



The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity & Diversity

By Roger E. Olson

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An ECPA 2003 Gold Medallion Finalist! The story of Christian theology has often been divisive and disjointed. Providing this companion volume to his earlier work *The Story of Christian Theology*, Roger E. Olson thematically traces the contours of Christian belief down through the ages, revealing a pattern of both unity and diversity. He finds a consensus of teaching that is both unitive and able to incorporate a faithful diversity when not forced into the molds of false either-or alternatives. The mosaic that emerges from Olson's work displays a mediating evangelical theology that is nonspeculative and irenic in spirit and tone. Specifically written with the nonspecialist in mind, Olson has masterfully sketched out the contours of Christian faith with simplicity while avoiding oversimplification.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In this ambitious book, Olson delineates from an evangelical perspective what is and is not authentic Christian belief. Chapters feature such topics as the Bible, God, Jesus and the Church, beginning with an overview of orthodox belief about the topic, citing Scripture, the Church Fathers and noted Christian writers throughout history. Olson then devotes a section to heretical beliefs, and follows this with an examination of diverse non-heretical beliefs among orthodox Christians (including Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox believers, and most Protestants). He ends each chapter envisioning greater unity among Christians, despite honest disagreements. While marred by some redundancy and excess verbiage, Olson's writing renders many complex theological concepts surprisingly accessible. And in his attempts to separate heresy from right belief, he acknowledges that those who adhere to beliefs he labels erroneous are usually sincere Christians (he cites wrong belief among fundamentalists, charismatics, liberal Christians and various sects). Attempting to mediate among the myriad dogmas, doctrines and opinions of orthodox Christians is no easy task, and Olson's descriptions of certain right beliefs and heresies (such as the psychological analogy for the Trinity and modalism) are sometimes barely distinguishable. Despite these and other small logical problems, Olson's book contributes greatly to contemporary evangelicalism not only in its impressive survey of many theologies, but also in its use of "The Great Tradition" of Christian belief as an essential guide to orthodoxy.

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From Library Journal

In this exemplary treatment of historical Christian theology and the development of belief, Olson (theology, Truett Theological Seminary, Baylor Univ.) succeeds in presenting what he posits as a "very basic, relatively comprehensive, nontechnical, nonspeculative one-volume introduction" to the subject. Olson works best at "affirming a strong central core of identifiable Christian belief," concluding that "beliefs matter, but not all beliefs matter equally." An evangelical Christian who is well versed in the variety of Christian beliefs—from Orthodoxy to Roman Catholicism to Protestantism and others that fall under the heading of "esoteric Christianity"—he compares and contrasts various traditions in brief and simple language, illuminating complex doctrinal debates such as the Trinity, the nature of God, salvation, and humanity. He employs an informed rhetoric, showcasing a Christianity "that allows for great diversity and variety about every detail." While not heavily into scholarly apparatus, he footnotes and cites where necessary. Teachers who want to cover a broad spectrum of Christian beliefs should seriously consider this as a textbook for their courses. Its reasonable price and thoughtful, comprehensive perspective make it a compelling purchase. Highly recommended for academic and larger public libraries.

Sandra Collins, Duquesne Univ. Lib., Pittsburgh

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Review

"You don't have to be a 'paid theologian' to understand Roger Olson's presentation of Christian theology. Without jargon but with an irenic spirit, Roger helps the educated layperson of any church persuasion to understand what is essential to believe in order to still be tethered to the Christian faith and what beliefs have broken the tether in the church's past. This book helps us to appreciate all the diverse theological colors that make up the mosaic called 'the Christian faith' while showing us where and why certain beliefs don't fit the pattern. Anyone who has been scared off by terms like *theology*, *doctrine* and *orthodoxy* will learn from Roger that these words and the Christian content that fills them are our friends." (Dennis Okholm, professor of theology, Wheaton College)

"In *The Mosaic of Christian Belief*, Roger Olson sets out to practice the admirable maxim of Peter Meiderlin, "in essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity." He accomplishes this task with wisdom and grace. In doing so, he educates his readers in the Great Tradition of Christianity and guides them through the maze of contemporary theological debate. Anyone seeking help in maintaining a commitment to the truth of the gospel while also embracing genuine Christian diversity will find no better guide than this book." (Jonathan Wilson, Professor of Religious Studies, Westmont College)

"What evangelicals have needed, according to Roger Olson, and what he has provided is a basic, relatively comprehensive, nontechnical, nonspeculative one-volume introduction to the Christian faith. The book offers a mediating and Arminian perspective within the broad evangelical tradition which underlines both shared beliefs and real diversity. At a time of extreme opinion, it is a God-send." (Clark Pinnock, Professor of Theology, Emeritus, McMaster Divinity College)

"Roger Olson expertly describes the core theological beliefs about which the Christian church has achieved wide agreement across its denominational divisions. On each of the major topics of Christian belief, he identifies proposals that fall outside the scope of that orthodox consensus and the main differences that exist between theologians who work within the Great Tradition. He then proposes a way forward, to overcome the tensions between these diverse positions and to broaden the area of consensus. Since Calvinists have been more active than Arminians in the writing of theological handbooks, and since many of the Arminians writing theology have not been evangelical, Olson's intentionally evangelical Arminian perspective makes a particularly helpful contribution. The book is written in language that should be accessible to undergraduate students and seriously minded church members and will, hopefully, help to stem the tide of theological ignorance that threatens the health of the church." (Terrance Tiessen, professor of theology and ethics, Providence Theological Seminary)

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Donald Oakes:

The reason why? Because this The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity & Diversity is an unordinary book that the inside of the publication waiting for you to snap that but latter it will shock you with the secret this inside. Reading this book alongside it was fantastic author who also write the book in such remarkable way makes the content inside easier to understand, entertaining technique but still convey the meaning fully. So , it is good for you for not hesitating having this anymore or you going to regret it. This amazing book will give you a lot of rewards than the other book possess such as help improving your ability and your critical thinking approach. So , still want to postpone having that book? If I were you I will go to the book store hurriedly.

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