

Book Review

The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims On the Way

Horton wrote this book to outline doctrinal understanding and theology in a clear and articulate way in order to assist people in preaching, experiencing and living out their Christian faith.¹ I found it very interesting and useful for a number of reasons.

It is very God-centred, being split into six parts each of which explores different aspects of what we understand about God and how he relates to creation and humanity. He starts with the subject of knowing God² and moves on through the God who lives,³ the God who creates,⁴ the God who rescues,⁵ the God who reigns in grace⁶ and concludes with the God who reigns in glory.⁷

In most of the twenty-nine chapters, each of which address different areas of doctrine and theology, Horton outlines the development of mainstream Christian thinking over the centuries, lays out the major views that are held today and presents his clearly presented and reasoned position. This will prove to be a very valuable resource to “dip into” in order to get a quick overview of many topics on which further study could be built as required.

He developed some very powerful ideas which merited some serious reflection. His confidence in the authority and sufficiency of Scripture,⁸ his thoughts on the essential difference between God and his creation and God’s moral opposition to us due to sin,⁹ the insight that the knowledge we have of God is purely and only that which he has revealed to us,¹⁰ his idea that philosophers such as Plato ‘prepared the Gentiles for the gospel’,¹¹ his clear articulation of the way in which the Trinity works together¹² while recognising that our understanding is limited,¹³ his views on responding to suffering,¹⁴ and his challenging words to those in church leadership¹⁵ are just some examples of his

¹ Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), p.32.

² Michael Horton, pp.33ff.

³ Michael Horton, pp.221ff.

⁴ Michael Horton, pp.307ff.

⁵ Michael Horton, pp.445ff.

⁶ Michael Horton, pp.549ff.

⁷ Michael Horton, pp.905ff.

⁸ Michael Horton, p.27.

⁹ Michael Horton, pp.41-42.

¹⁰ Michael Horton, p.116.

¹¹ Michael Horton, p.140.

¹² Michael Horton, p.156.

¹³ Michael Horton, p.299.

¹⁴ Michael Horton, p.370.

¹⁵ Michael Horton, p.410.

clear and thought-provoking insights which will all be useful to me in my ministry, preaching and ongoing study.

His comments on approaches to “being and doing church” are very challenging, as he identifies some of the reasons why churches become inward looking to support individuals in their personal faith as opposed to being missional with a real desire to have an impact on the outside world.¹⁶ He talks about different models of church life and the importance of being open and accepting to all,¹⁷ the need for whole church engagement in the key decisions which need to be taken¹⁸ and the various and differing responsibilities held by those in pastoral ministry as distinct from lay members of the church.¹⁹ These insights will be of real and lasting value as I seek to develop my own ministry in the church and to encourage those whom I am pastoring to do the same.

He writes ‘from the perspective of a Reformed Christian’²⁰ and there are some subjects on which I disagree with him but, overall, it is a very useful resource for Christian living and ministry. I expect to return to it frequently.

Bibliography

Horton, Michael, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011)

¹⁶ Michael Horton, p.838.

¹⁷ Michael Horton, p.854.

¹⁸ Michael Horton, p.855.

¹⁹ Michael Horton, pp.891-892.

²⁰ Michael Horton, p.30.