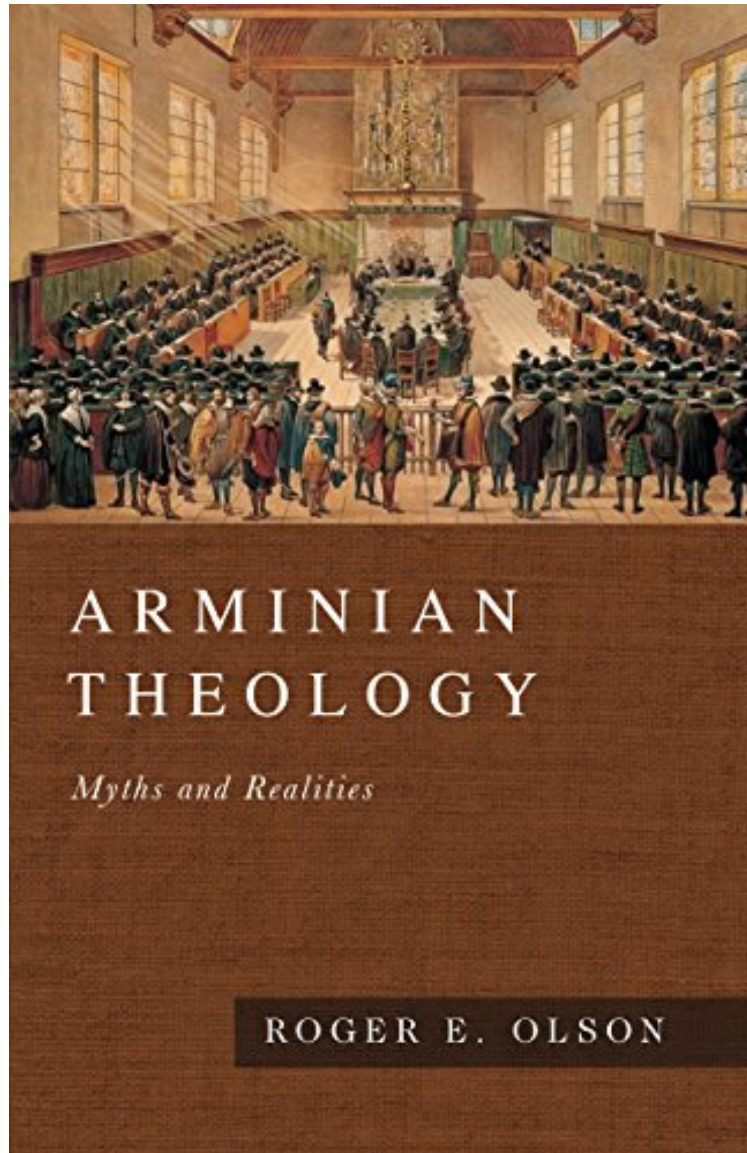


(Mobile pdf) Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities

# Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities

Roger E. Olson

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**Roger E. Olson : Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. This book helped make me a CalvinistBy Paul ForsterNow that I have your attention, the title of my review is accurate, and the 5\* rating is intended. Let me explain:Much of evangelical Christianity today doesn't pay much attention to theology. I grew up in a belief system that was an illogical mixture of semi-Pelagianism, Arminianism, and eternal security. My belief system only worked if I didn't think too

hard, or pay close attention to the entirety of the Bible. Investigating the issue of Calvinism and Arminianism, I read both Olson's book as well as listened to a set of seminars by John Piper (a Calvinist) that differentiated between the two. I was surprised at how both defined Arminianism in virtually the same terms. In other words, if a strong Calvinist and Arminian give the same definition of Arminianism, it must be accurate. It was also pretty close to what I had believed my whole life. To make a long story short, much more reading was necessary for me to make up my mind between the two systems fit the Bible better. So, why is a Calvinist recommending this book? It does an excellent job of fairly defining the issues involved. And, while I ended up disagreeing with the theological system it supports, I gained real respect for my Arminian brothers and sisters in Christ by reading it. My guess is that many in the Calvinist camp do not have a fair appreciation for authentic Arminianism - they will likely gain more respect for those they disagree with by reading this. Both sides could act more Christian by interacting with the actual theologies of the other camp as opposed to straw men often constructed by both sides. One downside of the book is, in my mind, the later chapters dealt with "myths" about Arminianism I did not hold. To me, at least, these chapters were less useful. For many readers, I do not necessarily recommend reading the entire book, only those chapters where they suspect the myth may be true. For me, at least, the myths were mostly dealt with in order of importance. I liked enough about this book I'm not detracting a star over this issue. My recommendation to anyone who doesn't fully understand Calvinism or Arminianism, or (worse!) thinks they are someplace in between, to read this, as well as a good introduction to Calvinism (Sam Storms "Chosen for Life" is short, approachable, and solid). Then, read through the New Testament and ask yourself which viewpoint better matches the plain meaning of scripture.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Imprecise, Misleading, Hypocritical, and Scriptureless - with a trove of Arminian quotes. By John M. Hauck

Olson's book was born out of a burning desire to clear the good Arminian name of false accusations and charges of heresy or heterodoxy (p. 9). In addition to addressing 10 Myths each with its own chapter, Olson provides a Preface, a Primer on Arminianism and offers Rules of Engagement for Evangelical Calvinists and Arminians. The organization of the book is nice. I recommend reading the Preface, the Primer (carefully), and the Rules before the 10 Myths. Olson's Primer includes definitions which add a wonderful precision to his work. For example, he defines the heresy of semi-Pelagianism as the belief that humans have the ability, even in their natural or fallen state, to initiate salvation by exercising a good will toward God (p. 17). Later he revisits the definition with these words, Wiley correctly defines semi-Pelagianism by saying, It held that there was sufficient power remaining in the depraved will to initiate or set in motion the beginnings of salvation but not enough to bring it to completion. This must be done by divine grace (p. 30). Olson also defines Arminianism, breaking it into variants called Arminianism of the Head and Arminianism of the Heart (p. 16). He clarifies that Arminianism of the Head is guilty of the heresy of being Pelagian or at least semi-Pelagian (p. 17). For this, Olson deserves praise. On the other hand, Olson's Rules are one-sided and hypocritical. He tells Arminians to wear their label proudly (p. 242) but is silent toward the Calvinist. He chides Calvinists anti-Arminian arguments as nothing other than vicious calumny while instructing Arminians who point their finger not to cease, but only to learn to appreciate some Calvinist contributions Protestantism. He tells critics to refrain from straw man attacks (p. 243), but only accuses the Calvinists of this behavior in his examples. Olson says both sides should admit the weaknesses of their own theologies, while he (an Arminian) does no such thing. Finally, Olson states that both sides should strictly avoid attributing beliefs to adherents of the other side that those adherents explicitly reject (p. 243), and yet he states that the Calvinist notion violates the character of God (p. 38). Beyond this, Olson's tone is often mocking as when claiming a Calvinist's argument boggles the Arminian mind (pp. 38, 42, 101, and 116). Olson attempts to define Calvinism as the beliefs of persons who regard John Calvin as the greatest organizer and purveyor of biblical truth during the Protestant Reformation (p. 15). This raises objections without being productive. Olson smuggles a value judgement into the definition when he states that many Calvinists reject Calvin's horrible decree of reprobation. In yet another attempt to define Calvinism, Olson states that Calvinism is the soteriological system stemming from Calvin, which is generally known under the rubric of T.U.L.I.P.. The problem is that this rubric only covers the topics of Calvinism that were being challenged by the Remonstrants. By using T.U.L.I.P., Olson breaks his earlier word where he promised, Because self-description is usually preferred over descriptions by adherents of other theologies, I will make clear how theological terms are used when describing both Arminian and non-Arminian theologies (p. 15). Olson defines Arminianism of the Heart with these beliefs: \* All humans are born morally and spiritual depraved, and helpless to do anything good or worthy (p. 33). This is called inherited depravity and inherited sin (p. 34). \* A measure of prevenient grace extends through Christ to every person born (p. 34). This measure provides all people with a release from the condemnation of Adam's sin (p. 34). Common grace alone [is insufficient] for willing the good. A special infusion of supernatural, regenerating or renovating grace is required for even the first exercise of a good will toward God. (p. 42). \* In addition, the remaining portion (the full benefits) of prevenient grace provides forgiveness of actual sins and imputation of righteousness (p. 34) to everyone who accepts them. \* The predestined are those who God foresees will accept his offer of salvation through Christ by not resisting the grace (p. 35). \* God's electing foreknowledge is caused by the faith of the elect (p. 35). A bit later, Olson describes prevenient grace much differently when he writes, Prevenient grace is simply the convicting, calling, enlightening and enabling grace of God that goes before conversion and makes repentance and faith possible (p. 35). Whether Olson is referring

to the first measure of prevenient grace that releases all from Adams sin, or the full benefits of this grace that provides some forgiveness of actual sins, this redefinition is most unhelpful. However, it is clear that resistance to that first measure of prevenient grace that releases all from Adams sin is impossible given Olsons definition. Olson continues, people are always able to resist the grace of God (p. 35) with another lack of precision. It seems he is indicating that the first measure of prevenient grace is irresistible (because it comes to all) while the remainder of it is resistible. It is also clear from Olsons definition that the full benefits of prevenient grace (reserved for people who accept it) includes forgiveness of actual sins and imputation of righteousness. He adds a bit of complexity when he writes, The person who receives the full intensity of prevenient grace is no longer dead in trespasses and sins. However, such a person is not yet fully regenerated. The bridge between partial regeneration by prevenient grace and full regeneration by the Holy Spirit is conversion, which includes repentance and faith (p. 35). It seems that the person who accepts the full benefits of prevenient grace will most certainly receive imputed righteousness and partial regeneration from the prevenient Grace, and then also most certainly, that person will cross the bridge of conversion to receive full regeneration from the Holy Spirit. It is tedious to restate that Olson said the full benefits of prevenient grace are for everyone who accepts them. It is worth keeping in mind however, as Olson now redefines the human responsibility in salvation from acceptance to non-resistance as he writes, rather cooperation with grace in Arminian theology is simply nonresistance to grace (p. 36). As for the will Olson states, prevenient grace does not interfere with the freedom of the will. It does not bend the will (p. 36), while at the same time the will is under the pressure of prevenient grace (p. 36). Olson does not explain how the first measure of prevenient grace that is universally applied without a willing recipient is not bending the will. As for the remaining measure, he also does not clarify how pressuring the will is not bending the will or at least not interfering with the will. Olson concludes the chain of salvation with these words, The cooperation of the human will is necessary because in the last stage the free agent decides whether the grace proffered is accepted or rejected (pp. 36, 66). In summary, Olsons sequence of salvation is as follows: 1. All humans inherit depravity from Adams sin. 2. All humans receive an irresistible first portion of prevenient grace which releases the inherited depravity. This is not to be confused with common grace. 3. Everyones will is pressured to accept the remaining prevenient grace. 4. When a human does not resist, the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit works the salvation of the soul. 5. In the last stage each human alone determines whether or not they will be saved. In other words, humans are the instrumental causes of salvation (p. 37). 6. Gods knowledge of who will be saved is caused by humans. Olson writes, The main reason Arminians reject the Calvinist notion is that it violates the character of God and the nature of a personal relationship (p. 38). He then proceeds with a series of questions and statements that he does not attribute to Calvinists nor does he explain how they are necessary results of Calvinism. Therefore, he violates his own Rules of Engagement where all should strictly avoid attributing beliefs to adherents of the other side that those adherents explicitly reject. These violations include: \* If God saves unconditionally and irresistibly, why doesnt he save all? Appeal to mystery at this point does not satisfy the Arminian mind because the character of God as love showing itself in mercy is at stake (p. 38). \* If the humans chosen by God cannot resist having a right relationship with God, what kind of relationship is it? (p. 38). \* Can a personal relationship be irresistible? (p. 38). \* Are such predestined persons really persons in such a relationship? (p. 38). \* God hides a smiling face behind the horrors of history (p. 38). \* Calvinism creates intolerable difficulties and gives rise to more exceptions than regularities (p. 39). \* The Calvinist God is not a God of love (p. 41). It seems Olson is unaware of his hypocrisy as he writes, the misinformation and distortion surrounding Arminianism in theological literature is nothing short of appalling (p. 40) and One principle that ought to be observed by all parties to this debate is Before you disagree make sure you understand (p. 41). Turning now to Myth 1, Olson argues that, At times Wesley himself could see only a hairs breadth of difference between [Arminianism and Calvinism] (p. 59). What is not disclosed by Olson is what Wesley said at other times. In his sermon Free Grace, Wesley preaches, Thus manifestly does this doctrine [predestination] tend to overthrow the whole Christian Revelation, by making it contradict itself; by giving such an interpretation of some texts, as flatly contradicts all the other texts, and indeed the whole scope and tenor of Scripture; an abundant proof that it is not of God. Such blasphemy.... It is not as though Olson was ignorant of these words, for he refers to the sermon Free Grace (p. 109) later in the book. This blatant misrepresentation of Wesley by Olson throws into doubt Olsons representation of other historical figures. It also makes it difficult to believe Olson when he claims, To a very great extent the differences between Arminianism and Calvinism are more a matter of emphasis than radical difference (p. 60). Turning now to Myth 2, Olson now redefines Calvinism in a more appropriate fashion, referring to the Westminster Confession of Faith (p. 62). In fact this entire chapter is a most refreshing change from the rest of the book. The descriptions are more balanced, the arguments a bit more realistic, the rhetoric turned down, and all in all, worth the read. By now it is clear what precisely the authors underlying beliefs about Arminianism are. It also is clear that these beliefs have been communicated in this book with only passing references to Scripture. In fact, Olson claims, I have concluded that appealing to Scripture alone cannot prove one side right and the other side wrong (p. 70). This then explains the fact that there are so few Scripture references made in this book. In Myth 3, Olson surveys the orthodoxy of various historical Arminian figures, arguing, As with all orthodox Protestants, Arminians believe... (p. 83) for a variety of topics such as the Trinity. In his defense of Synergism, Olson admits that the earliest and most

influential Protestant voices - Luther, Zwingli and Calvin, to say nothing of Bucer, Cranmer and Knox - were monergists (p. 95). He argues that because these reformers also practiced infant baptism and were advocates of the union of church and state, that any historical argument [for monergism] breaks down (p. 95). Yet, immediately after discrediting historical arguments, he appeals to the historical perspective to defend the orthodoxy of the Arminians that arose within the bosom of the Protestant Reformation (p. 95). In fact much of this entire book uses arguments based upon historical beliefs. Myth 4 appears to be rehashing (with more external references) to what has already been stated. Myth 5 adds a bit more definition to the human will, saying that God controls [the will] by putting boundaries around what it can do it is never autonomous or absolute God hedges [it] (p. 125), without guiding the reader into understanding how this is not interference. In one of Olsons scarce Scripture references he argues against Calvinism when he writes, After all, Jesus taught his disciples to pray Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven (Mt 6:10 RSV). If Gods sovereignty were already completely exercised de facto, why would anyone need to pray for Gods will to be done on earth? (p. 117). If Olson would have appropriately quoted the complete prayer, he might have seen his inconsistency with hallowed be your name and lead us not into temptation. In Myth 7 we learn that For Arminius, however, there is an intermediate stage between being unregenerate and regenerate (p. 164). The remainder of the Myths do not break with the basic theme of the book, and Olsons presentation is becoming predictable and repetitious. The book was worth reading for the following reasons: \* To understand Olsons sequence of salvation, including the two phases of prevenient grace and the final stage of salvation being decided by man. \* To learn Olson believes that a very popular form of Arminianism is semi-Pelagian as found in the United Methodist Church. \* For its trove of quotes from various Arminian authors over the ages, including a long index of the same. This book was not useful for understanding the Scriptural support for Arminianism or for an index of Scripture references to study. This book could be improved by removing the hypocrisy without changing the message. I wonder if a book targeted at the semi-Pelagian Arminians (of the Head) could help them understand why they should consider classical Arminianism (of the Heart). 10 of 11 people found the following review helpful. A Reformer's Must Read By Readalots With "Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities" (2006) Professor Roger Olson asserts that "Arminianism is a legitimate evangelical theological option" for the 21st century. Through this well documented 250-page hardback (with dozens of footnotes in each chapter) he intervenes on the "myths" attacking Arminianism. Olson's adroitly refutes each "myth" posited on Arminianism primarily by classical and contemporary Calvinists. (This theological genre is named for the early 16th century Dutch reform theologian and pastor, Jacob Arminius.) Speaking from the "classical Arminian" camp Olson ranges over the vast surface of Arminius' beliefs: from human free will, to the sovereignty of God, to election and predestination, to Justification and the Atonement. By the end, Olson convincingly confirms that Arminius, as a Protestant, is significantly different from Calvinists, Catholics, and Anabaptists of his era and today. (Arminius seems to have appreciated Luther.) Each chapter is helpfully composed and presented in the same way. Olson posess a "myth" (an untruth), rebuffs it, documents what Arminius himself say on the topic, and then presents various Arminian thinkers reflections on the theological issue. Episcopus, Wesley, Watson, Pope, Miley, Wiley, Theissen, Oden and many more over the past 400 years are variously considered and extensively quoted. The author poignantly recommends that Arminianism's critics would do well to study it before condemning it. Finally, he rightly challenges Arminians and their critics to work together for proclaiming the mission of Jesus Christ. Olson's is a good read teaching much about theology, the via salutis, and God's love. Although somewhat technical this book is recommended to any with interest in various Christian doctrines (such as free will vs. predestination, irresistible vs. resistible grace, original sin, prevenient grace, imputed righteousness, forensic justification, penal substitutional atonement, etc.) Olson is a must read for all reform theologians, Arminians, and Calvinists. Happy Reformation Day!

In this book, Roger Olson sets forth classical Arminian theology and addresses the myriad misunderstandings and misrepresentations of it through the ages. Irenic yet incisive, Olson argues that classical Arminian theology has a rightful place in the evangelical church because it maintains deep roots within Reformational theology, even though it maintains important differences from Calvinism. Myths addressed include: Myth 1: Arminian Theology Is the Opposite of Calvinist/Reformed Theology Myth 2: A Hybrid of Calvinism and Arminianism Is Possible Myth 3: Arminianism Is Not an Orthodox Evangelical Option Myth 4: The Heart of Arminianism Is Belief in Free Will Myth 5: Arminian Theology Denies the Sovereignty of God Myth 6: Arminianism Is a Human-Centered Theology Myth 7: Arminianism Is Not a Theology of Grace Myth 8: Arminians Do Not Believe in Predestination Myth 9: Arminian Theology Denies Justification by Grace Alone Through Faith Alone Myth 10: All Arminians Believe in the Governmental Theory of the Atonement

"Arminian Theology is a much-needed book, addressing many of the myths and caricatures about Arminianism that plague and muddle many contemporary theological discussions. Whether we advocate a particular theological perspective or not, it is imperative that we as Christians describe other theological perspectives with integrity, fairly and accurately. Dr. Olson is to be complimented for this excellent contribution." (Steve Lemke, Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry, Fall 2013) "Arminian Theology should prove to be a seminal text in understanding the

historical contours of Arminianism. It is an excellent starting point for anyone who wants to gain a cogent and perspicacious introduction to historical, evangelical Arminian theology." (Martin Povey, Stockport, Themelios 32/3, May 2007)"Olson's purpose is to clear the good Arminian name of false accusations and charges of heresy. . . . InterVarsity Press has given a new voice to an evangelical position which has been, for the most part, suppressed and misrepresented." (Vic Reasoner, The Arminian 25:1, Spring 2007)"Roger Olson recaptures Arminianism's original focus: pointing us to God's goodness rather than man's 'freed will.' This refreshing reappraisal should pave the way for better synergy between Reformed evangelicals and classical Arminians." (David Neff, editor, Christianity Today)". . . a fine example of contemporary polemical theology at its best." (Daniel Castelo for Pneuma, 29, 2007)"I heartily recommend this book to all who wish to gain a true grasp of authentic Arminianism." (Mark DeVine, Midwestern Journal of Theology, 2008)"Olson's book is highly recommended for those who want to understand the Arminian-Calvinist controversy better." (Andrew V. Snider, The Master's Seminary Journal, Spring 2009)"This is an extremely crucial work. It should be required reading for all students of theology. It is not a substitute for reading primary sources, but it is a helpful summary and introduction to the major issues." (Glenn R. Kreider, Dallas Theological Seminary, Criswell Theological 4/2, Spring 2007)"Although many of the personal and institutional animosities that used to mark relations between Calvinists and Arminians have become muted in recent years, the differences are still with us. The issues are alive because they concern matters of central importance to Christian faith. In this book Roger Olson gently and firmly corrects misunderstandings of Arminian theology that are often held by Calvinists--and Arminians! His deft expositions of the historical texts offer a significant contribution to the health of theological reflection and relationships. At the same time he demonstrates how to be irenic without adopting an empty tolerance that makes doctrine irrelevant to the church's life and mission." (Jonathan R. Wilson, Pioneer McDonald Professor of Theology, Carey Theological College)"In this blockbuster of a book Roger Olson demonstrates that Arminian theology is faithfully Christian, faithfully Protestant and faithfully evangelical. He introduces his readers to a large world which many will never before have entered, the world of Arminian and Wesleyan theology, and even those familiar with this world will become more informed about it. In his contents page alone he provides more clarity on the contested issues in the Calvinism/Arminianism debate than many books on the subject. He methodically subverts many of the arguments that Calvinists routinely use against Arminian theology. This is Christian polemical theology at its best: massively informed, carefully and passionately argued, and friendly and courteous to the opposition. I recommend Arminian Theology enthusiastically, and I predict that, if it is read with the attentiveness it deserves, it will ratchet up the level of the American conversation on these issues." (Fisher Humphreys, Beeson Divinity School, Samford University)"Roger Olson has done the church a great service with this clear explanation of the key tenets of the evangelical Arminianism taught by Arminius, Wesley, Wiley and others. His effort to correct common misperceptions is highly readable but well supported by thorough scholarly research. Calvinists should welcome this book for at least two reasons. First, it will help us not to misrepresent Arminianism and will thus enable both genuine dialogue and valid critique. Second, we can earnestly hope that Olson will succeed in converting to classic evangelical Arminianism the large number of evangelicals whom he recognizes to be semi-Pelagian rather than Arminian." (Terrance Tiessen, Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology and Ethics, Providence Theological Seminary)"Demonstrating that the recent offerings in the field of evangelical/Arminian scholarship constitute not a fad but a trend, Roger Olson has written a carefully researched work that aptly portrays Arminian theology at its best. Clearing away many of the stereotypes and half-truths that have remained much too long, Olson not only cogently argues that Arminian theology is nothing less than evangelical theology, but he also calls for Calvinists and Arminians to cooperate with one another in mutual recognition and respect under the broad tent of evangelicalism and for the larger good of the gospel. I heartily agree." (Kenneth J. Collins, Ph.D., Professor of Historical Theology and Wesley Studies, Asbury Theological Seminary, and author of The Evangelical Moment: The Promise of an American Religion)"Roger Olson's new book, Arminian Theology, provides the definitive defense of Arminian theology to date. This winsome and well-crafted work dispels chapter by chapter the ten major misconceptions or myths about Arminian theology perpetuated by foes and friends alike. While intended for a wide and general readership, this well-researched and documented text is really a profound essay in historical theology in which Olson gives voice to leading Arminian theologians past and present, allowing them to speak for themselves and define what Arminianism really stands for. Thus, not an exercise in defense, Arminian Theology is the most lucid and effective book-length restatement of true Arminianism in print today. Olson's gracious and irenic spirit shines through the text even while his scholarly documentation of point after point shreds the many misperceptions of Arminian theology so prevalent today. This is a must-read book for educated laypersons, pastors, and scholars interested in, and concerned about, the current and historic debates between Calvinists and Arminians. Arminian Theology certainly raises the theological bar against those who want to theologically discredit Arminianism and relegate it to the backwaters of history and the life of the church." (Rev. Dr. Elmer M. Colyer, Professor of Historical Theology, Stanley Professor of Wesley Studies, University of Dubuque Theological Seminary)From the PublisherFeatures Benefits \* Written by a respected and accomplished Arminian theologian\* Benefits those wanting clarity about classical Arminian theology, whether they are detractors, promoters or trying to make up their own minds\* As readable as Olson's Story of Christian Theology

and Mosaic of Christian Belief\* A major voice to be heard in the middle of the current controversy between Calvinists and Arminians  
About the Author Roger E. Olson (PhD, Rice University) is professor of theology at George W. Truett Theological Seminary of Baylor University in Waco, Texas. He is the author of *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition Reform*, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity Diversity* and *The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology*. He is also coauthor of *20th-Century Theology: God the World in a Transitional Age* and *Who Needs Theology? An Invitation to the Study of God* (both with Stanley J. Grenz), and of *The Trinity* (with Christopher A. Hall).