

avoided by summary histories and revivals alike.

Halfway through, Noll interrupts his story-telling to insert a chapter on "Explanations" of the causes for the Awakening. This is a weaker chapter, as Noll seems unwilling to exclude any proffered cause. He examines, in turn, the Holy Spirit, the role of great men, the flow of history, shifting societal structures, socioecclesiastical status, intellectual evolution, and psychological forces—all causes proposed by various historians. He bravely accepts that all these causes may well have played a role in bringing about the Great Awakening.

One is tempted to rejoin that accepting all explanations makes any particular explanation somewhat vacuous. In fairness, Noll's primary point seems to be that one can accept spiritual explanations for revival and still acknowledge that conventional historical conditions also play a role. Simply put, God works with and through history, not apart from it. But surely one could make this point *and* say that the psychological tension caused by the clash of materialism and authority in colonial America is a far-fetched explanation that involves too many unknown and unknowable variables to be a useful analysis.

Noll continues by looking at the later development and maturing of the Awakening. He traces with particularity the impulses that the revival brought to different existing denominations, as well as the new denominations created in its wake, most notably, Methodism's split from Anglicanism. This section is one of the few departures from the theme of "ecumenism" throughout the book. At the end of the book, he again leaves his chronological scheme to examine evangelicalism's role and impact "In the World," followed by the final chapter on "True Religion."

These two chapters balance each other, as the latter chapter's recognition that evangelicalism is concerned primarily with individual spiritual renewal does not obscure the former's acknowledgment that evangelicals did have an often-profound impact on society. Opposition to slavery, championing of religion and education among the poor and oppressed classes, the running of orphanages and schools, and even the creation of a firewall against the type of revolutionary fervor and class warfare that engulfed France are all benefits to society attributed to evangelicalism.

These chapters are probably beyond the scope of the book. Telling the story of the Great Awakening and the beginning of evangelicalism in less than three hundred pages is challenge enough. Trying to provide explanations about evangelicalism's impact on society is probably overly ambitious and detracts from time that could have been spent by examining more fully the period's theological framework. These topics deserve a book of their own, which, if we are lucky, the prolific Mr. Noll may soon write for us.

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Olson, Roger E. *The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004. 329 pp. Paper, \$39.95.

Roger E. Olson, Professor of Theology at George W. Treutt Theological Seminary, Baylor University, is the author of several books on theology and historical theology, including his recent *Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries*

of *Unity and Diversity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002). The present volume is part of a series of Westminster Handbooks to Christian Theology, which already includes *The Westminster Handbook to Reformed Theology* (2001); *The Westminster Handbook to Origen* (2004); and *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology* (2004).

In the *Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology*, Olson admirably surveys the broad parameters of evangelical theology, including numerous prominent evangelical authors. The sections of the book are organized under the titles "The Story of Evangelical Theology," "Movements and Organizations Related to Evangelical Theology," "Key Figures in Evangelical Theology," "Traditional Doctrines in Evangelical Theology," and "Issues in Evangelical Theology." As befits a "handbook," the reader will find historical essays and material on people, organizations, and theological positions. Only near the end of the book, however, does Olson give his definition of "evangelicalism." He notes that "evangelicals are Protestants profoundly influenced by the later renewal movements of Pietism and revivalism" (317). Earlier, though, he is careful to differentiate between Protestantism and evangelicalism, the two of which are not to be confused.

Olson's handbook is helpful in the congregate depictions of many aspects of evangelicalism, including the Puritans and their effect on evangelical theology, Calvinism, the Holiness-Pentecostal movements, and the issue of different worship styles in the various traditions. Each of the sections closes with a helpful, though brief, bibliography for further study.

This is an unusual handbook in that Olson is the sole author. Works of this nature generally involve a number of writers, contributing to the many categories necessary in a handbook compendium. Olson, however, exhibits his capability to survey the historical development of evangelical theology, its many movements, individuals, doctrines, issues, and institutions. No information is given on how topics or published theologians were selected for inclusion—whether by Olson or by the editors. The formatting of the book is also unique in that some of the sections are printed in the standard full-page style, whereas some sections are formatted in a two-column manner.

In his reporting on the varied and extensive viewpoints of evangelical theology, Olson attempts to be even-handed and give each side of a theological debate an impartial description. But the discerning reader can detect where Olson's sympathies lie. He quotes most often Donald Bloesch as the definitive word on a subject, or as one who can supply the needed wisdom to resolve a troubling or decisive issue. In fact, the book is dedicated "with gratitude and affection" to Bloesch, as one "who has served as a model of irenic evangelical theology and generous orthodoxy."

Olson's personal perspective can also be detected through his reporting of the sometimes heated issues that evangelical theology works its way through by referring to the "strife over the secondary matters of the Christian faith" (52). However, he never provides an explanation of how he determines what issues are "primary" in theology. He does, "unconsciously," reveal his own posture through the adjectives he selects. For example, when dealing with the issue of creation, he writes: "The vast majority of evangelical scholars and theologians reject young-earth creationism and

seek a more moderate approach to reconciling Genesis with science" (166). Is the issue of creation and its relationship to science a "secondary" matter that can merely be resolved by a "more moderate approach"? Or is this a "primary" issue that needs more theological wrestling? The topic of creation is referred to by almost every biblical writer in the canon. Can this really be a "secondary" issue? Is the "moderate" position the best reflection of the position of the biblical writers?

Olson's choice of words in describing other dissonant situations is also intriguing. When surveying eschatological discussions in the twentieth century, he reports that the "evangelical movement as a whole seemed to be obsessed with the second coming of Jesus Christ and the events surrounding it" (146). For a movement such as evangelicalism, which proclaims the coming of Jesus as a "primary" doctrine, should a determined focus be deemed an "obsession"? Again, when describing a document entitled "The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration," Olson describes the document's closing argument as a "theologically fussy statement of 'Affirmations and Denials'" (192). With the use of adjectives such as "fussy," it is not difficult to determine how Olson relates to the document. One final example (though many more could be cited) is Olson's passing remark about "secondary matters of the faith such as biblical inerrancy" (108). By relegating biblical inerrancy as a secondary matter, Olson is, perhaps, attempting to bypass the many heated arguments over the nature of Scripture. But who *really* determines that this is a "secondary" theological matter? Would not the primary source of all theological construction deserve supreme status? Though discussions of biblical inerrancy and infallibility cause sharp divisions, the solution should not be to relegate the discussion to secondary matters.

Olson does call for Scripture to inform theology, even if that means deviating from the received Protestant tradition. He notes that "authentic evangelical faith must shed its last vestiges of fundamentalism in maximal conservatism and defensiveness of human traditions (e.g., Old School Princeton Calvinism) and examine everything afresh in the light of new understandings of God's Word" (128). However, I would be curious to know how far Olson would go in doing this, and how he would determine which are the "primary" and "secondary" matters that might need revamping. Would Olson allow for evangelical theological positions, which have been held for centuries, to be revised in light of further scriptural understanding? Probably not, since such theological discussion usually involves discord. If a doctrine is divisive, it appears that Olson merely suggests that it is a "secondary" matter.

Olson also decries the exclusively white, male dominance within evangelicalism. He argues that "women and persons of color" have "not profoundly impacted" evangelical theology (2). However, there are now a number of studies by "women and persons of color" within the evangelical theological perspective. Perhaps Olson could have looked a little harder! Overall, however, the handbook is a valuable volume with excellent reference material. If a person wants to become better informed about evangelical theology, this is a rich place to start.