

such an affirmation (for examples, see pp. 196 and 216).

This work will appeal to those who are interested in ecumenical dialogue and the present state of relationships between Roman Catholics and Evangelicals. Geisler and MacKenzie have published an excellent work that will certainly have an impact on ecumenical trends in the United States. Yet one wonders if the two Jerusalem crosses at the top of every page will, in the end, convince Evangelicals and Roman Catholics that they have enough in common to become a political force for social change.

Andrews University

DENIS FORTIN

Grenz, Stanley J. *Theology for the Community of God*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994. 560 pp. \$29.99.

In his book, *Theology for the Community of God*, Grenz breaks rank with traditional evangelical theology and engages in the kind of constructive, dialectical theology usually associated with mainstream liberal theology—while seeking to retain the declarative, authoritative voice that has marked evangelical theology in the past. This is a courageous undertaking. Unfortunately, I fear that Grenz has not succeeded. Nevertheless, I find his thesis provocative, despite the lack of logical rigor marshaled in its defense.

Based on a deductive logic of divine sovereignty, evangelical theologians have traditionally assumed that since God cannot lie, and Scripture is inspired by God, the Bible must be free of all error. On this understanding of authority, the theologian functions as a taxonomist and curator, whose primary duty it is to collect and organize the "facts" of Scripture. The difficulty with this position lies not only in the fact that the narrative-like structure of Scripture resists compartmentalization into neatly drawn boxes, but, as Grenz emphasizes, this "concordance" or "propositionalist" approach fails to give adequate attention to the fact that "by its very nature theology is a contextual discipline" (8).

But how can one speak with a declarative, evangelical "Thus saith the Lord!" if one allows that theological reflection arises out of particular biological, historical, and cultural contexts, all of which are open to distortion and sin? In a provocative thesis that reveals the author's indebtedness to Hegel by way of Wolfhart Pannenberg, Grenz proposes a relational, trinitarian theology which discovers in biblical faith God's program for bringing into being an emerging eschatological community of "reconciled people, living within a renewed creation, and enjoying the presence of their Redeemer" (30). In a word, because God is the trinity, a plurality in unity, life-in-community is the ontological ground of creaturely life (98). Despite appearances to the contrary, creation, insofar as it is the work of the triune God, is created for the enjoyment of its completion in God.

The logic of this affirmation goes something like this: Because God is love, God is self-giving. Because God is self-giving, God willingly creates the world. But, "precisely because creation is God's loving act, it is free, voluntary, and non-necessary" (133). As a trinity of love, God is already complete without creation. Thus, creation possesses an autonomy that is its own. Yet insofar as it is created in accordance with the very essence of God—trinitarian love—"this counterpart

exists to be both the recipient of, and the mirror of divine love" (133). Thus Grenz reaches the radical conclusion that all of creation is destined to return to God. Hell exists neither as literal fires, nor as the extinction of evil. Rather, in a statement that Grenz never teases out, hell is the dark side of God's love. "As the eternal lover, God never withdraws his love from humankind, not even from those who spurn him. . . . Yet in their alienation from the Lover [the unrighteous] experience it in the form of wrath. . . . This is hell" (839).

The implications of this thesis for theology are profound. If revelation is limited and even broken, this is as we might expect, since God never determines creation but works through creation to bring it into conformity with its *telos*—life in a community of love. If we have difficulty discovering in Jesus of Nazareth evidence of his divine transcendence, but find only one who confesses his humble dependence upon the Father, this is again what we should expect. The "filial relationship of the Son to the Father as exhibited by Jesus of Nazareth constitutes the paradigm for creation" (137). And, if we fear that creation is characterized by a state of alienation and brokenness which undermines and destroys community, the historical reality of the resurrection of Jesus, who is the embodiment of the divine essence, stands as the guarantee of the end toward which all of creation is directed. As the Lord of creation, Jesus in his life, death, and resurrection is the revealed meaning of all creation (353).

Finally, if we seek empirical confirmation of the truth of these things, we can find it in the church; for we "who were God's enemies now experience community with him, because the Spirit has effected our new birth into the Father's family as the brothers and sisters of the Son" (572). "The fellowship we share with each other is not merely that of a common experience or a common narrative, as important as these are. Our fellowship is nothing less than our common participation in the divine communion between the Father and the Son mediated by the Holy Spirit" (630). This is the beginning and end of all creation, life-in-community with God.

As a thesis, I find Grenz's dynamic, trinitarian theology appealing. Still, the task of theology is not simply to be suggestive but to provide explanation and reason why Christian teaching is credible and therefore deserving of attention. Unfortunately, Grenz's development of his thesis is weak. His work lacks the logical rigor and consistency evident in first-rate theology. In the first place, despite his advocacy of narrative as the proper medium for writing theology, particularly trinitarian theology, Grenz writes without a narrative breath within him. Not only do each of the chapters begin with an encyclopedic tabloid of propositions—hardly the way to begin a story—but the propositions end up governing the development of the themes. The consequence is that *Theology for the Community of God* reads like a gnostic codebook of theological esoterica. The price paid for this approach is high. It forces Scripture into the dim background of theological conversation, while at the same time cutting off from conversation those who are unskilled in jargon of historical theological debates.

For example, in a theology built around the question of God's providential leading of history, Grenz never discusses, as an identified issue, the problem of human suffering and pain. Instead, the human dimensions of pain and suffering are pushed into the background by a discussion of the historic categories of

providence, concurrence, and government and their proper definitions. Grenz's only answer to the problem of evil itself is the *assertion* that "despite appearance to the contrary, the world historical process is going somewhere. . . ," namely, "toward the establishment of community" (161). But this is the very proposition that is called into question by suffering and pain; therefore it must be defended, not simply asserted. To see how the implications of a trinitarian theology might be developed to offer a profound archeology of evil as well as a practical response to evil, the reader is advised to see Peter Hodgson's *God in History: Shapes of Freedom* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989). One could wish that Grenz had provided from a conservative perspective what Hodgson has achieved from a liberal perspective.

Second, in his zeal to defend his own position, Grenz often resorts to strawmen arguments that fail to present opposing views in their strongest light. Again, a single example will have to suffice to illustrate a widespread problem. In his defense of the divinity of Jesus, Grenz appeals to Jesus' understanding of himself as the revelation of God and to the historical *facticity* of the resurrection. One might expect, therefore, that Grenz would address the challenge posed to such a line of argument by the recent work coming out of the Jesus Seminar. Yet nowhere does Grenz address the work of Burton Mack, Robert Funk, John Dominic Crossan, and others of the Jesus Seminar. Rather, he reiterates traditional apologetics used to support the historicity of the open tomb and the postresurrection appearances of Jesus to show that Jesus' body could not have been stolen, nor could Jesus have only swooned and then come forth as the Lord of history, nor could the appearance of Jesus be attributed to psychological hallucinations (335-336). Such arguments fail to address, however, the questions being asked today. Today's scholars are not asking about the possibility of the revivification of Jesus' body or about how many witnesses claimed to have seen the resurrection. Rather, they are asking about the intention of the biblical texts—which are seen as inventive stories of faith, rather than factual records. It is this challenge, then, that must be addressed by anyone claiming divinity for Jesus on the basis of his self-identity and resurrection, since the claims of the text must be in accord with the intention of the text, yet Grenz never addresses it.

Finally, and most troubling of all, is the definitional circularity that is replete throughout Grenz's argument. The example I offer is elicited as an illustration of a wider problem. Grenz, in a departure from traditional evangelical theology, defends a holistic anthropology that views human beings as a unity of body, mind, and spirit. The hope of eternal life is based, therefore, not on the immortal properties of the soul, but on the promise of resurrection in Christ (210-218, 776). Grenz goes even further to insist that this resurrection cannot be identified with the moment of death, since the Bible places "our individual entrance into eternity in the context of the one general resurrection" (768). Yet Grenz maintains that the righteous dead are conscious of happenings on the earth in an intermediate state between death and the resurrection. In an odd categorical mistake, Grenz claims that since the righteous dead are with God, and God is in eternity, the righteous dead have passed from time to eternity, and therefore perceive the world as God perceives it (777). Now certainly no such conclusion can be drawn from the fact that the righteous are "kept with God unto the resurrection" (776). It is logical to

assume that "the dead sense no gap between death and the resurrection," insofar as time stops for the dead and eternity begins with the resurrection. But simply because one is surrounded and held fast in the love of the eternal God is not a reason to deduce that the righteous are conscious—especially if human beings are psychosomatic unities as Grenz claims.

In the end, this reviewer wonders whether evangelical scholars such as Grenz can retain their distinctive identity as evangelicals and engage in the dialectics of mainstream theology. I fear that the rules for engagement in mainstream theology inherently erode the authoritative foundation of evangelical faith, since mainstream theology is conducted in a public forum that prohibits all forms of special pleading for one's own case. Arguments stand or fall on the basis of their ability to withstand criticism, not on the basis of appeal to some established authority. Ostensibly, Grenz engages mainstream theology on its own terms, yet time and again he resorts to assertion, apologetics, and definitional solutions to make his claims. As a consequence, I fear that Grenz has introduced his evangelical readers to the set of problems that dominate mainstream theology—such as questions of cultural relativity, origins, the historicity of Jesus, human anthropology, and eschatological disconfirmation—without offering an adequate response from within evangelicalism to answer these problems. Still, insofar as *Theology for the Community of God* draws attention to the paradox of creating an authoritative/dialogical theology, it is crucial reading for any evangelical who is interested in the future of her or his tradition.

Walla Walla College
College Place, WA 99324

GLEN GREENWALT

Gustafson, David A. *Lutherans in Crisis: The Question of Identity in the American Republic*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993. 176 pp. Paper, \$15.00.

Mauss, Armand L. *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994. 296 pp. Cloth, \$29.95.

Every church in every age has had to face the challenge and threat of assimilation. Will it maintain its identity or assimilate to the larger culture? is the question forced upon it. That question was particularly urgent for minority groups in nineteenth-century America.

While the new nation had within it the drive for freedom, individualization, and social/religious pluralism, it also harbored the paradoxical drive for homogenization. The drive toward homogenization lay in part in the young nation's sense of millennial mission to the world. Written into the fabric of American institutions was the desire to "Americanize" those who were different or "too different" from the mainstream, whether the differences be those of language, ethnicity, or religion.

Protestantism of an evangelical sort lay at the heart of the nation's unofficial religious establishment. And those groups outside the Methodist/Puritan Protestant lineage felt subtle and not-so-subtle pressures to conform.

Two recent books from widely different religious groups have taken up this