early writings, he can be observed as inching toward the accession of a transcendent basis to serve as a corrective for ethical and societal ills, not unlike other Europeans working in the US context,⁴⁸ and not unlike the BCC's Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine Today in the 1980s, which began meeting at the time that British evangelicalism was facing precisely the same issues Grenz was (ie, women in ministry, homosexuality, postmodernism, etc.). As early as 1994 in *Theology for the Community of God* he indicated his discovery of this

⁴⁵ Ed L. Miller, 'How I Took Barth's Chair, and How Grenz Almost Took It From Me', *Princeton Theological Review* 12/1 (Spring 2006), p. 3; and Roger E. Olson, 'Stanley J. Grenz's Contribution to Evangelical Theology', *Princeton Theological Review* 12/1 (Spring 2006), p. 27.

⁴⁶ Two exceptions to this are *Reason for Hope: The Systematic Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); and coauthored with Roger E. Olson, *Twentieth Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992). Yet Grenz would have certainly argued that Pannenberg and twentieth century theological developments had significant impact on the church's life.

⁴⁷ E.g., *The Baptist Congregation* (Valley Forge: Judson, 1985; reprint ed., Vancouver, BC: Regent College, 2002), p. 18; *Prayer: The Cry for the Kingdom* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1988; rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), pp. 8-30; coauthored with Wendell Hoffman, *AIDS: Ministry in the Midst of an Epidemic* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), pp. 175-91; *Sexual Ethics: An Evangelical Perspective*, rev. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), pp. 44-51, originally published as *Sexual Ethics: A Biblical Perspective* (Dallas: Word, 1990); *The Millennial Maze: Sorting Out Evangelical Options* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992), p. 198; coauthored with Denise Muir Kjesbo, *Women and the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995), pp. 169-79; coauthored with Roy D. Bell, *Betrayal of Trust: Confronting and Preventing Clergy Sexual Misconduct* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995; 2d ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), pp. 61-7, 80-81; and *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 168-9.

⁴⁸ E.g., Volf, 'The Trinity is Our Social Program', pp. 403-23; and Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity*, pp. 396-7.

theological basis in 'the social Trinity' which provided him a satisfactory theological basis for dilemmas left behind by modernism.⁴⁹

In the 1997 Laing Lecture at London School of Theology entitled, 'Christian Integrity in a Postmodern World', Grenz continued to work out implications of what Christian ethics grounded in 'the only true God... the social Trinity' (both as a transcendent reference point for terms and as a model) might look like in the contemporary postmodern context.⁵⁰ This essay was an expanded edition of a chapter in *The Moral Quest* (1997) where Grenz had been moving toward 'the goal of constructing a community-based ethic of being',⁵¹ In 2000, he stated the relevance of the social Trinity for human ethics succinctly:

We believe that the Christian vision, focused as it is on God as the triunity of persons and humankind as created to be the *imago dei*, sets forth more completely the nature of community that all religious belief systems in their own way and according to their own understanding seek to foster. This vision, we maintain, provides the best transcendent basis for the human ideal of life-in-relationship, for it looks to the divine life as a plurality-in-unity as the basis for understanding what it means to be human persons-in-community.⁵²

By the early part of the century, Grenz had become 'the most well known evangelical theologian calling for recognition of the importance of the "communitarian" turn for the casting of evangelical theology',⁵³ And it was the early working out of Grenz's ethics that served a major role in the development of his theological method, one that saw the present culture

⁴⁹ Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 2d ed., p. 76; and *A Primer on Postmodernism*, pp. 168-9. Interestingly, he refers to God as a 'social reality' in *Revising Evangelical Theology*, p. 187, though nowhere yet as 'the social Trinity'. One year earlier in 1992 he noted that Pannenberg's 'elevation of the social Trinity to the center of theology provides the foundation for a move to community, but he leaves others the challenge of developing the idea itself' ('The Irrelevance of Theology', p. 311).

⁵⁰ Delivered 13 Feb 1997 and later published as 'Christian Integrity in a Postmodern World (Theological Ethics)', in *New Dimensions in Evangelical Thought: Essays in Honor of Millard J. Erickson*, ed. David S. Dockery (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), pp. 394-410.

⁵¹ Stanley J. Grenz, *The Moral Quest: Foundations of Christian Ethics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997), pp. 227-39.

⁵² Stanley J. Grenz, 'Beyond Foundationalism: Is a Nonfoundationalist Evangelical Theology Possible?' *Christian Scholar's Review* 30/1 (Fall 2000), p. 81.

⁵³ F. LeRon Shults, 'The "Body of Christ" in Evangelical Theology', *Word and World* 22/2 (Spring 2002), p. 183.

(with intrinsic language, issues and questions from its own context)⁵⁴ as an indispensable source for theology's construction.⁵⁵ But in addition to culture, in which the Spirit is said to speak, Grenz had two other sources for theology's construction: scripture and tradition. This threefold source for theology's construction, deemed a 'trialogue', refers to 'the activity of "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 a constructive conversation',⁵⁶ The sources Grenz found for his revisioning program allowed him to seek and identify distinct questions being asked by the contemporary culture,⁵⁷ which then make way for the doctrine of the Trinity to respond to them. For Grenz's justification of his use of the doctrine of the Trinity here (and how the 'culture' source most adequately makes way for the Trinity to be brought to bear on it) and its relationship to his other two sources for theology, he borrows from Emil Brunner. Brunner asserted, 'The ecclesiastical doctrine of the Trinity, established by the dogma of the ancient Church, is not a Biblical *kerygma*, therefore it is not the *kerygma* of the Church, but it is a theological doctrine which defends the central faith of the Bible and of the Church',⁵⁸ This is where, in light of the demise of foundationalism in the postmodern situation, Grenz's theo-

⁵⁴ Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), pp. 130-66.

⁵⁵ This does, however, seem to be in somewhat reversed order, since Grenz asserted that the 'revisioning of evangelical theology demands a revisioning of evangelical ethics' (*Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, p. 19), though his own evolution happened in reverse – ethics led him toward a particular theology.

⁵⁶ The term 'trialogue' was first used by Grenz in Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *Who Needs Theology? An Invitation to the Study of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), pp. 112-15; and later appears in *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei*, *The Matrix of Christian Theology*, vol. 1 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), x, as a playful label that speaks of a theological construction arising out of 'the perichoretic dance of a particular, ordered set of sources of insight', Roger E. Olson says that 'the "trialogue" is stated in virtually all of [Grenz's] books' (*Reformed and Always Reforming: The Postconservative Approach to Evangelical Theology* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007], p. 112).

⁵⁷ This includes the contemporary *theological* culture as well (Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, pp. 163-6).

⁵⁸ Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1950), p. 206, cited in Stanley J. Grenz, 'What Does It Mean to Be Trinitarians?' unpublished paper presented at the Baptist World Alliance Doctrine Commission, Charlottetown, PEI (5 July 2001).

logical structure begins.⁵⁹ One might here begin to see Grenz's relatedness to trinitarian developments on the British scene, from which he drew deeply, both as part of the contemporary (theological) context and also as part of the ('open' and 'eschatologically-oriented') confessional tradition which 'provides an interpretive context' for the theologian,⁶⁰ and through which the Spirit speaks. Indeed, '[i]nsofar as the tradition of the Christian church is the product of the ongoing reflection of the Christian community on the biblical message, it is in many respects an extension of the authority of scripture',⁶¹

It seems clear enough that while Grenz embarked on a comprehensive trinitarian theology, he saw the British theological context as providing robust options. When scanning the trinitarian canvas from which to draw for the shape of his own theology in the progress of *The Matrix* series, he draws from eleven theologians, among whom three have been either precursors or part of the British trinitarian resurgence: T. F. Torrance, Zizioulas, and Jenson (Oxford University, 1965-68).⁶² Also noteworthy is that in earlier drafts of the outline proposal for *Rediscovering the Triune God*, Colin Gunton had a significant role in the proposal.⁶³ This observation indicates how catalytic he was for Grenz in the early part of the project and in his own thinking and reception of the British trinitarian development.

⁵⁹ Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, pp. 43-54, 190-92; Roger Olson notes that Pannenberg also makes the Trinity the 'structural principle of theology' ('Wolfhart Pannenberg's Doctrine of the Trinity', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 43 [1990], p. 177).

⁶⁰ Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, pp. 124-7.

⁶¹ Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, p. 119.

⁶² Stanley J. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God*.

⁶³ In one book proposal draft Grenz had a single chapter entitled, 'Colin Gunton: Solving the Problem of the One and the Many'. Another draft of the outline proposal had the same title in sub-theme, placed in a chapter with T. F. Torrance. In another proposal draft for the same book, Grenz placed Gunton with LaCugna and Zizioulas under the heading, 'The Triumph of the Cappadocians' (these proposals are part of Grenz's personal records for the ms., *Rediscovering the Triune God*). Grenz also maintained a friendship with Colin Gunton that led to Gunton's recommendation (along with Nicholas Wolterstorff and Ellen Charry) for Grenz to receive the Luce Fellowship that gave him the time to commence *The Matrix* series, with *The Social God and the Relational Self* as the first installation. James Torrance's essay from *The Forgotten Trinity* also was catalytic for Grenz according to introductory comments in *The Social God and the Relational Self*, pp. 6-7, 10.

4. THE RELATEDNESS AND RELEVANCE OF GRENZ'S PROGRAM TO BRITISH EVANGELICALISM

4.1. Grenz's Relationship to British Evangelicalism

While Grenz's dependence on and parallel relationship to the British resurgence of the (social) Trinity has been set forth, this brief section addresses the question of how Grenz's program related to and was received within Britain. Only five titles of Grenz's writing were sold in Britain, totaling 11,703 volumes (7.75% of global book sales of same titles, totaling 150,938). He published two articles and one review in *Baptist Quarterly*, served as series editor with two British publishers (Paternoster and Ashgate), and reviewed British authors with some frequency.

In a letter Grenz wrote to Paul Fiddes (2 Nov, 1998) soliciting his support for a research grant, the appeal to Fiddes noted 'the crucial importance of my proposed work in advancing the scholarly enterprise especially as it relates to you own field of study'. In saying this much, he believed the work that became *The Social God and the Relational Self* (as well as, perhaps, his larger explorative *Matrix* series) would have some bearing on Fiddes's work. Fiddes did not see the direct influence, but saw himself and Grenz working in parallel directions on two sides of the Atlantic. Fiddes recently stated,

I recognize [Grenz's] *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* as containing the substance of what I have been trying to do in theology, but I cannot say that Stan's work had any direct influence on me or the development of my thought. In retrospect I detect the following common themes between us: the grounding of theology in community; reflection on the evangelical faith of the people of God, but not a systematic arrangement of biblical truths;⁶⁴ the Bible as shaping community, and the authority of scripture being the 'Spirit of God speaking in the scripture'; illumination here and now brought into close conjunction with inspiration; Trinity as fundamental for both community and theology; and appeal to the postmodern critique of enlightenment subjectivity and individuality. In short, I have sympathy with Grenz's building on the 'three pillars' of scripture, tradition and present culture.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Grenz's 'systematic' work in *The Matrix* and his *Theology for the Community of God* clearly differ from Fiddes's perception of Grenz's approach. Grenz was thoroughly 'systematic' in his theology.

⁶⁵ An excerpt from an unpublished paper by Paul S. Fiddes, 'Paul S. Fiddes and Stanley Grenz in Retrospect' (n.d.). In this paper, Fiddes notes that he first met Grenz in 1982 at BWA's International Conference for Theological Educators in North Carolina.

Also relevant is that Grenz would not have produced what he did apart from his engagement with British thinkers and their methodologies. And certainly, as in the case of Fiddes, British theologians were well aware of Grenz's work, though not always engaging directly with it.

Recent British theologians seem to have engaged Grenz more heavily after the publication of *The Social God and the Relational Self* (2001), which established him as a significant thinker in the world of trinitarian studies. Recently British theologians and practitioners have engaged his work on *imago dei*,⁶⁶ community and ecclesiology,⁶⁷ and have acknowledged him as a major player in the evangelical world.⁶⁸ On the other hand, a number of recent works on the Trinity in Britain have commenced with no reference to Grenz whatsoever,⁶⁹ showing that British trinitarian theology (and evangelicalism) developed quite independent of him, though certainly not unaware of and devoid of conversation with him.

⁶⁶ Tom Smail, *Like Father, Like Son*; and Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

⁶⁷ Peter R. Holmes, *Trinity in Human Community: Exploring Congregational Life in the Image of the Social Trinity* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006); and Ian Mobsby, *The Becoming of G-d: What the Trinitarian nature of God has to do with Church and deep Spirituality for the Twenty-First Century* (n.p.: YTC Press, 2008).

⁶⁸ Rob Warner, *Reinventing English Evangelicalism, 1966-2001: A Theological and Sociological Study, Studies in Evangelical History and Thought* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007).

⁶⁹ Among these are Roger Forster, *Trinity: Song and Dance God* (Milton Keynes: Authentic Media, 2004); Robin Parry, *Worshipping Trinity: Coming Back to the Heart of Worship* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005); Tim Chester, *Delighting in the Trinity* (Oxford: Monarch, 2005); Tim Chester, *Mission and the Coming of God: Eschatology, the Trinity and Mission in the Theology of Jürgen Moltmann and Contemporary Evangelicalism* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006); and Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2003). Incidentally, the final chapter in Bauckham's book, 'Witness to the Truth in a Postmodern and Globalized World,' pp. 83-112 thematically parallels Stanley J. Grenz, 'The Universality of the "Jesus-Story" and the "Incredulity Toward Metanarratives"', in *No Other Gods Before Me? Evangelicals and the Challenge of World Religions*, ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), pp. 85-111. And yet Bauckham uses Leslie Newbigin as an early dialogue partner in that essay while Grenz rarely considers Newbigin throughout the corpus of his work.

4.2. Grenz's Relevance for British Evangelicalism

Throughout his life, Grenz remained a Baptist situated in North America, greatly committed to the church in that context and to developing a theology that would serve that locale,⁷⁰ which may give a partial account of why he is less known in Britain. Yet it is not as though Grenz was unrelated to British evangelicalism and other theologians intersecting with it, as this paper has sought to establish.⁷¹ Indeed, his relationship with British evangelicalism keenly marks theological developments occurring simultaneously. But can it be said that Grenz was doing something different than what was already happening in British evangelical theology? If so, what does his program have to say to the evangelical church in Britain today? In short, what can British evangelicals learn from Stanley Grenz?

British evangelicals can learn from his desire to serve the church. Grenz was a theologian of the church, who wanted to see evangelicals become better theologians. He also saw himself as a servant of other theologians, especially younger ones.⁷² He saw himself as a servant of and missionary to the disheveled (and increasingly dismantled) emerging church, desiring to serve their leaders by helping them to have a theology.⁷³ Ac-

⁷⁰ Wolfhart Pannenberg recounts a conversation where Grenz asked if Pannenberg wanted him to become Lutheran. Pannenberg recounts his response: 'My answer then was that no, I would prefer that he in the context of his own tradition should find [a way] to incorporate the elements of truth from all other Christian traditions towards the formulation of a truly contemporary Christian theology. This was precisely what Stanley went to do in his later development, in the series of his later publications' (See the editorial comments by Erik C. Leafblad, 'Prolegomena: In Dedication to Professor Stanley Grenz', *Princeton Theological Review* 12/1 [Spring 2006], p. 1).

⁷¹ For a further account of evangelicalism in the British academy see also Stephen R. Holmes, 'British (and European) Evangelical Theologies', in *Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, ed. Timothy Larson and Daniel J. Treier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 250. E.g., Gunton might have not wanted to be called an evangelical, but he trained many of them from Britain to the US; Fiddes might also not want to be called an evangelical, though his work with BWA can hardly be detached from similar aspects that have also developed in US evangelicalism in particular.

⁷² Former coordinator of Emergent-UK and pastor of Vineyard Church, Sutton, Jason Clark attributes a personal conversation with Stan Grenz at a meeting in 1999 and subsequent emails that led him back into academic study as a theology student, into DMin studies at George Fox University and PhD work at King's College, London (personal email correspondence, 25 May 2009).

⁷³ Personal conversation with Roger Olson (23 April 2009). Olson also commented: 'He told me privately on a number of occasions that he was "gravely concerned" about open theism and the emergent church network. He con-

cordingly, Grenz is as a model for how theologians can and should see themselves as servants of the churches. He was greatly misread by emerging church theologians (and others), who took only what they liked from Grenz, benefitting from his critique of modernism, but not considering the manner in which he sought to construct theology for the church that would effectively bridge gaps, bringing healing for the sake of the church's mission in her present situatedness. British evangelicals (especially young leaders) can learn from that. But it doesn't seem to be anything new, since similar engagement has occurred in other places throughout Britain.

If Grenz has something to offer to British evangelicalism today, it lies within his 'dialogue', the intent of which was to provide an entire systematic exploration that would produce a theology, every part of which would be informed by God's triunity.⁷⁴ This seems similar in some ways to what he saw happening in the UK (perhaps with BCC, and elsewhere), though with a different, intentionally dialogical structure, and definitely not isolated from conversation with British voices. So, going back to school with Grenz might consist of paying attention to the three sources for theology's structure, following the outline of his triad (though presented here in reverse order).

First, British evangelicals should listen to other voices from the culture and context,⁷⁵ and not just their own voices, or those from the party lines they have been taught to advertise. British evangelicals should learn from Grenz's willingness to learn from a variety of voices (inside and outside of one's camp), not uncritically, but reading and listening to them very carefully for valuable input. Grenz keenly learned from his own mentors, and yet was not afraid to subject even them to critique, especially when church history gave a stronger testimony to alternate positions or to better methodologies. May British evangelical theology be marked by listening especially to those voices and the questions of those most hurting in the world around them. As Grenz's journey went, so too British evangeli-

sidered people in both movements friends, but he was dismayed by what he regarded as their all too easy and quick abandonment of theological tradition in favor of theological or ecclesiastical innovation', ('Stanley J. Grenz's Contribution to Evangelical Theology', p. 27).

⁷⁴ Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God*, x.

⁷⁵ This understanding is similar to that of Tim Keller of Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York City, who defines contextualization in this way: 'giving God's answers to the questions [people] are asking, in forms that they can comprehend' ('Being the Church in Our Culture', May 2006, < <http://bit.ly/bGh1Gi> > accessed 27 Feb 2010).

cal theologians need to study and engage the critical ethical issues in the world.⁷⁶

Second, British evangelicals should ground their theology in church history, deeply drinking from how theology has been formulated, and how the Bible has been interpreted historically throughout the church's tradition. While inheriting a deep German Baptist pietistic heritage, and having been steeped in a rich US evangelical tradition, Grenz was much more conversant with contemporary theology than historical theology. This myopia is a weakness of much contemporary theology in the twentieth century, which has often found scholars looking back to history to see if someone at some time held to their particular view. And yet in the rapidly-changing contemporary world, with global conversations among radically dynamic theological scenes, the construction of relevant theology will have to be conversant with East/West, North/South and Central, in the search to see Christian theology not as something recently invented or new and improved, but as grounded in the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

Finally, British evangelicals must be biblical. Evangelicals are the people of the book. Contrary to some of his interpreters,⁷⁷ Grenz was a serious exegete of the biblical text, as can be seen in his two volumes of *The Matrix Series*.⁷⁸ Roger Olson acknowledged:

⁷⁶ Just months before his death, Stan was working on a book with Phil Zylla, the proposal description being as follows:

Essentially, *God and the Experience of Suffering* will be an academic treatment of the reality of suffering from a Christian theological perspective written for the sake of enhanced pastoral ministry. As an integration of pastoral theology (which Phil will represent) and systematic theology (supplied by Stan), the volume will set forth a theology of suffering, written in a manner that takes seriously postmodern sensitivities and the particular problematic endemic to the contemporary context. Consequently, the project seeks to reframe the issue of suffering, viewing it not as an intellectual problem to be solved but as a reality to be apprehended and confronted by means of rigorous theological reflection and inspired moral vision (Stanley J. Grenz and Phillip C. Zylla, 'Book Proposal for *God and the Experience of Suffering*', 15 June 2000 [unpublished]).

⁷⁷ Stephen Denis Knowles, 'Postmodernism and Evangelical Theological Methodology with Particular Reference to Stanley J. Grenz', PhD thesis (University of Liverpool 2007), p. 197; and Ben Witherington III, 'Epilogue to a Frank Discussion,' 12 Sept 2008 < <http://bit.ly/d6BsxQ> > accessed 1 July 2009.

⁷⁸ Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, chs. 5-7; Grenz, *The Named God and the Question of Being*, chs. 4-7.

as I interpret even his last books, Stan followed a fairly traditional Protestant methodology of allowing the written, inspired Word to determine the shape of his thought and his conclusions. That is not to say he was secretly or covertly a fundamentalist. But he most definitely treated scripture as more than merely a 'first among equals' in constructing theology.⁷⁹

Grenz held scripture as his primary authority, knew his Bible well, and used it often. His practice was something closely related to what certain scholars have advocated in the so-called theological interpretation of scripture school.⁸⁰

5. CONCLUSION

One British evangelical theologian recently suggested that in light of some of the unfair criticism he received in the North American evangelical context, Grenz would have enjoyed working in the convivial UK theological setting. And while he had a bit less difficulty in Canada than in the US, perhaps he had learned from the irenic, ecumenical work of the BCC in the 1980s that seems to have served British evangelicalism well. Had Stanley Grenz not died at such an early age, his engagement with British evangelicalism would have no doubt continued to develop further, especially had he received the appointment of the Professorship of Evangelical Theological Studies at Harvard Divinity School in 2005,⁸¹ and continued his constructive proposal on the East Coast of the United States. Stan's vision was of a distinctly evangelical theology grounded in the doctrine of the Trinity. His work flowed from a constructive program that tried to make sense of the world around, building a relevant theology that would serve the church. The need, then, for robust cultural engagement, seeped in the evangelical tradition that holds out scripture as the church's active authority is the echo left by the legacy of Stan Grenz for the church's mission today.

⁷⁹ Olson, 'Stanley J. Grenz's Contribution to Evangelical Theology', p. 28.

⁸⁰ Exemplified in recent works such as Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Craig G. Bartholomew, Daniel J. Treier, N. T. Wright, eds., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005); Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008); and the recent periodical series inaugurated Spring 2007, ed. by Joel B. Green, *Journal of Theological Interpretation*. See also Jason S. Sexton, 'The *Imago Dei* Once Again: Stan Grenz's Journey Toward a Theological Interpretation of Gen 1:26-27', *Journal of Theological Interpretation* (2010): forthcoming.

⁸¹ Grenz was 'a top candidate for this [new] position' and while generating considerable discussion among the members of the search committee, 'his death meant a rethinking of the finalists' (Personal email correspondence from Francis Fiorenza, 15 July 2009, used by permission).