

power that the term *good* still holds, for she seeks to undo the damage that *evil* invokes by reducing it to mere opinion” (32). And, refuting Kant’s limit between the phenomenal and noumenal, “such a barricade only works if we also claim implicitly to know what is on the other side.... [O]nly if we claim to know with certainty what cannot be known with certainty would we know where to place the barricade in the first place” (56; also enjoy 39, 41, 56, 93, 132, 286). This and so much more in Long’s highly synthetic recovery of theological particularity for ethics should not be missed.

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**The Social God and the Relational Self:
A Trinitarian Theology of the *Imago Dei*
Stanley J. Grenz**

Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2001
(345 pages)

Extensively published theologian Stanley Grenz, who teaches at Carey Theological College and Regent College in Vancouver, here gives us the first book of a projected six-volume systematic theology (or major contribution thereto, at any rate) generally titled “The Matrix of Christian Theology.” It is a dense and learned work, full of carefully explicated histories of ideas drawn from theology, biblical studies, philosophy, and psychology. Every reader will profit from paying close attention, learning or re-learning the major trends in Christian thought from the enormous amount of material here presented in carefully drawn summaries, complete with copious footnotes, blessedly placed at the bottom of the page. Grenz’s reach is fully ecumenical, covering Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox writers across the ages in an even-handed and thoughtful manner, and all brought to the service of a coherent, well-argued thesis.

That thesis is that the “postmodern” deconstruction of the concept of “self” as a given inward identity poses a challenge that Christian theology is able to meet handily, thanks to a reconfigured theological anthropology dependent on an understanding of the Trinitarian God as “social” or “relational.” The doctrine of the Trinity has experienced a revival of interest in the twentieth century, since Barth, to the point where Grenz can claim that there is now general agreement on its centrality. The current, widely accepted model grants the traditional expression of three “persons” sharing one essence (so there is no tritheism), but with distinct centers of will and purpose. The “threeness” matters; it means something important. “Person” here is defined relationally rather than substantially. Just as human persons are defined by their relations, embedded in community, so God is also to be (re)conceived in terms of relationality—although, of course, with due caution about the imprecision and inaccuracy of metaphor and analogy applied to God the ineffable.

Grenz spells out the subtle varieties of trinitarianism in fine detail: This is certainly “thick” theological description. The consensus that emerges is that the doctrine of God’s oneness is a *consequence*, not a presupposition, of the different roles of the persons of the Trinity. God *is* those relations. His true being *is* communion, an ontological category. “The divine being is constituted by the communion of the three Trinitarian persons.”

Having traced the course of this doctrine, Grenz turns to the history of the concept “self,” which will eventuate in a relational, communitarian definition correlative to the “social Trinity.” Here again he gives us a finely detailed historical survey, from Augustine to Freud and Maslow, ending finally in Foucault and the deconstruction of the Enlightenment’s self, the inviolable inner observer detached from the world it observes. The autonomous unitary modern self has given way to the “postmodern” self which *is* its constantly changing relations. There is “no personal identity distinct from social identity.”

Of course, this is a highly unstable self. To find a useful way to understand it and manage it in Christian terms, Grenz develops an appropriate Christian anthropology based in the concept of the *imago dei*, the image of God in which we are said to be created. Once again he gives us a developmental history of the idea, moving from the “structuralist” view that considers the *imago* as referring to certain qualities we possess that are like God, notably reason and will, to a “relational” understanding, where our human actions are required to “image” (now a verb) the Creator. Then he suggests a third option, also with historical roots, that the image of God is our divine goal and destiny, to be realized in the eschatological future.

The model, the fulfilled complete image of God, is, of course, Christ, who is also the “head of the new humanity,” realizing God’s intent for us, destined for eschatological fulfillment; but, like New Testament eschatology generally, this goal is not reserved entirely for a future consummation. The kingdom of God is yet to be realized, but it is presently active. There is always an “already but not yet” quality to it, a destiny that is proleptically active. Thus, this is theology with an ethical punch: We are responsible to live out our divine destiny in the present.

Grenz ties all his strands together with his concept of the “ecclesial self,” the self that exists in its relations transformed by the power of the Spirit in community. This is the new “holy form of human life which results from redemption.” And it is explicitly communal. Grenz, who has written much on sexuality, provides an intriguing argument that the creation of the two sexes is the primal instance of the *imago dei* as relational. Man is obviously meant from the beginning to be a social animal. We are made to be creatures who form bonds, who cannot be alone without a sense of incompleteness. Sexuality is the basis of community and will remain “on the highest level” in the fulfilled community of the new humanity.

Yet, must this essential form of relationality also mirror God’s social being? After all, it is essential to the book’s thesis that human relationality and divine relationality

are “mutually informing,” or “cohere with” each other. Sure enough, our human sexuality “corresponds to” or “reflects” something of God. Not that God has gender; “He” does not, and Grenz provides a very helpful roundup of the debate over inclusive language for God. But God has interior relationality. The formula: “God is love,” means that the inner life of the Trinity is characterized by loving relations—and is expressed toward creatures. In sum, the life of love in the ecclesial community “marks a visual, human coming-to-representation of the mutual indwelling of the persons of the Trinity.”

Grenz’s argument has some novel elements, obviously, but it is coherently put together, backed by immense learning, and careful—sometimes painfully careful—textual analysis. Agree or not, the book is certainly a profitable read, well worth the time it takes to follow the many currents of thought that it weaves together so skillfully.

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Modern Catholic Social Documents and Political Economy

Albino F. Barrera, O.P.

Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2001 (340 pages)

While some sections are simply solid and well-done, other sections are outstanding, and I do strongly recommend this book for students of Catholic social thought. It makes good theoretical sense of the tradition, weaving the most important concepts into an intelligible body of thought focusing on the goal of economic “participation” for all.

Albino F. Barrera offers a thorough and balanced review of what he calls the “treasure trove of teachings” in *Catholic Social Thought* (CST) beginning with *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and running through *Centesimus Annus* (1991). Part 1 of the book emphasizes the insistence found in CST for balanced and integral development within and among nations. In a somewhat novel emphasis, Barrera focuses on the (disadvantaged) agricultural sector in the developing economies. The unbalanced favoring of the industrial base and the urban areas has left the rural areas unfairly impoverished. Otherwise, Part 1 simply does a commendable job at covering material that one finds in any good review of the teachings, as well as sets a stage for his latter discussion (Parts 3 and 4) of the problem of relative inequality and, especially, participation.

Part 2 is background reading in which Barrera traces the development of (what we now call) “economic ethics” from Scholastic times to the present. For example, the change of circumstances from times that were feudal and agrarian to the situation of the modern economy brought about dramatic shifts in concepts of just price and the demands of social solidarity. The concern today is still to preserve “the stability and integrity of the community, but not by way of preserving a hierarchical economic order. Rather, it seeks to establish a minimum base, below which, no one is allowed to fall”