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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.

—Thomas Sieger Derr
Smith College

Modern Catholic Social Documents and Political Economy
Albino F. Barrera, O.P.

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” (78–9). The minimum base necessary for social solidarity today is the well-known right to a family living wage for labor. We have therefore shifted from concern with an organic hierarchy to concern with individual rights—met through participation in the economy. This section is well-done, and I would assign it for any class in theological ethics considering such subject matter.

Part 3 does what any work about CST must at some point do: It discusses theological anthropology. It also contrasts that understanding of the human person with what is found in orthodox economics. Such a section is essential, since CST claims to put its own understanding of the human person at its theoretical center. Positions on various economic issues are then viewed here as conclusions reached deductively from the respective anthropology. Barrera avoids stereotyping the classical school (he finds plenty of evidence that the classical economists saw the need for some governmental intervention and most certainly were not purely laissez-faire in their thinking), and also presents a nuanced interpretation of CST as well. My main criticism here is that many (if not most) economists would certainly not want to defend their limited anthropological economics as complete and accurate. The economic anthropology only serves a small part in their economic models, which then have (it is hoped) good predictive ability.

In Parts 3 and 4, it is refreshing to read a discussion favorably inclined toward CST that can still recognize that it “says very little about the practical requirements of implementation (of its moral demands), nor does it examine these proposals against empirical evidence” (164). For example, according to Barrera, the problem of inequality is worsening in the new economy. CST, on the other hand, demands greater equality in the distribution of societies’ benefits. Unfortunately, CST says very little about how to increase equality, to what degree equality must be pursued, and in what manner to do this. CST also seems oblivious to the dynamic nature of the economy and the impact of redistribution on production itself. He concludes that an ethic of equality has weak foundations and, instead, develops the tradition in the direction of an ethic of participation. It is here that the book will make its real contribution.

Barrera develops the theory in a direction that is appropriate for today and in light of the “signs of the times.” For Barrera, today we may speak of material and immaterial (such as information) property. Instead of an ethic of equality (property, wages, transfers), we need one of participation in the new economy. The key to equity in the case of immaterial property is participation. Furthermore, his analysis shows that this participation must go beyond that required for meeting “basic needs.” Participation in the new knowledge economy must reduce relative inequality and provide for the attainment of human excellence and genuine flourishing. Equitable participation in the new economy is the new ethical Archimedean point. What nagged at me a bit was the distributive mentality, even in the new information economy. It was as if, in the old and new economies, a central authority (the government, I assume) distributes benefits and burdens from above. There could be more empirical work and discussion of subsidiarity.
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Perhaps the most prominent contributors to this natural-law revival have been the moral theologian, Germain Grisez, and the legal philosopher, John Finnis. It was no coincidence that Grisez and Finnis were the first two laymen appointed to the pope’s International Theological Commission. In many respects, they have (almost single-handedly) forced Christians and non-Christians alike to reassess the case for natural law, just when many liberal Protestants and heterodox Catholics thought they had managed to relegate it to the dust-bin of history.

The first generation of students of what is often called the “new natural law” school are now beginning to exert their influence in a range of areas. Perhaps the most well-known is Princeton University’s McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence, Robert P. George. Nowhere in his many writings does George claim to have modified new natural-law theory. His particular contribution has been to apply new natural-law thought to a range of public policy questions in ways that directly challenge the assumptions of what George calls the “secular orthodoxy” that dominates the public square. These are the questions addressed by George in the collection of essays contained in his latest book, *The Clash of Orthodoxies*.

Written in language accessible to nonspecialists in jurisprudence, natural law, and theology, the common thread of *The Clash of Orthodoxies* is George’s conviction that the Judeo-Christian understanding of the world is more reasonable than its secular alternatives. By “secular,” George does not have in mind the ecclesiastical-temporal distinction. Rather, he means secularist philosophical commitments, as personified by John Rawls and Robert Nozick and, at the outer extremity of reason, George’s Princeton colleague, Peter Singer. Though these scholars differ among themselves about questions such as the limits of private property, George maintains that all secularists (whether they realize it or not) share the same concept of man. It is this anthropology, especially its concept of the precise relationship between human reason, free will, and the passions that George finds so wanting.

The essence of George’s position may be found in his first essay, which carefully compares the respective claims that Judeo-Christianity and orthodox secularists make about the nature of man. Here George raises, among other things, grave questions about whether secularists can believe, on the basis of their own Humean-utilitarian anthropology, that the free choice is real.

Many of the other essays reflect George’s rigorous application of this analysis to debates within the public square, the law, and the church. In each instance, George demonstrates that secular liberals like Rawls, as well as homosexual pederast, such as Andrew Sullivan, are essentially seeking to rationalize positions that can only ultimately be justified on the basis of emotivist (i.e., unreasonable) understandings of man.

Particularly important is George’s elucidation of the sheer narrowness of Rawls’ portrait of public reason. Believing Jews and Christians, George maintains, should be willing to debate public policy questions on the basis of reason. But, as George illustrates, Rawls’ concept of public reason effectively skews the discussion in favor of...