

A Response to Grenz and Olson's *Who Needs Theology?*

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by

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Whether the word "theology" excites, bores, or repulses someone, Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson have given fresh impetus to the study of God with their work *Who Needs Theology? An Invitation to the Study of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 150 pp.

The authors' thesis, which they develop over the first half of the book, is "everyone is a theologian," but not necessarily a good theologian. By "everyone" they mean everyone, from the average person in the church who would never apply the label theologian to himself, to the atheist who hardly thinks of God, to the child in the Sunday School class, and of course to the credentialed theologian who studies this field on the academic level. Every one of these individuals asks theological questions like, "Why do good people suffer," or "Why is there something rather than nothing," and their theology, good or bad, will inform their answers.

By "good theologian" Grenz and Olson mean that not all theologies are equally reflective of accuracy to the truth and the expression of it. They have developed a spectrum of theology to illustrate this, and it is a very helpful tool so the reader may evaluate his own theological perspective, for, as Socrates said, "the unexamined life is not worth living." This spectrum has allowed this reviewer to evaluate his own theology and to be thankful he has (hopefully) moved away from folk theology and lay theology toward ministerial theology and (again, hopefully) toward professional theology and ultimately academic theology.

The authors define Christian theology as including both reflection and articulation, and they ably demonstrate the value of theology to the Christian in both pleasing God and in understanding and appreciating their own faith in an increasingly pluralistic and non-absolutist world. While the pitfalls of killjoyism and divisiveness must be avoided, there truly is no growth in faith apart from theology.

The second half of the book moves from theory to practice, and gives the reader some hands on tools he can use in his growth as a theologian. The text of Scripture, the heritage of faith, and the context of culture (both ancient and contemporary) form the triad with which all theologians must interact. Grenz and Olson demythologize the idea that Christian faith involves sacrificing the intellect or requires living outside of culture. Rather, "taking faith into life means looking at the society in which we live through theological eyes."

Grenz and Olson have succeeded in helping this reviewer to desire more theological precision in his own life, and to take that theology out of the mind and the classroom and into the everyday world. In family, community, and culture, theology is a welcome contributor to understanding the universal questions of life and the life of the mind. I am a theologian, and so is every single person I will meet today. Can I inspire theological thinking, and more importantly, good theological thinking, among my fellow man?