BOOKS I HAVE READ: TRACKS OF TRUSTWORTHINESS

Posted on November 4, 2020 by Eddie

An essential read for the trustees of any (and every) Christian Charity.
Category: Observations

The subtitle of this book; Biblical and contemporary insights for church or charity trustees describes exactly what it is all about. Published last month, Tracks of Trustworthiness is an excellent introduction to the work of trustees in British Christian charities. It is very good, indeed.

The book is a normal-sized paperback and runs to just under 300 pages including an index and a number of helpful appendices. Although it deals with some legal and technical issues, it is easy to read and won't pose problems to anyone who is in the habit of regular reading.

Essentially, what the book does is set out the responsibilities of charity trustees as individuals and corporately as the board. It does this through reference to charity law and good practice, biblical reflection and leadership and insights from the experience of trustees from a wide range of charities. it is a fairly simple recipe, but the product is very helpful. I suspect that experienced trustees won't find much that is particularly new here, but they will be pleased to have all of this material in one place, rather than scattered through notebooks and websites. It will set you back about nine quid and is worth every penny (boards should consider buying copies for their members from the charity's governance budget - you do have one, don't you?).

Tracks of Trustworthiness consists of four sections, each broken up into a number of different chapters. The chapters are short enough to be read easily at one sitting.

Section 1: Godly Tracks, covers the nature of governance and why it matters, vision and values and risk. These are all absolutely essential in charity trusteeship.

Section 2: Personal Tracks, considers the roles of gifts and calling in Christian trusteeship and looks at the roles and responsibilities of a trustee. I found the chapters on the role of the Chair and on relationships and boundaries to be particularly helpful. As many churches become CIOs, these are going to be key issues that they have to grapple with.

Section 3: Organisational Tracks, covers issues such as budgeting, running good meetings and accountability. This includes some basic skills which should be common but sadly aren't. I've spent too much of my life in badly run, badly focussed meetings. We need to invest in doing these things well.

Section 4: Future tracks, looks at succession planning and possible future trends.

There is a short postscript on Covid-19 and three appendices, including a helpful short one on Modes and Codes of Governance.

I have to stress that throughout this book there are reflections on biblical characters and incidents that illustrate the point that the author is making. It's a good example of how to do practical theology.

Who should read this book? I would argue that anyone who is a trustee of a Christian Charity (and that includes most churches) needs to be aware of the material in this book. This means that unless they have experience as a trustee in a range of charities and have gone through a serious induction program, they should buy a copy and read it. Copies should also be sent to prospective trustees so that they can get a picture of what it is that they are letting themselves in for. A board that is going through a time of flux, would be well advised to work through appropriate sections of the book together. Basically, if you are a charity trustee, you should read it. It's as simple as that.

I would add a slight caveat. This is an excellent general book, but it doesn't get into any depth for specific types of charities. There are issues related to the future of mission agencies (my area of interest) which it simply cannot touch upon. Agency trustees should definitely read Tracks of Trustworthiness, but I would immodestly suggest that they should also read my own short booklet for agency board members, The Way Forward. Those who are really keen would do well to read my more substantial work; Mission Agencies in Crisis.