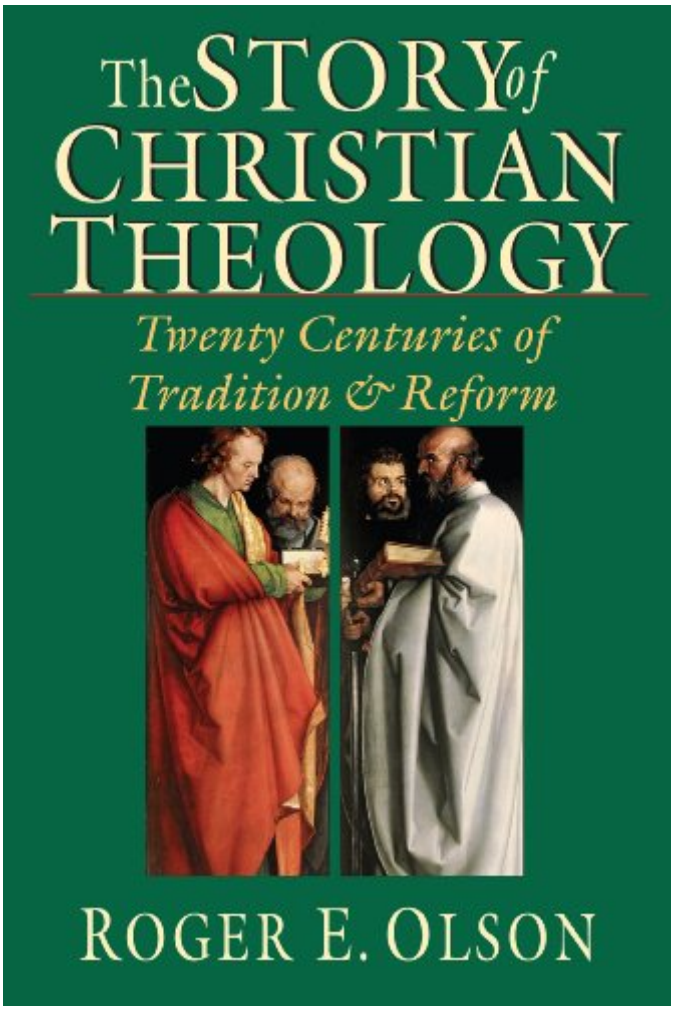
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The Story Of Christian Theology



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Synopsis

Voted a 2000 Book of the Year by Christianity Today!Winner of a year 2000 ECPA Gold Medallion Award!History is made up of stories--narratives that recount the events, movements, ideas and lives that have shaped religions and nations. Theologian Roger Olson believes that the history of Christian theology should be told as such a story, one replete with thick plots, exciting twists, interesting people and fascinating ideas.In this panoramic work of historical theology Olson vividly recounts the deeds and words of the cultists and apostolic fathers of the second century, the clash between the theological schools of Alexandria and Antioch, the epochal division between East and West, the revolutionary advent of the Reformation and much more, right on up to the dazzling, sometimes dismaying fallout that has continued to shake Christians through the twentieth century. Through it all Olson detects and traces a common thread: a concern for salvation--God’s redemptive activity in forgiving and transforming sinful human beings.Evenhanded, refreshingly readable, impressive in its breadth and depth, The Story of Christian Theology is poised to become a standard historical theology text.

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Customer Reviews

This book is, in my opinion, as excellent an introduction to mainstream Christian theology as you will find. Unlike a book on the history of the church, this book focuses on the unfolding of theological thinking over the course of Christian history. For this reason it can be a useful commentary for studying the unfoldment of church history as well. For most of us, however, it may be the only book on mainstream Christian theology that you will ever need to or want to read. Because it covers the entire sequential history of Christian theology from the first century to the present day and represents the contemporary evangelical viewpoint. Anyone wanting to study any of the alternative theological ideas within the time frames covered in this volume or any of the alternative theological or nonliteralist views available in other volumes will obviously have to look elsewhere. However, even for those who do look elsewhere, this book does articulate in a clear and comprehensive yet readable volume the mainstream, literalistic and evangelical history of theology.

Professor Roger Olson’s book may be considered by some appropriate only for collegiate and seminary study; however, his narrative format and lucid style has made this book a very successful study text for a men’s bible study group at our church. We had grown tired of simplistic guides for bible studies. The men have been meeting for several years and wanted a more challenging experience but one that was, in its conceptual load, manageable for all participants as some do not have any college experience. We particularly appreciated, as this is a Lutheran bible study group, the author’s objective, fair assessments of theological traditions that depart from his own doctrinal commitments (Classical Arminian; Baptist). We also were able to use a web site, not affiliated with the author, called the Good Egg Bible Study that has correlated questions for every chapter in his book. Based on our experience, we would encourage adult educators in a church setting to offer short courses based on consecutive segments of the text in conjunction with the class discussion questions available at the Good Egg site. We went through the entire book, but we spent several months accomplishing this.

While sometimes writing on heady topics, Olson’s style is readable and, I think, accessible to the average layperson. I suspect this book is primarily intended for seminary students, but any Christian who may be interested in the history of Christian theology would want to read this book. A student of his I knew referred to this book as "The Green Monster." Truth is, it’s no monster at all, but a thoughtful and informative book on Christian history and theology. Well worth the read.

If you've ever wondered how the major pieces of Christian theology --things like the Trinity, Predestination, and Baptism-- you will find them here. Dr. Olson, a historian by trade, takes on the places, times, and movements that developed and hardened the Christian doctrines we know today. Essentially, this book follows a strictly chronological format, starting from the birth of the Church in the book of Acts, and carrying through to the split of the Fundamentalist movement and Reformed theology in the 20th Century.The first section deals with the fundamental heresies that came in with the founding of the Church by examining the writing of the Patristic Fathers, the Apologetic Fathers, and then focusing specifically on Irenaeus. Here the fundamental issues of the nature of Christ in his incarnation were initially resolved. Of course, many of these issues have risen again in recent time with the formation of heretical branches of Christian thought, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and the LDS Church.The second section deals with the unity of the Church which is primarily founded on the conversion of Rome to a Christian state. While Dr. Olson does a good job of explain the good results of the unity of the Church, he doesn't cover the concerns of those Christians who objected to the sacralism of merging the state and church, and using state power to impose consistency of theology.The major argument over the nature of the Trinity is dealt with in the fourth section, and the fifth returns to the nature of Christ. Section five describes the split between the Eastern and Western church over the issue of the procession of the Spirit --does the Spirit proceed only from the Father, or from the Father and the Son. According to Dr. Olson, the theological quarrel was founded on different views of the place of Scripture and hermeneutics.Martin Luther, John Calvin, and the Reformers are covered in the seventh section. Dr. Olson provides good insight into the relationship between the various Reformers, laying the groundwork for the ultimate split of the Reformed movement described in section eight. The author's ability to lay out the relationships in this section provides a very easy to understand historical picture, though he tends to downplay the role and objections of the Anabaptists, and the sacralizing power grounded in Constantinian Christianity.In the final section Dr. Olson discusses the split between liberal and conservative Christianity, the split between fundamentalism and mainline Christianity. Some of the most interesting pieces he discusses here relate to the role of Billy Graham's ministry, and the role of various schools, strong personalities, and even the impact of scientific thinking in this era.A long read, but a good basis from which to reach out and investigate Christian history and theology.

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