

*Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities*. Roger E. Olson. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006.

No modern evangelical scholar has escaped the ever present debate between Calvinism and Arminianism. Opinions have almost always been voiced strongly and at times with quite a bit of rancor. Roger Olson's work *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* helps bring balance to that debate in our own day by forcing the scholar to face historical realities and admit that he may not know as much as he thinks he does about Arminian theology.

Olson's work is more a history than a theology. In doing so, he uses primarily original source material (Arminius, Episcopius, Limborch, Wesley, Watson, Pope, Miley and others) to show that Arminian theology has largely been misrepresented. This misleading portrait has chiefly been painted by Calvinists, but at times, Olson asserts, even by Arminians. His work is given to correct this wrongful picture and in doing this he succeeds.

The book is organized around ten major chapters, each one dedicated to one myth that has been perpetuated about Arminian theology and which Olson attempts to show is not true. For example, he rejects the myth that Arminian theology is the opposite of Calvinist/Reformed theology, showing that Arminius, based upon his own statements, was closer to Calvin than later debates place him. Further, he discards the falsehood from his point of view that the heart of Arminianism is belief in free will. Instead, he argues historically that the heart of the movement has been God's loving and just character with the formal principle of Arminianism being the universal will of God for salvation. Another example is Olson's insistence that all Arminians do not hold to the governmental view of Christ's atonement on the cross as is often suggested, a point this current reviewer has often wrongfully asserted.

In all of these so-called myths, Olson gives the reader a historical survey of Arminian writings from Jacob Arminius until the present time. In this, he is honest about changes that took place within the Arminian tradition which have been hurtful. He wants his reader to understand that the later writings of Philip Limborch move away from Arminius and the Remonstrants by rejecting total depravity and affirming human moral ability after the Fall. However, Olson does not want his readers to accept this stream of development as emblematic of the entire historical movement of Arminians. He argues convincingly from original historical sources in making this assertion. To use another historical personage in this regard, Olson wants his readers, especially his Calvinist friends, to quit looking at Arminianism merely through the theology of Charles Finney and those like him.

Such a positive assessment of Olson's book does not cover everything he says. The reader who has little background in the source material will no doubt want to check the information himself. Theologically, this reviewer, who does not hold to Arminian theology, was quite disappointed to see that Olson was open to open theism although he stops short of endorsing it. Hopefully, such shortcomings will not cloud the value of the book as a historical work of high caliber to help those both outside and inside the Arminian movement to understand its own theological statements given through its own history.