

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality.* By Stanley J. Grenz. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1998. 210 pp. ISBN 0-664-25776-3.

Stan Grenz thinks that too many well-meaning Christians approach the problem of homosexuality from perspectives coyly camouflaged behind walls of rhetoric, regardless on which side of the homosexual debate one happens to stand. So concerned is he about this issue, he has put much of his academic theological work on hold in order to write an analysis of the issue that is at once compassionate and dispassionate: *compassionate* toward the people who wrestle with this issue—homosexuals and those of us who have been commanded by Christ to love them; and *dispassionate* toward the evidence—biblical, biological, anthropological, psychological, and theological. Today, books like this are necessary pastoral reading because the problem is persistent, the rhetoric is intense, and the information vacuum is great. Unashamedly evangelical, this book asks questions about what the Church's attitudes toward homosexuality *ought* to be and limits itself to four lines of argument.

First, Grenz looks at the contemporary situation. Scientific analyses of homosexuality fall into two camps: "nature" and "nurture." Grenz reminds us that even though Freud refrained from calling homosexuality a "sickness," he nevertheless opened the door to a number of psychoanalytic approaches that vigorously do. Psychologist Elizabeth Moberly, for example, argues that since the sexual identities of very young children are ambisexual, the process of sexual maturation necessarily involves a number of developmental stages. She thinks that homosexuals are people whose sexual development has been arrested at one of these stages prematurely. For Moberly, homosexuality has nothing to do with "nature." Homosexual longings are instead an attempt to make up for arrested growth in a person's relationship to persons of the same sex, particularly toward parents of the same sex. C. A. Tripp argues that in societies where the male ideal of "hero" or "winner" is dominant, homosexuality becomes prevalent because so many young boys, already in the throes of adolescent sexual crisis, give up trying to achieve such "impossible ideals" of maleness. David Blankenhorn (*Fatherless America* [New York: Basic Books, 1995] 224–25), however, disagrees, arguing instead for a direct correlation between fatherlessness, the rise of androgyny generally, and homosexuality.

Proponents of the "nature" hypothesis reject the psychoanalytical explanations, proposing instead a number of explanations that focus either on genetic predisposition or hormonal dysfunction. Genetic theories are largely dependent on well-publicized but radically inconclusive studies on identical twins, as well as postmortem analyses of hypothalamuses in the brains of homosexual men (found to be significantly larger in Simon LeVay's oft-cited study). Hormonal theorists, however, argue that the cause of male

homosexuality is due to deficient levels of prenatal testosterone in the earliest stages of male life.

The problem with all of these hypotheses, Grenz points out, is classically "the chicken versus the egg." Which comes first—homosexual yearnings leading to an overdeveloped hypothalamus or an overdeveloped hypothalamus leading to homosexual yearnings? No one knows, really, regardless of the populist rhetoric on both sides of the debate. Most reputable scientists today think that "homosexuality is likely the product of both inheritance and environment" (p. 24). Underlying the entire contemporary discussion, Grenz suggests, is an even more basic ideological conflict, a conflict in philosophical presuppositions. Many argue strenuously that homosexuality is something *static*, that sexual orientation is something one is "born with," though this "fact" remains unproven. In point of fact, many anthropologists argue that such a view of human nature is inconsistent with what we know about human behavior generally. Human sexuality, like all human activity, is *dynamic* and in constant flux. Sexual decision-making cannot reasonably be described without the element of *volition*. One is not simply born with a "sexual orientation." Only a static fatalist would argue such a narrow view. That such a view has taken firm hold, however, is more than a little puzzling to sociologists like David Greenberg, who concludes that the contemporary Western concept of homosexuality as a fixed, biologically based sexual orientation is "the product of a constellation of ideas present in our society, and not the transcultural reality proponents assume it is" (p. 29). Psychiatrist Jeffrey Satinover supports this conclusion by documenting the development of this "constellation of ideas" in the leadership of the American Psychiatric Association (*Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996] 31–40).

*Second*, Grenz looks at the biblical evidence. In Genesis 19, the residents of Sodom attack two angels residing in Lot's house as guests. Traditionalists have long interpreted their desire to "know" them (Heb. *yādaʿ*) as clear evidence of homosexual behavior. Recently, however, some have begun to argue that the real sin in the story is the Sodomites' violation of the law of *hospitality*, not their homosexuality. Grenz questions this line of interpretation. Without denying that inhospitality is a major theme in the story, Grenz points out that, in Ezek 16:50, Sodom is condemned for engaging in *tôʿēbā*, "detestable (things)." In Lev 18:22, this same Hebrew word is used to describe the homosexual act, *regardless of social context*. Thus the burden of proof lies on anyone who would define the behavior in Genesis 19 apart from the clear canonical commentary in Ezekiel and Leviticus.

Another line of recent interpretation questions the nature of the prohibitions in Lev 18:22 and 20:13 (the second of which prescribes the death penalty for homosexual offenders). One view is that the behavior proscribed actually has to do with homosexual activity, but only in the context of idolatry. Outside of this specific cultic context, proponents argue, the prohibition does not apply, particularly to loving, monogamous homosexuals. The problem with this view is that there is simply no evidence from ancient Near Eastern inscripational evidence to support it. No ancient text even *suggests* that male-male sexual activity might be a part of Canaanite fertility cult religion.

How could male homosexual behavior homeopathically reenact the procreative sex act and thereby convince a Canaanite farmer that his crops will produce germinating seed in the spring?

For Grenz, Rom 1:26–27 is the central text in the homosexuality debate. Traditionalists argue that Paul stands firmly in the Holiness Code traditions of Leviticus in his condemnation of pagan immorality. Others argue that what Paul is actually condemning here is a particular *kind* of homosexuality called pederasty (male adult–male child coition). That Paul is concerned *only* with pederasty, however, cannot be true, Grenz argues, because alongside his condemnation of male-male sex he also condemns female-female sex. Another question has to do with the sources upon which Paul allegedly depends. Is he merely reacting to the behavior he sees in Greek and Roman sources, or is he exegetically proactive, working predominantly from Hebrew Bible sources? Following Dale Martin, Grenz argues that the latter is the case, that the root of Paul's argument in Romans 1 has fundamentally to do with pagan hubris toward the Creator.

*Third*, Grenz looks at the traditions of the Church. Here he engages three seminal books: D. S. Bailey's *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (London: Longmans, Green, 1955), J. Boswell's *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), and D. Greenberg's *The Construction of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). He rejects Boswell's attempts to demonstrate greater levels of "tolerance" in the early Church than what he thinks the evidence allows. The fact that the early church focuses on pederasty does not mean that early Christian pastors are not concerned with homosexuality per se. Rather it implies that they find themselves forced to deal with a particular *kind* of homosexuality. These Christian pastors see it as their job to protect the Church's children, to promote the kind of stable homes within which children can grow and mature. While some obviously go too far, particularly when they condemn all sexual activity as morally suspect, Grenz suggests that the reason for their concern is more ethical than sociological. Early Church leaders care little about "nature-versus-nurture" theories.

This leads, finally, to Grenz's last line of argument: that Christians ought to approach this problem first and foremost from a perspective grounded in a clear theological ethic. Biblical, ecclesiastical, and scientific arguments have their place, as far as they go, but Grenz is concerned that the Church is trying to engage this discussion in a passive-aggressive way, using inferior dialogical tools. Human sexuality, divorced from a broader understanding of theological anthropology, becomes a shallow and hollow thing. Human sexuality, he argues, reflects our basic incompleteness as embodied creatures. Biological sexuality, he suggests, is a paradigm of our deeper quest for spiritual wholeness. Human beings are created in the *imago dei* as male-and-female. Same-sex intercourse does not reflect the *imago dei* of a Triune God—three distinct Others united into One Being. Unless we are prepared to abandon a theology of the trinity, how can we affirm that homosexuality in any form even comes close to reflecting the trinitarian view of God? How can homosexuality even approximate what the *imago dei* of male-united-with-female is supposed to represent?

So why are so many Christians embracing same-sex marriage and homosexual ordination today? Grenz's response is the plea of the book. Too many of us, he quietly suggests, have yet to think through the implications of our free-will sexual decisions theologically. Does this mean that the Church should ban all those who fail to replicate the *imago dei* in their sexual decision-making? No. Persons who make homosexual decisions must be welcomed like all other sinners in need of God's grace, even if the behavior in which they engage has to change if they are to learn, with the rest of us sinners, what it means to become the *imago dei* in a broken world. Simplistic "Doesn't-God-love-homosexuals-too?" arguments *completely miss the theological point*. Paul makes it crystal clear that God does indeed love homosexuals . . . and thieves . . . and adulterers . . . and drunkards . . . and all other sinners (1 Cor 6:9–11). Of course God loves sinners! The question is not whether God loves people who make homosexual decisions but whether people who make homosexual decisions are willing to conform their lives to the image of the Triune God.

The deeper issue is not biological or psychological but theological. Which God are we prepared to worship? This question cannot be simply pushed over to a back burner while the Church endlessly debates matters of biology and Bible. What Grenz wants to know is whether we are prepared to surrender the doctrine of the Triune God in the midst of this or any other theological debate. Is God some kind of Baal just because a lot of people are screaming and dancing and gashing themselves open in conformity to this god's image? Or is God Father-Son-Spirit in mysterious communion, and are we truly prepared to strive to conform to *this* God's image—male-and-female made in the *imago dei*?

For those who dare to engage it, this book raises a number of serious theological questions—questions that are often overlooked in the midst of our many anthropological debates.

Michael S. Moore  
Fuller Theological Seminary Southwest