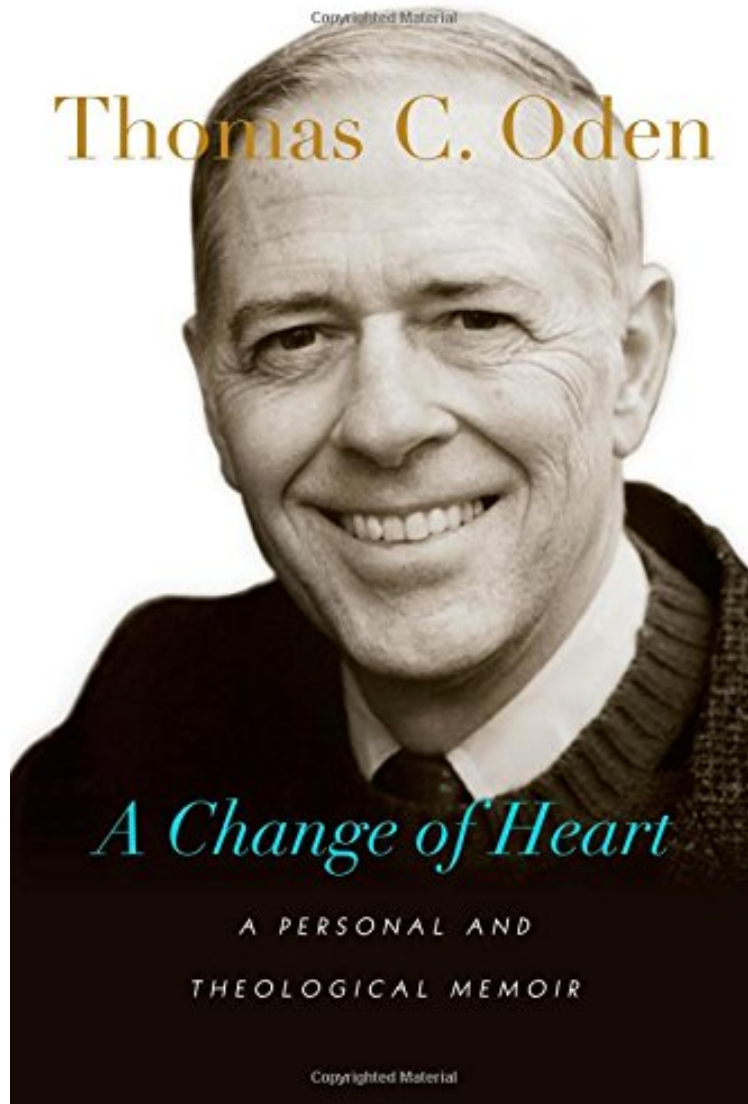


(Free pdf) A Change of Heart: A Personal and Theological Memoir

## A Change of Heart: A Personal and Theological Memoir

*Thomas C. Oden*

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**Thomas C. Oden : A Change of Heart: A Personal and Theological Memoir** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Change of Heart: A Personal and Theological Memoir:

56 of 57 people found the following review helpful. The Oden OdysseyBy Vic ReasonerThomas Oden had a happy and well-rounded childhood in Oklahoma. He knew the value of hard work. However, between 1946-1956, he described every turn as a left turn. In 1950 Readers Digest published an article entitled Methodisms Pink Fringe. Oden said the article attacked the very church leaders with which he most identified. He confessed to writing Change of Heart partly to alert people to question the realism of liberal ideals. Once he connected with the national youth

program of the Methodist Church he gained a vision of social justice that included antiwar and pacifist sentiments, along with revolutionary ideas. Even before going to college, he was a regional youth leader taking the social gospel to other church districts. In a desire for upward mobility in an academic environment, he quickly abandoned classic Christianity. He said his first forty years were prodigal; the last forty have been a homecoming. He entered the ministry with the goal of using the church as an instrument for political change. The trick was to learn to sound Christian while undermining traditional Christianity. Essentially, he moved from one new idea to another: Marxism and liberation theology, pacifism, psychoanalysis, Rogerian therapy and unconditional love, demythology, existentialism, civil rights, situational ethics, ecumenicism and an observer at the Second Vatican Council, feminism, new age, Gestalt therapy, and environmentalism. But even as some of his books were growing in popularity, he was already moving on to another theological fad. To his credit, he was intellectually honest enough to admit it when he saw that the bandwagon he was currently on was not going anywhere. After 1950 he read the New Testament through the lens of Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche, rejecting a literal understanding of the incarnation and resurrection. He could use this language only in the demythological sense of Bultmann. At college he lost the capacity for heartfelt prayer and lost his love for the hymns of the church. He could discuss philosophy, psychology and social change confidently, but God made him uneasy. Oden found the teachings of Saul Alinsky to be extremely useful. Alinsky's push and shove Chicago politics were a pattern for Hillary and Obama. Although he never met Hillary Rodham Clinton, he said his journey closely paralleled hers. Her thesis, on the Alinsky Model, was kept under lock and key for many years, but Oden said he had read it closely. President Obama also followed it. By the fifties Oden identified strongly with the Vietnamese independence movement and had great admiration for Ho Chi Minh. From the University of Oklahoma, he went to Yale. While there in 1956 he broke with pacifism as he watched the brave Hungarian students standing up against Soviet tanks. He also became convinced that Truman's decision to bomb Japan had actually spared lives in what would have been a prolonged ground war between Japan and America. Obviously a bright student and professor, Oden was pushed forward. He interacted with the most famous and influential theologians, including Bultmann, Pannenberg, and Barth. But he never had a serious exchange of ideas with an articulate conservative before the end of the 1960s. Oden did a U-turn in the 1970 after meeting Will Herberg, a Russian Jew who spent thirty years working for the communist party before returning to his Jewish roots. Herberg told Oden, If you are ever going to become a credible theologian instead of a know-it-all pundit, you had best restart your life on firmer ground. You are not a theologian in name only, even if you are paid to be one. Oden confessed that he had been enamored with novelty and in love with heresy. He did a 180, taking a dive into the early church fathers which helped him overcome his education. It is unclear, however, whether his conversion was an intellectual paradigm shift or a spiritual rebirth. The first moral change was to reject the situational ethics of abortion. Oden was also disillusioned to discover that the average outcomes of all types of psychological therapy is the same rate of recovery that occur merely through the passage of time. He also discovered that the societies which most closely followed Marx became the poorest and he began to defend capitalism. He was also aware that the evidences of intelligent design were mounting. He joined the Evangelical Theological Society although membership required him to affirm the inerrancy of Scripture. When challenged to explain how he could have possibly joined the Evangelical Theological Society as a Wesleyan, his reply was that he had actually read the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978) and the Chicago Statement on Biblical Application (1986). He then would tell his critics to first read these statements and then he would talk to them substantively about their disagreements. However, his realignment with orthodoxy exacted a high price from his colleagues at Drew, especially as the feminist agenda became the majority position. The more he wrote, the less he wrote which was published by Abingdon, the Methodist publishing house. As he moved away from liberal Protestants, he found more common ground with conservative Roman Catholics, although he was personally a catholic with a small c. This book is a window into the apostasy of the Methodist Church as early as the 40s. It is an encouragement which illustrates the power of truth, the Holy Spirit, and the gospel. But how many never found their way back home? 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A memoir of a theologian's movement from classic liberalism to historic Christianity. By Adam Shield have been vaguely aware of Thomas Oden but I have not previously read anything by him. I was first aware of his books on early African Christianity such as *The African Memory of Mark: Reassessing the Early Church Tradition*. I was not really aware that he was also the driving force behind the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* series. People I know of kept mentioning how good this memoir was and when I had some promotional credit I bought it (it is the most expensive memoir I have ever purchased, which is why I have not read it previously.) Oden is similar in age to Eugene Peterson, Kalistos Ware, Pope Benedict, Martin Marty and Richard John Neuhaus. All of these theologians lived through a strange time. They were born between the world wars in a global recession. The first wave of progressive modernity had passed with the world wars and a new death of god liberalism came to the fore with their adulthood. Oden fully embraced liberal theology as an academic theologian (and unusual for then, but not today, also a working pastor). In his late 30s he started to struggle with the weaknesses of the liberal movement, ecumenism (as illustrated by the World Council of Churches) and his own faith. A major turning point was his first sabbatical, which he spent in Europe interacting with many of his theological heroes and as an observer with Vatican II. Over the next decade he started promoting classical Christianity through paleo-orthodoxy, a

theological method that rejected innovation but instead relied on early church (Patristic) sources. Once committed to paleo-orthodoxy (he was differentiating from neo-orthodoxy), he pledged to not intentionally write anything new. For Oden, the way forward was by fully understanding those that were closest to the time of Jesus. These early writers were following in the steps of Paul in 2 Cor 2:2 by saying nothing new about Jesus. Oden is also committed to the consensus teaching. One of his other projects was to determine exactly what is agreed upon by different groups. So one book project was taking over 100 evangelical statements of faith and determining what was affirmed by all of them. (And this was really what at heart was the point of the Ancient Christian Commentary series as well.) For an armchair theologian such as myself, this was a fascinating book. Oden has had a global reach, geographically, denominationally and historically. He was friends with a number of Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant theologians. He credits a conversation with Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict) for encouraging him to attempt the Ancient Christian Commentary series. He was involved in the Evangelicals and Catholics Together movement as well as a number of other ecumenical movements based around traditional Christian orthodox beliefs. Oden was also an incredibly prolific author. Based on my count he was the author of at least 58 books, not including the Ancient Christian Commentary series which he was the general editor and also the author of a couple of the books in the series (also not counting different editions of books as multiple.) As someone that has been seriously working through my own journey of faith and looking back toward the historic Christian streams of faith, it is clear that whether I knew of him or not, Oden is someone that has influenced many that have also influenced me. For those that are less theology nerds and less interested in historic Christian streams of faith, this will be less interesting. Like many memoirs there is a lot of and then I wrote this and then I met these people. If you are not aware of at least some of the players and background story it could get a bit boring. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. I appreciate the clarity and detail that *A Change of Heart* brings to the issue of the influence of leftism in the Church. This scholarly memoir is written with sincerity, and humility and should be a tool for all those wanting to understand the crucial importance of "rightly handling the word of truth".

Preaching's 2014 Best Books for Preachers 2014 Best Theological Memoir from Byron Berger, Hearts and Minds Bookstore How did one of the twentieth century's most celebrated liberals have such a dramatic change of heart? After growing up in the heart of rural Methodism in Oklahoma, Thomas Oden found Marx, Nietzsche and Freud storming into his imagination. He joined the post-World War II pacifist movement and became enamored with every aspect of the 1950s' ecumenical Student Christian Movement. Ten years before America's entry into the Vietnam war he admired Ho Chi Min as an agrarian patriot. For Oden, every turn was a left turn. At Yale he earned his PhD under H. Richard Niebuhr and later met with some of the most formidable minds of the era enjoying conversations with Gadamer, Bultmann and Pannenberg as well as a lengthy discussion with Karl Barth at a makeshift office in his hospital room. While traveling with his family through Turkey, Syria and Israel, he attended Vatican II as an observer and got his first taste of ancient Christianity. And slowly, he stopped making left turns. Oden's enthusiasms for pacifism, ecumenism and the interface between theology and psychotherapy were ambushed by varied shapes of reality. Yet it was a challenge from a Jewish scholar, his friend and mentor Will Herberg, that precipitated his most dramatic turnback to the great minds of ancient Christianity. Later a meeting with then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (later Benedict XVI) planted the seeds for what became Oden's highly influential Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. This fascinating memoir walks us through not only his personal history but some of the most memorable chapters in twentieth-century theology.

"*A Change of Heart* takes readers where Thomas Oden has been, bringing them into a conversation with some of the seminal theological minds of the 20th century and walking them through the tumultuous decades of Thomas Oden's lifespan. By any measure, these have been some of the most consequential and controversial in the history of the Christian church. More than anything else, this book will help every preacher come to a deeper understanding of what it means to embrace biblical Christianity despite facing a highly secularized age." (R. Albert Mohler Jr., *Preaching*, "The Year's Best Books for Preachers," March/April 2015). . . . I would yet close by stating once again what a delightful and insightful book this is. It is a powerful analysis of a broader phenomenon: the movement from the political left to the right, and from an infatuation with novelty to an appreciation of tradition. . . . Unusual for an autobiography, this is not an exercise in ego but rather the testimony of a remarkably talented and yet touchingly humble man. Oden has lived an extraordinary life at the very center of the revival of church interest in both patristic thought and what he so helpfully characterizes as paleo-orthodoxy." (Carl R. Trueman, *First Things*, February 2015) "Oden provides an engaging account of his life, decade by decade, from the 1930s into the 2010s, as he moves from rural Oklahoma to Dallas and then east to Yale University and Drew University before ultimately returning to Altus, OK. . . . This thoughtful reflection will engage a wide variety of readers and will help promote not only the broadest ecumenical Christianity but also interfaith cooperation." (Carolyn Craft, *Library Journal*, November 15, 2014) "If ever a theologian should provide a memoir of his journey, Tom Oden is the one. *A Change of Heart* is the record of that phenomenal sojourn intersecting the lives of countless theologians and religious leaders. And as readers

of the relentless Oden would expect, the pages of this book fly by on the winds of Oden the wordsmith. This is the montage of a master artist." (Paige Patterson, president, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas)"Tom Oden's *A Change of Heart* chronicles his own odyssey through modernity back home to the fathers he never knew until he read them, prayed with them and learned the riches of the timeless faith at their feet. This book invites readers to join him in this odyssey. As one who has been privileged to travel the last part with him, I can truly say they will not be disappointed in the journey Tom Oden is inviting them to undertake with him." (Joel C. Elowsky, associate professor of historical theology, Concordia Seminary St. Louis; research director, Center for Early African Christianity)"In this memoir Tom Oden explores his theological career with specific reference to his transition from Christian liberalism to evangelical Christianity. In the process he describes the many theological issues that dominated his era, focusing on the World Council of Churches as a lightning rod. Oden's view that theology should not be at the whim of every passing fashion, or that current affairs should not be the litmus test, deserves careful consideration even by those who disagree with him. Oden offers a touching description of the passing of his wife after a bout with cancer. The book is a record of an important theological voice of his generation, one that brings to focus the wide-ranging religious influences of the day." (Lamin Sanneh, D. Willis James Professor of Missions and World Christianity, Yale Divinity School)"Tom Oden is one of the most remarkable Christians of our time. This is the story of how he has lived through, contributed to and helped to overthrow several revolutions during his long and fruitful life. Deeply rooted in Wesleyan spiritual traditions, Oden shows us the meaning of grace in a human life that shatters in order to restore and bring joy. Those of us who know and love this great theologian will be delighted to read the story of his pilgrimage thus far. The whole church will be blessed by it." (Timothy George, founding dean of Beeson Divinity School of Samford University and general editor of the *Reformation Commentary on Scripture*)"In a century when intellectuals abandoned the Christian faith in droves, one intellectual had the courage to embrace it. A movement liberal at forty, at eighty Tom Oden had become the champion of the classic Christian consensus. *A Change of Heart* tells the story of one of the twentieth century's most courageous intellectual and spiritual journeys." (Roberta Green Ahmanson)"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." (Woodrow W. Whidden, *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, Autumn 2016)"The ecumenical value of Thomas Oden's life work, especially among Protestants, liberal and conservative, would be hard to overestimate. He is not simply an important figure in the subordination of school and denominational theologies to a catholic vision, but because of his courage in separating himself from error, combined with his titanic labors in support of orthodox Christianity, he is the pivotal figure at a critical theological juncture, an icon of the pilgrim on a pilgrimage that many will and must take, and for which he will be thanked by generations of those who will be served and perhaps even saved by his efforts. John Wesley, his spiritual progenitor, called himself a 'brand plucked from the burning.' So is Thomas Oden, and he has given us here not only an account of the wood hardened by fire, but of the fire itself, which will destroy the souls who commit themselves to it if they are not rescued by a Compassionate Jew." (S. M. Hutchens, *Touchstone*, May/June 2016)"This book is for anyone seeking inspiration or encouragement in the face of the challenges of modernity, to press on in faithfulness to the gospel which was once for all handed down to the saints." (Andrew Dragos, *Seedbed Blog*, July 26, 2015)"Over the last 60 years or so, few United Methodist theologians have been as influential as Thomas C. Oden. His pioneering work in pastor theology, pastoral care and counseling, patristic exegesis, Wesley studies, and systematic theology have a profound influence on at least two generations of scholars and clergy. . . . "Oden's latest work, *A Change of Heart*, is a personal and theological memoir. In keeping with that genre, the goal of this work is simply to tell the story of a life lived. . . . People from across theological and political spectrums will find in its pages a loving and generous guide eager to take them on a journey that is as much about repentance as it is conviction or certitude. . . . "[W]hile I have read many of Oden's works over the years, we have never personally met one another. After reading this latest work, there is a real sense in which I feel like we have met. Even better, I feel like I have made a new friend. And isn't that what a good memoir should do?" (Jason Vickers, *Good News Magazine*, April 29, 2015)"Thomas C. Oden is a fascinating figure in the history of 20th Century theology, and his new autobiography, *A Change of Heart*, is a fascinating read. Known for *The Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* and *Agenda for Theology*, Oden writes a riveting tale about his early commitment to liberal theology and socialism, and then a 180-degree turn as he embraced classic Christianity and conservative thought in the early 1970s. Truly a remarkable story, Oden's work is well worth the time." (Mark Hansard, *Emerging Scholars Blog*, January 14, 2016)About the Author Thomas C. Oden (1931-2016), was the general editor of the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* and the *Ancient Christian Doctrine* series as well as the author of *Classic Christianity*, a revision of his three-volume systematic theology. He was the director of the Center for Early African Christianity at Eastern University in Pennsylvania and he served as the Henry Anson Buttz Professor of Theology at Theological School of Drew University in Madison, New Jersey. Oden was active in the Confessing Movement in America, particularly within the United Methodist Church and was president of The Institute for Classical Christian Studies. He suggested that Christians need to rely upon the wisdom of the historical Church,

particularly the early Church, rather than on modern scholarship and theology and said his mission was "to begin to prepare the postmodern Christian community for its third millennium by returning again to the careful study and respectful following of the central tradition of classical Christianity."