

BOOK REVIEWS

Handy, Robert T. *A History of Union Theological Seminary in New York*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987. xiv + 378 pp. \$30.00.

Just as Fuller Theological Seminary (see review on George M. Marsden's *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* in this issue of *AUSS*) holds a unique place in the history of conservative theological education and scholarship in the United States, so Union Theological Seminary of New York has a similar position in the liberal arena. With such men as Philip Schaff, Charles Briggs, George Albert Coe, Harry Emerson Fosdick, Henry Sloan Coffin, Reinhold Niebuhr, Paul Tillich, Henry P. Van Dusen, Robert McAfee Brown, George A. Buttrick, James Moffatt, James N. Cone, and a score of other preeminent scholars on its faculty, the history of Union is also the story of a cross section of the development of American scholarship in nearly every area of religious studies.

Union Seminary was founded in 1836. Handy's history was developed to commemorate the institution's sesquicentennial anniversary. As such, it is the only history of the seminary covering its entire existence. Previous histories of note are George Lewis Prentiss's *Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York: Historical and Biographical Sketches of Its First Fifty Years* (1889), Prentiss's *Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York: Its Design and Another Decade of Its History* (1899), and Henry Sloan Coffin's *Half Century of Union Theological Seminary, 1896-1945* (1954). Besides having been long out of print, these earlier volumes needed updating.

Robert T. Handy, Henry Sloan Coffin Professor Emeritus of Church History at Union, served as a full-time faculty member and sometime administrator at the school from 1950 through 1986. Thus he has an insider's view of its history. That, of course, gives him both the advantage of being a participant in much of the institution's recent history and the disadvantage of subtle and not-so-subtle bias as he writes about "his" school, colleagues, and students.

Handy's book traces the seminary's development from its inception as an independent seminary for the training of Presbyterian ministers in 1835, up through its rapid development and almost continual growth from the 1850s through the mid 1960s, and into its period of retrenchment in the period of "turmoil," "transition," and "testing" from the mid 1960s through the present. Of particular interest is his treatment of the Briggs

heresy trial in the 1890s, in which the seminary asserted its stand on academic freedom and broke the formal relationship it had voluntarily (rather than legally) sustained to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church between 1870 and 1894. That move did much to set the liberalizing direction of Union in the twentieth century. While the treatment of Briggs is helpful, it does not particularly add any new information to a field which has already been adequately covered in previous works. Other topics of special interest in Handy's volume are his treatment of the consistent but growing positions of Union in the field of civil rights and ecumenism.

A History of Union could have been a stronger book. In many ways it seems to be a history directed at the institution's alumni. Largely based on secondary sources, at times it is anecdotal. A great deal of space is devoted to biographical sketches of its presidents and leading professors. Some sections, in fact, are a kind of who's who on the faculty, a problem that gets worse in later chapters as programs and personnel proliferate. One would have hoped for a volume treating more of the substantial issues in the school's controversial and path-breaking history.

In spite of the book's weaknesses, it is still a valuable contribution to the fields of American religious and educational history. It performs a valuable service in bringing together an overview of the entire history of Union that emphasizes biographical sketches of its major personalities and traces several emphases in its institutional development. Of particular interest, undoubtedly not a purpose in the mind of its author, is its consistent tracing of the gradual step-by-step decisions that led Union from being an institution serving a conservative evangelical constituency to its becoming a school pushing at the frontiers of a worldwide ecumenism that encompasses the non-Christian faiths. The mentality and processes underlying such a transformation are informative to both those who would like to encourage and those who would like to avoid such a drift.

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GEORGE R. KNIGHT

Kittelson, James M. *Luther the Reformer: The Story of the Man and His Career*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986. 334 pp. \$24.95/\$8.95.

Lewis W. Spitz (in an "advertising comment") has referred to Kittelson's *Luther the Reformer* as "the best complete biography of Martin Luther, the man and the reformer, available to the English reading world. It is historically solid, factually authentic, psychologically sensitive, personally perceptive, socially aware, and, above all, theologically knowledgeable and persuasive" (p. 1). With the assessment of the first sentence in this quotation the present reviewer quite readily concurs, but the wide