Olson's "The essentials of Christian thought: Seeing the world through the biblical story" (Book Review)

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Recommended Citation
DiRoberts, Kyle (2017) "Olson's "The essentials of Christian thought: Seeing the world through the biblical story" (Book Review),"
The Christian Librarian: Vol. 60 : Iss. 2 , Article 39.
Available at: http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/tcl/vol60/iss2/39

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Roger E. Olson is professor of theology at the George W. Truett Theological Seminary of Baylor University. His latest volume, *The Essentials of Christian Thought*, is inspired by and a continuation of French Catholic thinker Claude Tresmontant and American Protestant thinker Edmond La Beaume Cherbonnier. According to Olson, both men “suggest that the Bible itself contains a philosophy” or a metaphysical vision of reality, which is a suggestion rare among modern Protestants. The title of this book refers to the fundamental principles that are essential to understanding “the Bible’s implicit understanding of the nature and meaning of life and reality, and basic Christian philosophy.” In other words, the essentials of Christian thought refer to what lies “underneath and undergirds as a foundation the truths explicitly revealed in the Bible and tenaciously held by Christians for two thousand years.”

Olson’s agenda is to help “Christians devoted to the Bible as God’s Word understand its implicit philosophy of reality – what is really real behind and beyond appearances.” Such an agenda grew out of two concerns. First, that Christians were shunning “philosophy altogether as hostile and antithetical to vital, robust Christian faith.” Second, Christians were unknowingly absorbing “unbiblical, and therefore unchristian, views of reality into their own perspectives on life and reality.” Thus, a central presupposition for Olson is that “the Bible does contain an implicit metaphysical vision of ultimate reality.” For Olson metaphysics is “simply another word for investigation into the nature of ultimate reality,” and when appropriately understood one’s metaphysical presuppositions are not in opposition to the Bible. He offers a secondary agenda for this book, which is to provide “administrators and faculty members of Christian institutions of higher education with a relatively simple elucidation of the ‘faith’ part of ‘faith-learning integration’ – a central reason for such institutions’ existence.” In the end, the gap is small between these two agendas as one might conclude that for Olson it is actually his primary agenda to provide a model for “faith-learning integration” in higher education.

This book does achieve its purpose and would be a great resource, particularly for those members of Christian institutions of higher education. In addition, this book reintroduces Christians to the concept of metaphysics and helps Christians understand that the Bible and metaphysics are not mutually exclusive concepts as it relates to the nature of ultimate reality.

**Reviewer**
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