

Issues in Contemporary Christian Thought: A Fortress Introduction, by DUANE OLSON. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011. xiii + 296 pp. \$25.00.

Matching sets of virtues and vices typify Duane Olson's *Issues in Contemporary Christian Thought*. One's estimation of the book and of its potential for use in assorted contexts will depend on which of these qualities, or which combination, takes precedence.

The first virtue is the writing. Olson is a clear writer, and he performs valuable work in funneling centuries of thought and scores of thinkers into a clear road map for a college student in an entry-level religion course. Multiple resources within the text further aid readers as they make their way through text boxes, discussion questions, recommended reading, and a glossary.

The book's second virtue is its delimited treatment of modern issues in Christian theology. Olson's thesis "is that the developments of modernity are decisive for contemporary Christian self-understanding" (ix). The book's guiding focus, therefore, involves three components: the challenges modernity presents to Christianity, "general patterns of . . . response" to such challenges on the part of Christians as well as particular theologians, and discussion of both the theological and the cultural sides of these issues (x).

The structure of the book more or less follows this tripartite division. Part 1 sets the contemporary scene in light of the Enlightenment's impact on Christianity. Part 2 continues with "modern ideas and aspects of traditional Christian theology" (xi), such as cosmology, history, and eschatology, and part 3 concludes with discussion of "cultural issues and Christian life and thought" (xii). These cultural issues consist of religious diversity, feminism, homosexuality, and science.

Olson is to be lauded for keeping to his self-circumscribed scope. With patience and clarity he takes up each of these areas of encounter and contestation between Christian thought and the modern project. The eighth chapter, on homosexuality (199–223), is by far the standout of the book: measured, careful, even-handed in its biblical, historical, and theological treatments, it is something of a miniature primer for the state of the debate at the present moment in the United States. Given the topic, this is not a minor achievement.

Unfortunately, not all of the chapters fare so well, a fact that leads to the first vice of the book: its perspective—or, to be precise, its supposed lack thereof. Olson nowhere identifies his own convictions on any particular issue, but instead assumes a stance of distanced neutrality. This decision is immediately questionable, though it can be justified for certain scholarly purposes, not least in the case of an introductory textbook. However, Olson's view from nowhere quickly reveals itself to be a view from somewhere, only in this case, unspecified and thus that much more subtly prejudiced.

The fact can be demonstrated by a variety of textual evidence, such as his one-note rhetoric regarding Catholicism's "resistance" to "openness" in the modern world (35), or his summary dismissal of "the Mary of historical Christian image and interpretation" as "far from what is known of the historical Mary" (174).

A larger, though equally telling, example, is at the level of the book's organization, that is, the revealing way in which Olson presents different theological