

Oden, Thomas C. *A Change of Heart: A Personal and Theological Memoir*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014. 384 pp. Hardcover, US\$32.00.

Thomas C. Oden (PhD, Yale University) has been the long-time Henry Anson Buttz Professor of Theology at the Theological School of Drew University in Madison, New Jersey, and currently serves as the general editor of the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* and *Ancient Christian Doctrine* series. He is also the author of *Classic Christianity*, a revision of his late 1980's three-volume systematic theology (which is probably the opus of his theological writings). His more recent books include *The African Memory of Mark*, *Early Libyan Christianity*, and *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*.

Oden has emerged as one of the major Protestant theological voices of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and has exerted a marked influence in both international ecumenical and evangelical circles. This personal and theological *Memoir* (autobiography) chronicles his rather remarkable personal, professional, and theological journey. While Oden's personal sojourn has some very fascinating (even heart-warming) autobiographical facets, the substantive importance of this *Memoir* is the chronicling of his striking theological pilgrimage.

Coming from a small-town, mainline Methodist Oklahoma background (he says he grew up with "Oklahoma dust in his nostrils"), Oden would initially, in his career as both pastor and then as a professional academic, deeply immerse himself in what he would characterize as radical "modernity." From the earliest days of his public pilgrimage, he gave evidence of literary and scholarly productivity and would go on to become a classic embodiment of the trendy liberal, even radical, ecumenical campaigner.

But with his move to Drew University there began to emerge a "radical" shift in his thinking to what he would eventually characterize as "Consensual, Classic (or Paleo) Christian Orthodoxy." Put simply, Oden would steadily and progressively begin to reject "Modernity" and its extremely subjective theological and moral presuppositions and replace them with a strong turn to the canons of the great ecumenical councils and writers of the church of the first six centuries. These canons (142–146) have provided Oden with the essential keys to his theological methodology, which will bear the fruit of an alleged "consensual orthodoxy," all inspired by the perspectives of Vincent of Lerins' (fifth century CE) *Aids to Remembering* or the *Commonitory*. At the heart of his adopted "canonical authorities" would be the writers he would call "the Great Eight," the men who were foremost in expressing the creeds and canons of the aforementioned "consensual orthodoxy."

More precisely, Oden's key figures would include "The four great ecumenical Doctors of the Eastern tradition (Athanasius, Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Chrysostom) and the four Doctors of the Church of the West (Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, and Gregory the Great)." Oden then goes on to make the claim that these "eight" magisterial figures "were the ones most consensually remembered, who most accurately gave expression to the faith that was already well understood by the apostles and celebrated by the

worshipping community under the guidance of the written word.” He then adds that “the most moving of those writers, to me, were Athanasius and Augustine. Both of them were refined like gold out of the cauldron of early Christianity in Africa” (144–145).

What is to be made of Oden’s methodology and its resultant “consensual orthodoxy”? Most certainly, from the perspective of orthodox Christian thought, there is much to celebrate in these “Paleo” theological contributions to Oden’s theology. And here we could at least mention such key items as the Trinity, especially as it was confessed and refined at Nicea, Chalcedon, and Constantinople. And certainly such contributions to the later, more sober, and less trendy Oden have empowered him to make substantive and positive contributions, especially to modern evangelical thought, with its somewhat truncated vision of the longer Christian tradition. But having acknowledged these positive points, one is given sober pause for reflection to wonder if Oden has fully appreciated the major correctives of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation and the Arminian contributions that have greatly inspired his own much-beloved eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Methodist heritage.

Furthermore, can we really say that the alleged “consensual orthodoxy” of his “Great Eight” was all that “consensual” and biblically “orthodox”? Possibly the best way to get right to the heart of this allegedly orthodox consensus is to ask Oden how all of this fits in with Augustine’s positions on predestination and justification by faith alone. This question becomes quite critical, especially in the light of Oden’s own Wesleyan/Arminian background in Methodism. Does Oden’s own background in the theology of Wesley count for anything in this discussion? Quite frankly, one senses that the Bible, filtered through the interpretive lenses of Wesley, would be preferable to the lenses provided by Augustine and the rest of Oden’s “Great Eight”!

Furthermore, would it be asking too much of Oden to once again take a sympathetic look at the venerable Protestant principle of “the Bible and the Bible alone” as one’s ultimate source of theological authority? For instance, can any teacher of justification by faith alone really privilege Augustine when one becomes aware of how much Augustine’s theology of justification has informed the Canons on Justification produced by the Council of Trent (not to mention the recent Tridentine-flavored published positions on the issue of justification expressed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, second edition [revised in accordance with the official Latin text promulgated by Pope John Paul II]; see especially 481ff.)? Quite frankly, it seems that Protestants would do better to once more take their theological cues from canonical Scripture, especially as it has been filtered through the perspectives of Oden’s Methodist “father” Wesley (who was more directly a product of the best of the Protestantism of the Puritan and the Anglican “Middle Way” of theology—not Augustine of Hippo and the rest of Oden’s “Great Eight”). Certainly Wesley was quite open to the insights of the Early Church Fathers, but they never achieved the kind of “canonical” status that Oden seems to want to cede to these “Fathers of the Church”!

Additionally, when it comes to the practicalities of applying the *sola scriptura* principle, one wonders which writings are easier to understand, the biblical writers or Oden's "Great Eight." Most certainly the writers of the long Christian tradition of theological exposition have made their positive contributions, but would we not be better served to go back to carefully and prayerfully pondering the canonical books of the Bible for our key perspectives in doing theology, especially when it comes to our anthropology, hamartology, and soteriology?

Oden's *Memoir* should be a preferred read for anyone interested in twentieth- and twenty-first-century historical and systematic theology, especially as such work has played out in the halls of modernity, evangelicalism, and ecumenical trends, especially in the context of the unfolding exchanges between Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Evangelical Protestantism.

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Porter, Stanley E., and Andrew W. Pitts. *Fundamentals of New Testament Textual Criticism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015. xvi + 201 pp. Softcover, US\$22.00.

According to the authors, this book was produced to fill the need of a midlevel textbook that introduces first- or second-year Greek students to the field of textual criticism and issues related to the canon and translation theories (xiii–xiv). It is the second volume of a series of Greek language resources published by Eerdmans (xi). The first volume, *Fundamentals of New Testament Greek*, was published in 2010 by Stanley E. Porter, Jeffery T. Reed, and Matthew Brook O'Donnell and is composed of a textbook and an accompanying workbook. The third volume, an intermediate grammar, is in the process of being written, and the final volume, a book on exegesis and interpretation, is in the planning stage (xii).

Stanley E. Porter is currently president, dean, and professor of NT at McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton (Ontario). He has authored twenty-eight books, edited ninety volumes, and written over 300 journal articles and chapters in different disciplines of religious studies. He has published several publications in the field of NT textual criticism and actively participates in the current debate by calling scholarship to move away from an eclectic text and accept a single text model. Thus, without any doubt, the author knows the field of NT textual criticism.

Andrew W. Pitts is currently chair of the Biblical Studies Department and assistant professor of Biblical Studies and Christian Ministries at Arizona Christian University. He is the assigned coauthor of the forthcoming intermediate grammar.

Fundamentals Of New Testament Textual Criticism consists of thirteen chapters and an appendix, entitled *Tools for Further Text-Critical Study*. Each chapter ends with a summary, a list of key terminology, and a bibliography. At