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Review of "An Introduction to Christian Theology"

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An Introduction to Christian Theology

*By Richard J. Plantinga, Thomas R. Thompson, and Matthew D. Lundberg
Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010. XX + 634pp. \$29.99.*

While systematic theology has fallen out of favor in some circles for being too essentialist and often unwilling to acknowledge the concrete particularity of the theologian constructing the system, the discipline still plays a vital role in the church's reflection on its faith. Plantinga, Thompson and Lundberg frankly acknowledge the profound shifts in theological method we have witnessed in the last generation while making a strong case for the value of systematic theology for the contemporary church.

As Friedrich Schleiermacher proposed in his *Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of Study*, systematic theology should be pursued as a historical discipline, by which he meant that the systematic theologian must express the Christian faith as it is professed by the church at a particular moment in time. The three authors of this impressive introduction to Christian theology embody Schleiermacher's demand for a systematic theology that is conscious of its particular historical moment, resulting in a textbook that will surely be a welcome and valuable addition to the shelves of students, pastors and educators.

The book is divided into three parts, each of which may be read independent of the others. Part I, "Introduction to Theology," explores the nature and task of theology, paying particular attention to what the authors call the "critical context" of contemporary theology. Part II, "Key Themes of Christian Theology," presents the systematic theology proper, with each doctrine or locus proceeding from biblical sources to historical development to contemporary systematic expression. Part III, "Historical Survey of Christian Theology," reflects on the major themes, figures, movements and controversies in the history of Christian thought. The supplemental material included in this volume sets it apart from similar offerings, particularly the rich illustrations, tables, and glossary.

The authors have attempted a daunting challenge: to offer a systematic introduction to Christian theology that is biblically grounded, historically supported, committed to orthodoxy, yet ecumenically appealing and sensitive to contemporary challenges and new directions in theology. It is inevitable in a book with such high aspirations that some themes will not receive the emphasis many would wish to have seen. However, this text will prove to be a most valuable resource for many years to come and is well-suited for use in college and seminary classrooms or for pastors and educators hoping to remain current on the state of theological reflection.

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