

Calvin on the Christian Life: Glorifying and Enjoying God Forever. By Michael Horton. Theologians on the Christian Life. Edited by Stephen Nichols and Justin Taylor. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014, 262 pp., \$19.99, softcover. ISBN 9781433539565.

The editors of the series, Theologians on the Christian Life, have selected noted figures from church history and paired them with modern theologians who can present their subject's thoughts on Christian life so that lay people may benefit from the text even as robust scholarship undergirds it. Their choice for the volume on John Calvin is Michael Horton, the J. Gresham Machen Professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics at Westminster Seminary (California). As an ordained minister in the United Reformed Church, Horton brings his pastoral and theologian's perspective to the task with the aim to rehabilitate John Calvin's image among Christians.

This text is not a hagiography on Calvin, the Geneva Reformer who is credited and blamed for creating the soil in which the Enlightenment flourished. It does, however, try to disabuse the reader of some of the worst of the Calvin stereotypes. Horton establishes two foils for Calvin's thought, contrasting his perspective as something of a *via media* between the Roman Catholic Church and the Radical Reformers, particularly the Anabaptists. He also maintains an on-going dialogue among Calvin, Luther, and Zwingli throughout the book.

The Christian life emerges as the focus topic. Horton allows Calvin to speak for himself through quotation and summaries of his *Institutes* and other writings. The student looking for an accessible introduction to Calvin's perspective on theology, Christology, ecclesiology, and Christian vocation will find ample roadmaps in Horton's footnotes to material in Calvin's own works and in the recent secondary literature surrounding Calvin.

The volume divides into five sections, with a general index and scripture index. In his introduction, Horton attempts to frame Calvin as he really was, a shy pastor-theologian who stood up for the authority of Scripture, in contrast to the Calvin presented in history as a radical religious tyrant or libertine, depending on who is commenting. He takes on the case of Servetus early, showing that Calvin's complicity in this notorious incident episode was partially a reaction against the radical reformers. This episode was the only death penalty case to happen in Calvin's Geneva (31). Horton summarizes his hopes for this volume, "As we explore Calvin's view of the Christian life, we discover a teacher who arrived at his convictions not out of ivory-tower speculation or monastic contemplation, but out of constant crises, tests, disappointing setbacks and personal suffering" (31-32).

While the first chapter offers a brief biography on Calvin and his milieu in Geneva, the second chapter focuses on the Catholic and Evangelical influences on his thought. Horton sets as Calvin's North Star – the certainty of the gospel. He points to three distinctives of Calvin's personal piety: *Sola Scriptura*, scripture alone has authority over the human soul; the person and work of Christ, and the conviction that Christian life is lived in community, something which the Western Church needs to remember.

The remaining chapters focus on theology proper in relation to the Christian life (chapters 3 and 4), Christ's role as mediator and equipper for the Christian life (chapters 5 and 6), and an extensive section on living Christian life in community (chapters 7-10). The final section (chapters 12-13) deals with Christian living in relation to those outside the church, whether in government or in social action. Chapter fourteen summarizes Calvin's desire that Christians love each other, love their neighbors enough to give them

the gift of life that we have been given, with the end in mind of pleasing our Lord.

Calvin's Geneva was an effort to bring this to life in the sixteenth century; and, as with most human endeavors, it had its successes as well as its struggles.

Horton's effort to bring out the pastoral concern and pietism in Calvin succeeds admirably in this text. He constantly brings the reader back to the fact that Calvin was a pastor, who dealt with life and death, poverty and plenty, in the context of his Genevan parish. Calvin as a theologian was indeed trying to give the Church a fresh start after the excesses and abuses of the medieval Catholic Church. He weaves Calvin's thoughts together into a narrative that allows Calvin to speak, while bringing into the conversation his dialogue with Luther, Zwingli and other reformers, as well as the Catholic Church. Horton portrays Calvin's relationship with the Anabaptists as cool at best and hostile at worst. There is more than a hint that perhaps Horton is speaking to today's radical reformers who want to base their legitimacy as an orthodox voice in the church on their roots in Calvin. Calvin would not claim them.

Laverne Young Smith
Liberty University
Lynchburg, VA
PhD Studies, University of Birmingham

(UK)