

**The Surprising Work of God: Harold John Ockenga, Billy Graham, and the Rebirth of Evangelicalism** by Garth M. Rosell. Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, Mich. 2008.

Pb. 268 pp. Reviewed by Johan D. Tangelder

A new study shows that 36 percent of the average adult Americans have no idea what defines "an evangelical Christian." "I'm not sure; all I can think of is Billy Graham," said one 40 year-old woman. "Billy" Graham (1918-) is still America's evangelical "icon." His popular appeal was in his extraordinary charisma, his forceful preaching, and his simple message: "Repent of your sins, accept Christ as Saviour, and you will be saved." His evangelistic crusades around the world, his television appearances and radio broadcasts, his friendships with presidents and world leaders, and his role as unofficial spokesman for America's evangelicals made him one of the most recognized religious figures of the twentieth century. When we were in the Philippines, Billy Graham's crusade in Manila was attended by tens of thousands. He also sponsored a school for evangelism as well as one for Christian writers. But the evangelical leader who is not so well-known is Harold John Ockenga (1905-1985), who was a central figure in the birth and development of neo-evangelicalism. He was a scholarly pastor who had earned a Ph. D. under J. Gresham Machen at Princeton and Westminster Seminaries. He did more than anyone else to launch the neo-evangelical movement that balances revivalism with intellectual rigour. As a close friend of Graham, Ockenga greatly influenced him. For three decades he was pastor in Park Street Congregational Churches in Boston. He began a radio ministry; his scholarly preaching and his publications, aimed at a popular audience, increased his reputation in evangelical churches. He helped organize the National Association of Evangelicals in 1941, and served from 1942 to 1944 as its first president. He coined the term "neo-evangelical" to describe an evangelical theology that sought to engage the larger social issues in America. He challenged evangelicals to reclaim American culture and its institutions for Christ. In a relatively short time, evangelicalism became the most influential religious and social movement in American history. Ockenga was also one of the founders of Fuller Theological Seminary. In 1956, he was instrumental with Billy Graham in the founding of the magazine *Christianity Today*, which became a "must" read for evangelical educators, pastors and leaders. He served for a quarter of a century as chairman of its board. After Ockenga retired from Park Street Church in 1969, he became president of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, where he remained until his retirement in 1979.

Through his personal acquaintance with the movers and shakers of evangelicalism, Garth M. Rosell, professor of church history at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, is well-qualified to offer an intimate look at evangelicalism through the window of the life, ministry and writings of Harold John Ockenga and his long friendship with Billy Graham. He also recounts their love for their Saviour, their vision for mission at home and abroad, their courage and strong biblical convictions. In his extensively researched book *The Surprising Work of God*, the author uses well-chosen quotations from the writings, speeches, personal correspondence of Ockenga, Graham and others to give the reader an appreciation of the history of America's mid-twentieth-century spiritual awakening and how evangelicalism became a worldwide Christian movement.

A must read for students of American church history!