

Pastor Stef's Book Review – January 2016

Roger Olson is a prolific author who can write theological tomes (I recently finished his 720 page *Journey of Modern Theology: From Reconstruction to Deconstruction*) as well as thought-provoking books for the church layperson. His book ***How to be an Evangelical without Being Conservative (2008)***, only 202 pages, is one for the latter group. To give you the flavor of what you will find addressed in it here are a few chapter titles: “Building Character without Moralism”, “Seeking Truth without Certainty”, “Taking the Bible Seriously without Literalism” and “Being Religionless without Secularism”.

Roger Olson is a Baptist theologian who teaches at Baylor University in Texas. In this book he describes himself as “a God-fearing, Bible-believing, Jesus loving Christian who believes religious traditions are always open to reform in the light of God’s Word.” Therefore, as the Protestant Reformers taught, healthy churches and individuals should be “reformed and always reforming” in their beliefs and practices. Whenever this stops we become dry bones stuck in traditionalism. We either hold to unexamined views that aren’t really biblical or we make biblical mandates out of cultural and generational ideas that no longer work in this culture and generation. (And yes, Olson has a chapter in this book about the “worship wars”).

I often want to distance myself from the word “conservative” and what it implies in Christian circles. At the same time, I’m not a “liberal”, as most people think of liberals. And what’s one person’s liberal is another person’s conservative. I’ve certainly been accused of being both a liberal and a conservative! This is why I hate the simplicity of attaching a “label” on someone as if any thinking person can be so neatly put into a package.

Olson’s book resonated with me. I find myself coming down on the same side as Olson does on almost every issue he addresses. And there is rarely a writer I can say that about. I found myself thinking, “This is me! That’s how I would say it! That’s how I want to live my faith!”

So, I give you three reasons to read this book:

1. If you are an evangelical, but want to distance yourself from the conservatism and traditionalism that it has fallen into, this book will be fresh air to you. (Most of our evangelical forefathers/mothers were *not* conservative).
2. If you are confused by what you are reading here and think that the best thing for the church to do is to go *back* to the way things once were (whatever you mean by “once” – 1950s, 1850s, 1750s...). This book will help you re-examine your views, even if you don’t end up agreeing. This is at least healthier than leaving your positions unexamined.
3. If you are wondering how your pastor thinks, this book will give you a fair synopsis of how I approach my beliefs and desire to live out my faith.