
Garth Rosell tells the story of Harold Ockenga and Billy Graham’s friendship, the rebirth of the evangelical movement in the 1940s and 1950s following the fundamentalist modernist controversy, and the mid-twentieth-century revival that swept across much of the United States. Although Ockenga and Graham are at the center of this story, Rosell emphasizes not what they achieved, but, as they emphasized, what God did through them and their associates. The story Rosell tells is a story about a “surprising work of God.”

Rosell lists several factors that contributed to the rebirth of the evangelical movement during the 1940s and 1950s. Historians will recognize and agree with Rosell’s list. Rosell, however, adds one factor to the common list. According to Rosell, Ockenga and Graham’s friendship was another factor in reversing the effects of the fundamentalist retrenchment following the fundamentalist-modernist controversy.

Ockenga and Graham’s relationship was extraordinary. The two men were very different. Ockenga was from the North; Graham was from the South. Ockenga grew up in an urban environment; Graham grew up on a dairy farm. Ockenga was an intellectual; Graham was an average student, though a lifelong learner. Ockenga was a settled pastor; Graham was an itinerant evangelist. Nevertheless, in spite of their differences, Ockenga and Graham developed a friendship that continued for decades and was used of God to shape a movement.

Ockenga and Graham met early in Graham’s career as an evangelist when he came to Boston to speak at a series of public meetings that served as a catalyst for a revival that would spread throughout New England and, eventually, the United States. Graham and Ockenga were at the forefront of this “surprising work of God,” though, as Rosell reports, they were supported by a number of other persons, including Merv Rosell, the author’s father.

Although Ockenga and Graham were two very different people, they shared a desire to unify Protestants from all denominations in the proclamation of the gospel throughout the United States and around the world. They consciously crossed the lines of separation their fundamentalist brethren drew in the sand to proclaim the good news to all people, even though it provoked criticism and prompted some friends to abandon them. Their shared passion for evangelism drew them together. Repeatedly throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the two men found themselves working together on projects that would further the proclamation of the gospel throughout the United States and around the world.

Rosell’s superbly written story is grounded in thorough research, including the Harold John Ockenga Papers and the Merv Rosell Papers. Rosell
allows Ockenga, Graham, and their associates to tell much of the story, although Rosell’s narrative and analysis prevents a one-quote-after-another feel. Rosell’s personal acquaintance with the people at the center of the story enables him to provide valuable insight into the personalities, relationships, and events that gave rise to the rebirth of the evangelical movement. In spite of Rosell’s familiarity with the people and events at the center of the story, he remains objective throughout the story.

If the result of serious scholarship can be delightful to read, Rosell has achieved this end. At least everyone who has an interest in the history of Christianity in North America or the history of the evangelical movement should read this book. It belongs alongside George Marsden’s *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism, 1870–1925* and *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism*, and Joel Carpenter’s *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism*. However, if our past defines who we are in the present, Rosell’s work deserves broader attention. Anyone who identifies as an evangelical would benefit from reading it. Ockenga and Graham’s commitment to scholarship, biblical preaching, unity, and global mission is deserving of emulation by the current generation of evangelicals. The story Rosell tells is one that younger evangelicals need to know.

—Roy Williams


This volume is a set of chapters on the history, theology, and impact of the Heidelberg Catechism (HC), composed originally in Dutch in 2005 by theologians and ministers from four Reformed denominations in the Netherlands. The first half of the book treats the Reformation context of the HC (Christa Boerke), the preparation of the catechism itself (Wim Verboom), the major figures involved in the writing and approval of the document (Boerke), and the theological character of the HC (van ’t Spijker). The second half focuses, not surprisingly, on the reception of the catechism in the Netherlands. Verboom traces the early history of catechetical instruction in the Lowlands, Teunis Hofman the recognition of the HC by the Dutch churches through the time of the Synod of Dort, and Willem op ’t Hof and Marinus Golverdingen the use of the catechism in Dutch preaching and church education, respectively. Editor van ’t Spijker closes the book with reflections on the relevance of the HC today.

In many respects, this is a solid addition to recent literature on the HC. The general reader will find in the early chapters a clear overview of the historical background to the HC, and those with deeper scholarly interests will be pleased with such items as detailed biographies of the superintendents and consistory members in Heidelberg in 1563 (“The People Behind the