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BOOK REVIEW

Michael Horton. *Pilgrim Theology: Core Doctrines for Christian Disciples*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011. 506 pp. Hdbk. ISBN 978-0-310-33064-6.

Dr. Michael Horton is the J. Gresham Machen Professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics at Westminster Seminary California and the editor-in-chief of *Modern Reformation*. In addition, he is the president of White Horse Media, for which he co-hosts a talk show on Reformation theology. The present work is an abridgement and a rewrite of his systematic theology, *The Christian Faith* [of which see a review in *MJTM* vol 13].

Pilgrim Theology is roughly half the size of *The Christian Faith* and parallels it in structure, with a few omissions and contractions. The latter engages more extensively with historical and philosophical concerns and interacts with a wider variety of theologians. The former is intended for a wider audience and, like its predecessor, contains study aids in the form of a supporting glossary and questions at the end of each chapter. It also comes with a separate study guide available in print and online. Yet *Pilgrim Theology* should not be mistaken for an introductory text on Christian theology; readers lacking prior knowledge of basic theological vocabulary and constructs will find themselves quickly overwhelmed. For example, terms such as “grace” and “justification” do not find their way into the glossary and Horton’s second chapter, “God’s Written Word,” is grounded in part on the Trinity, which is not treated in depth until chapter four.

Horton notes that “older theologians referred to their summary of faith as ‘*our theology*’ to make it clear that it was not just ‘*my theology*’ . . .” (13). He therefore writes deliberately in the Reformed tradition of theology and rarely ventures far from his predecessors. He uses Reformed canons and confessions in

an authoritative fashion to buttress his points, arguing that, “Just as courts interpret the constitution, church courts interpret Scripture” (68). Calvin is regularly quoted, often extensively, and never critically. Reformed theologians such as Herman Bavinck, Charles Hodge, and Louis Berkhof also feature prominently in his presentation.

Being thoroughly grounded in such a tradition and surrounded by such a company entails adopting an aggressive or defensive posture on points at which Christians from other traditions depart from the Reformed perspective. Whenever Horton mentions Roman Catholics, Pentecostals, Arminians, or especially Anabaptists, it is with a critical eye. Dispensationalism is addressed in the text solely in the context of eschatology and makes a brief appearance in the glossary. This makes his praise for the Orthodox tradition in relation to “The Doctrine of Glorification” quite refreshing. Within the Reformed tradition, he is careful to distinguish his own more nuanced presentation of Reformed theology from the excesses of hyper-Calvinism. For example, he prefers the term “particular redemption” in place of “limited atonement.” In this way he attempts to take certain biblical texts into account without compromising Reformed tenets:

With the New Testament, advocates of particular redemption can cheerfully proclaim, ‘Christ died for sinners,’ ‘Christ died for the world,’ and ‘Christ’s death is sufficient for you,’ acknowledging also with the Scriptures that the assurance, ‘Christ died for you,’ is to be given only to believers (212).

One of the more problematic theological constructions Horton makes in *Pilgrim Theology* is his extension of the idea of covenant into the Trinity. Defining covenant as “an oath-based union under given stipulations and sanctions” (465), he also asserts that a covenant of redemption “was made between the persons of the Trinity” (191). Ephesians 1:4 shows that God’s plans predate creation, but the fact remains that Scripture does not speak directly of a covenant within the Trinity. Without special revelation, Horton cannot make the case for an attributive analogy in which the term “covenant” is properly used only for the Trinity. Instead, he risks importing aspects of an unequal relationship

between suzerain and vassal into his understanding of intra-Trinitarian relations.

Regarding other doctrines, Horton offers a robust defense and clarification of the penal substitution theory of atonement, refuting caricatures of God as an abuser. He also attempts a biblical response to the New Perspective on Paul with respect to justification. In laying his position out on the sacraments he bemoans the fact that “‘evangelicalism’ has been reacting against sacramentalism” (357). While careful to distinguish his view from the Roman Catholic view of the sacraments as an infusion of grace, Horton maintains that “God truly offers and gives his saving grace *through* earthly means” (357). He also defends paedobaptism. In his eschatology, he argues for an amillennial perspective. Within this perspective, he takes the minority view that God has a future purpose for ethnic Jews on the basis of Romans 9–11.

While it may be intended for a wider audience than *The Christian Faith*, *Pilgrim Theology* will likely only appeal to those already within the Reformed tradition or those willing to be swayed by it. They will undoubtedly benefit from Horton’s nuanced and concise treatment of Reformed doctrine. Those, however, who hail from a different tradition will be better served by the fuller discussion provided in the former work.

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