

aims to change one's negative perceptions of non-Christian religions and offer a new perspective about them. At the same time, it is a significant encouragement for Christians to rediscover who they are and what they believe. This book will help readers develop a friendly approach and attitude towards other faiths and overcome the "fortress" or "us versus them" mentality that is so widespread today.

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*The Essentials of Christian Thought: Seeing Reality through the Biblical Story*, by Roger E. Olson. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017. 236 pp. + 16 pp. appendix. Paperback. US\$ 18.99.

Written by the well-known theologian and church historian Roger E. Olson, *The Essentials of Christian Thought: Seeing Reality through the Biblical Story* explores the implicit metaphysics behind the biblical narrative. The purpose of the book is "exposition and therapy" (p. 107), clarifying the biblical worldview to help Christian readers and educators avoid conscious or unconscious syncretism. In a clear, precise, yet simple language, Olson builds an argument that "the philosophy of the Bible can stand on its own two feet" (p. 70), without having to borrow from extrabiblical ones.

Apart from the preface and introduction, the book is structured in seven chapters, each followed by an interlude detailing the issues raised in the previous chapter. The first chapter presents the postfoundationalist epistemic perspective of the author. More specifically, the author accepts a qualified form of postliberalism as his methodological outlook. Olson commends its proposal that "the meaning of the Bible is not outside of it" (p. 44). He contends that the biblical worldview with its central metaphysical assumptions offers the best answer to the basic questions of life.

The second chapter indicates God as the ultimate reality of the Bible. God is supernatural, personal, but not human. Olson defines supernatural as that which is not dependent on nature. Personal means having intelligence, will, and self-determination. Calling this metaphysical vision "biblical theistic personalism" (p. 63), the author points out in the third chapter that various theologians retrieved it. Among these, Claude Tresmontant and Edmond La Beaume Cherbonnier play a key role. Olson quotes them frequently in the book, detailing their efforts of separating the

biblical perspective from the extrabiblical ones. The fourth chapter presents the central extrabiblical philosophies competing with the biblical one: metaphysical dualism, metaphysical monism, panentheism, and naturalism. Olson evaluates them briefly, indicating the conflicting points with the ultimate reality of the Bible, God.

The fifth chapter is the key chapter of the entire book. Olson presents here seven metaphysical assumptions delineating the ultimate reality of the Bible. The first is that the biblical vision "is duality without dualism and excluding monism" (p. 145). This means that there are two categories of reality: God's reality and created reality. The second assumption is that God is a being, not the "being itself" (p. 146), given that he is a person. Third, God is both a supernatural and personal being. A fourth assumption follows—God "is not a prisoner of nature" (p. 150), implying that divine miracles do not disrupt but rather suspend the regular divine activity in nature. Fifth, God is both self-sufficient and vulnerable. As such, he is open to be influenced by his creatures, but not as process theologians affirm. The fifth assumption entails a sixth—God is not timeless but temporal "in the sense of 'everlasting'" (p. 160). As such, he experiences the flow of time and both acts and reacts in relation with the created world. The last assumption is that God, as the ultimate biblical reality, is the ethical benchmark for every creature. "Because God is personal," Olson explains, "knowledge of God includes a challenge to decision" (p. 162).

The following chapter presents the biblical-Christian perspective of the world. As the good creation of God, the world is contingent. Olson acknowledges that because of sin, the world is broken and corrupted. Nevertheless, it is destined to be divinely restored. An "ontological interval" (p. 187) separates the world from God, and every effort to violate this interval leads to idolatry. The last chapter focuses on the biblical view of humanity. After presenting several competing views, Olson presents human beings as dependent and good. Still, endowed with freedom and responsibility, they chose to rebel against God. Reflecting the biblical language, the author indicates that human "behavior is controlled by the heart more than by the mind or reason" (p. 212). Therefore, education is not the solution to everything but rather a real integration of biblical faith in the process of learning. Olson addresses this issue by offering a model of the integration of faith and learning in the appendix that concludes the book.

*The Essentials of Christian Thought: Seeing Reality through the Biblical Story* is a book well-written. The line of reasoning Olson proffers is easy to follow. Each chapter builds upon the previous, with clear transitional paragraphs. The seven interludes do not break the flow of thought but rather enrich it. Olson is careful to state the purpose of the entire book and of each chapter in a clear manner. He presents his methodological perspective and refers

back to it frequently. Important ideas are restated periodically, helping the reader to better understand the author's perspective. The coherence of the book is thus greatly increased. Olson is attentive to help the reader understand the implications of non-biblical competing views of reality while building a solid case for the biblical philosophical outlook.

The layout of the book is excellent. The gray shade of the interlude pages helps the reader glance comfortably through the book. The text is easily readable. The footnotes are kept short. The author interacts with various authors throughout the book, indicating key works to be consulted. Nevertheless, one feels the need of interaction with more recent authors (e.g. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, John C. Peckham) on divine ontology. Some readers may feel frustrated to find no concluding chapter per se, and the lack of a subject/authors index is inconvenient.

Simple yet far-reaching in its metaphysical and epistemological conclusions, the book is recommended for students and teachers alike. The author manages to synthesize the central facets of the biblical worldview, which truly represent the "essentials of Christian thought." Its focus on these philosophical assumptions reveals a much-needed methodology for theological studies. It aligns with a recent turn towards the biblical narrative as the foundation for any doctrinal system. In addition, it offers an example of how a bridge between biblical and systematic theologies may look like. Although the methodological label of "postliberalism" may be misleading, the modified form Olson suggests represents a rich and rewarding starting point.

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