

A Review of:

Revisioning, Renewing and Rediscovering the Triune Center: Essays in Honour of Stanley Grenz, ed. Derek Tidball, Brian Harris and Jason Sexton (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014).

The early death of theologian Stanley Grenz in 2005 has been mourned in the decade since by evangelicals across the spectrum. He was only two books into his planned magnum opus, *The Matrix of Christian Theology*, a multivolume work of theology. Many have also mourned the loss of those unwritten books. His influence has been great amongst evangelicals, though some of his work has also been controversial.

Surrounding the 10th anniversary of Grenz's death, there has been a renewed interest in Grenz and his work. One such engagement is this festschrift that came out just before the anniversary. The name arises from the titles of key books by Grenz: *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* (1993), *Renewing the Center: Evangelical theology in a post-theological era* (2000) and *Rediscovering the Triune God* (2004). In these titles, we see Grenz's desire to breathe new life into evangelical theology.

The editors—Derek Tidball, Brian Harris and Jason Sexton—are British, Australian and American, thus coming from across the English-speaking world most impacted by Grenz's work. The book had its genesis in two different celebrations of the 10th anniversary of Grenz's death, one at the ETS annual meeting in 2014, and the other at the AAR annual meeting the same year. The list of 25 contributors is a roll call of respected theologians, broadly evangelical, many Baptists, though with several from other traditions. Again, the list of contributors reflects Grenz's anglophone audience. Several of the authors also collaborated with Grenz during his lifetime, among these John Franke and Roger Olson.

It might be that you already plan to read this book as a Grenz fan or because you are won over by the reputable list of contributors. But you may be thinking: "Why, a decade later, should I read this festschrift about Grenz?" Let me suggest to you this work is worth reading because Grenz's vision was one that sought to revision evangelicalism for the future. In doing so, Grenz often anticipated developments within evangelicalism. As the editors describe Grenz in the preface, he was "a truly exceptional evangelical scholar, who was far ahead of most of us" (xxi). What we have here isn't a detailed study of Grenz as such, but rather today's scholars using Grenz as a springboard to speak into contemporary theology. The essays run the gamut from engaging directly and frequently with Grenz's work to being undertaken more in the spirit of Grenz rather being a direct engagement. For the Grenz fan,

though, an added charm of this book is the occasional personal glimpses provided by those who knew him.

The book has six sections: three are based on Grenz's three motifs for theology—trinity, eschatology and community—and the others based on his three sources for theology—scripture, tradition and culture. The book starts with a foreword by Grenz's friend Roger Olson. If you like me are often tempted to skip the preface, let me urge you not to in this case. Olson gives us both a brief summary of who Grenz was, as well as an insight into the friendship between himself and Grenz. If you are wanting a longer introduction to Grenz the theologian, chapter one by Harris, Sexton, and Jay Smith serves this purpose well.

The first motif discussed is that of the Trinity. Grenz is regarded as one of the theologians who drove the resurgence of emphasis on the Trinity in the late twentieth century. The contributions in this section are by Kevin Vanhoozer, John Franke and Kurt Anders Richardson. Vanhoozer presents a framework for understanding different theologians' relationship to the doctrine of the Trinity. He presents the framework as primarily descriptive rather than evaluative, but it is fairly transparent from the start it is an evaluative framework. Franke, a co-author of Grenz, is next. He doesn't engage much with Grenz but writes about Trinity in a way which has much sympathy with Grenz's work, speaking of the Trinity as social plurality and relating this to global mission. Richardson follows this with a more conceptual piece about perichoresis.

The second section is on Community, Grenz's integrative motif of theology. Paul Fiddes, like Grenz a Baptist, examines Grenz in some detail as he compares his Baptist version of *koinonia* ecclesiology with Catholic versions. This is work that would have pleased Grenz who sought to do theology from his own tradition for the benefit of, and in conversation with, the whole church. Grenz's ecclesiology has also been relatively neglected in comparison with other areas of his theology, so this is a welcome exploration. Stephen Holmes follows this by looking at another of Grenz's books, *Welcoming but not affirming* which has had great influence on evangelical responses to same-sex attraction. Debate on this issue has increased since Grenz examined it, and Holmes does some useful engagement here with contemporary thinking, building on Grenz's approach. Veli-Matti Karkkainen rounds out the Community section by connecting it to Trinitarian theology. I really appreciated his insight that theology can "become an act of hospitality" (150), suggesting that theology at its best is not a battle of wits but a generous conversation.

The third section on the motifs, Eschatology, includes essays by Jonathan Wilson, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling. Wilson looks at how apocalyptic vision is misappropriated

and instead suggests it should inform our vision for mission. Gureztki's essay discusses Barth and universalism. Gureztki does reference Grenz's opinion of Barth, but this essay is much less directly related to Grenz or his vision. This essay will be of more interest to those studying Barth. Nordling's essay is next. She develops Grenz's later work on the imago dei and the eschatological destiny of humanity. She ends with a beautiful personal letter to Grenz, reminding us that as we interact with the work of those who have gone before, we are looking forward to when we will be joined with them again, knowing God's plan fully and enjoying knowing each other in eternity.

The fourth section on Scripture as source of theology begins with an essay by Ellen Charry. On a side note, it would have been good to see more female contributors considering Grenz's own championship of the role of women in the church, though I do understand that the problem is a systemic one throughout theological academia. Charry consciously uses Grenzian principles in reading the psalms of lament, allowing them to speak from their own context. A.T.B. McGowan's essay is second, showing both an appreciation of Grenz's approach to the doctrine of Scripture, yet critiquing Grenz's theological method self-consciously from within his own tradition of Presbyterianism. Mark Bowald follows with an essay about virtue hermeneutics, arguing for reading scripture both for and with virtue, with an attention to the reader that is in continuity with Grenz's hermeneutic.

The fifth section moves to Tradition and begins with an essay by Glen Scorgie and Phil Zylla examining Schleiermacher and Grenz as two pietist theologians. Grenz came to see himself squarely within the Pietist strand of evangelicalism, calling himself "a pietist with a PhD". In doing so they defend Grenz's commitment to Scripture. William Abraham also engages directly with Grenz's theological method, looking primarily at Grenz's and Franke's work *Beyond Foundationalism*, but proposing his own particular methodology. Gregg Allison is the last in this section, and he opens with a heartfelt personal tribute to Grenz. Allison writes from a place of broad agreement with Grenz's use of tradition and proposes that tradition should have presumptive authority.

The sixth section is on Culture as a source for theology. Stanley Hauerwas titles his essay "church matters" in honour of Grenz "who from an evangelical perspective helped us to see why the church matters" (343). He urges that the church make the most of the end of Christendom in embracing the calling of being a political alternative. F. LeRon Shults is next, and he borrows one of Grenz's strategies of theological reflection through the lens of science fiction, by using 'Avatar'. David Cunningham whose essay finishes this section also uses analogy, comparing the church to a theatre company in order to talk about the church's role in revelation.

To Derek Tidball falls the privilege of summing up and suggesting a way forward as he contributes the final essay on Evangelical theology after Grenz. This essay alone is, as they say, worth the price of admission. Tidball shows a deep understanding of Grenz's goals. He uses Grenz's central commitment to generous orthodoxy to offer a way forward for evangelicalism. The book ends not with this essay, but instead with Bruce Milne's memorial sermon, and he ends where Nordling did: with a glimpse of the final glory of all of God's people worshipping together in community; a destiny Grenz centered his theology on, and one that should be in the mind of all who engage in theology with others. Indeed, it does seem to have been in the mind of the contributors to this volume, as within its pages many different people join the conversation in an effort to know and praise God. I think Grenz would have liked it. I did, and I recommend it to all who are asking about the future of evangelical theology.

About the Reviewer

Reviewed by Megan Powell – du Toit, publishing editor at the ACT and PhD candidate