A Review Article of Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*
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**Introduction**

Sinclair B. Ferguson’s work, *The Holy Spirit*, is one of eight volumes in the *Contours of Christian Theology* series, edited by Gerald Bray. The purpose of this series is to introduce the main themes of Christian theology. The volume at hand traces the revelation of the Holy Spirit’s identity and work in a biblico-theological and redemptive-historical manner (12). Ferguson writes from an Evangelical and, more specifically, a Reformed perspective. His view of the authority of Scripture surfaces from the outset: “It will be clear in what follows that I have taken the canon of the Old and New Testaments at their face value, believing that here we find God’s word… the only reliable foundation on which to build a theology of the Holy Spirit” (13). The aim of this review article is to provide an accurate encapsulation and fair assessment of Ferguson’s theology of the Holy Spirit.

**Summary and Strengths**

In this opening section of the article, each chapter of Ferguson’s work will be summarized. The purpose here is two-fold: 1) to recapitulate the primary points of Ferguson’s book so that his pneumatology is made clear for the reader and 2) to emphasize the particularly helpful aspects of the work. Critique will be deferred for now.

*The Holy Spirit and His Story*

Ferguson opens his book with the intriguing question, “What, or who, is the Holy Spirit?” (15). He rightly points out that the name “Holy Spirit” (and even worse, “Holy Ghost”) tends to convey confusion. In his attempt to answer the initial question of the book and clarify the confusion associated with the third person of the trinity, Ferguson considers the basic meaning of
the term “Spirit” (Heb. *ruach*, Gk. *pneuma*). He correctly concludes that “ruach denotes more than simply the energy of God; it describes God extending himself in active engagement with his creation in a personal way” (18).

Ferguson then takes the reader on a journey through the Old Testament, making the point that God’s Spirit has been involved in all divine work from the beginning. He references Gen. 1:2—“the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep… the Spirit of God (*ruach elohim*) was hovering over the surface of the waters”—to begin his case. Despite the reservation and hesitation among a large number of biblical scholars to draw any trinitarian conclusions from Gen. 1:2, Ferguson’s view is that the most natural reading of *ruach elohim* in this verse is in terms of the activity of the divine Spirit (19). He accumulates texts to strengthen his case (e.g.: Ps. 104:30 and Job 33:4). For Ferguson, “the activity of the divine *ruach* is precisely that of extending God’s presence into creation in such a way as to order and complete what has been planned in the mind of God. This is exactly the role the Spirit characteristically fulfills elsewhere in Scripture” (21, emphasis original).

After his discussion of *creator spiritus*, Ferguson transitions to a discussion of the divine *ruach* as the mode of God’s power-presence among his people (21). The Spirit carries the people of God beyond their normal physical capacities. He distributes gifts of statesmanship and craftsmanship, as evidenced in the lives of Joseph, Daniel, and Moses. Of Moses, Ferguson writes, “[He] was endued with the divine Spirit to enable him to govern… Just as the Spirit produced order and purpose out of the formless and empty primeval created ‘stuff’ (Gen. 1:2), so, when the nation was newborn but remained in danger of social chaos, the Spirit of God worked creatively to produce right government, order, and direction” (22).

Ferguson is quick to point out, however, that the ministry of the Holy Spirit is not limited
to gifts that serve the national establishment of the people of God. The Spirit’s work is also moral and, most importantly, redemptive (23). On this note, Ferguson offers a brief treatment of the oft-asked question, “Were Old Testament believers regenerated by the Spirit?” His comments here are helpful:

New life from God’s hand was a reality in the old covenant, even if it only foreshadowed the reality of participating in the resurrection life of Christ. This notwithstanding, one of the temptations of a theology of the Spirit which recognizes the deep-rooted continuity of revelation in the Bible is so to stress the continuity of the Spirit’s ministry that we are in danger of flattening the contours of redemptive history, and of undermining the genuine diversity and development from old to new covenants (26).

Ferguson’s final discussion in the opening chapter centers on inspiration. A number of excellent observations surface in this section on Spirit and word. For example, Ferguson draws the reader’s attention to the fact that the doctrine of inspiration is not invented but inherited by New Testament writers. The written record of God’s impressive deeds and instructive words is the fruit of the activity of the Spirit among the redeemed people, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament (27). Ferguson also points out that little is said regarding the how of divine out-breathing and Spirit-bearing influence in the production of Scripture. The authors of Scripture seem to have been much more interested in the product rather than the process of divine revelation.

The Spirit of Christ

In the second chapter, Ferguson introduces the Spirit as the Paraclete. The Greek term parakletos—a compound of kaleo (“to call”) and para (“alongside”)—denotes someone who is called to another’s aid or defense (36). The term also has a forensic connotation; the Spirit is the great witness-advocate who testifies to Christ. Ferguson is right to highlight Basil of Caesarea’s marvelous title for the Spirit: “Christ’s inseparable companion” (37).
throne, the Holy Spirit was the constant companion of Christ. Ferguson explains this companionship further by underlining three distinct stages of Jesus’ ministry where the Spirit is clearly at work.

The first stage of Jesus’ life and ministry where the Spirit is clearly at work is conception, birth, and growth. Luke records that Mary was “with child through the Holy Spirit” (Luke 1:31, 35). Ferguson piles up a number of other passages to make the point that, “as the inaugurator of the new humanity, the ‘second man’ is brought into the world by the Spirit’s agency. His virgin conception is therefore essential to our salvation and was, fittingly, brought to pass by the Spirit who is the executive of that salvation” (42). There was also a continuing ministry of the Spirit in the life of Christ, as Ferguson suggests. One can assume, from Luke’s comment that Jesus “grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52), that Jesus gave expression to the fruit of the Spirit at each period of his human development (44).

The second stage Ferguson explores is baptism, temptation, and ministry. An important question must be asked, “If Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit from conception, what is the significance of the coming of the Spirit at his baptism?” (45). Ferguson suggests that, at his baptism, Jesus was being prepared and equipped for conflict, indicated by the fact that, in the Synoptics, immediately following the baptism scene is the wilderness temptation scene. Ferguson adds that the Word of God and the Spirit of God produce an assurance of Jesus’ own identity and ministry as the Son of God and the Suffering Servant. In other words, the physical manifestation of the Spirit and the audible voice at the baptism scene are a seal to Jesus (46). The Spirit’s role throughout Jesus’ entire ministry is evident for Ferguson. He explains: “[The Spirit] serves as the heavenly cartographer and divine strategist who maps out the battle terrain and directs the Warrior-King to the strategic point of conflict. He is Christ’s adjutant-general in
the holy war which is waged throughout the incarnation” (50).

The final stage Ferguson investigates is death, resurrection, and ascension. He quickly points out that only one New Testament text explicitly mentions the Spirit’s ministry during Jesus’ suffering and death, Heb. 9:14. Ferguson adds that the resurrection, while chiefly attributed to the Father, should be understood as an event that took place “through the Spirit of holiness,” as Paul declares in Rom. 1:4. The conclusion that Ferguson comes to is that when Jesus announced his departure from the disciples (John 14:18), but assured them that he would come back to them, he was not speaking of his post-resurrection appearance, nor was he speaking of his second advent at the end of time; rather, he was speaking about his “coming” in the gift of the Holy Spirit. In Ferguson’s view, so complete is the union between Christ and the Paraclete that the coming of the Paraclete is the coming of Jesus himself in the Spirit (56).

The Gift of the Spirit

Next, Ferguson turns his attention to the Pentecost event. In typical fashion, he begins the chapter with a probing question, “What is the meaning of Pentecost?” (57). He spends the next thirty-five pages attempting to answer this question. In short, Ferguson explains that the Pentecost event publicly marks the transition from the old to the new covenant. The two major strands of interpretation for the events of Pentecost—the Lukan and the Johannine—are examined in detail. Ferguson unpacks a number of Lukan themes, including tongues of fire and judgment reversal. Ferguson sees in Acts 2 a reversal of Gen. 10 (the Tower of Babel). He explains: “On the Day of Pentecost that new community became the sphere in which the eschatological reversal of the effects of sin began to appear in a reconciled people consisting of both Jew and Gentile…” (60). The Lukan evidence reveals that Pentecost was a pouring out of the Spirit in unrestrained measure, without geographical and ethnic limitation (62). Thus,
Pentecost was an event of rich redemptive-historical significance for Luke (64).

The Johannine strand proves to be more difficult for the interpreter, particularly because of Jn. 20:21-23. In this account, which took place on the day of Christ’s resurrection, Jesus breathes on his disciples and tells them to receive the Holy Spirit. How is this pre-Pentecostal passage to be understood? Ferguson indicates that within the Johannine framework the coming of the Holy Spirit is dependent on Christ’s ascension and exaltation. Therefore, in Ferguson’s view, Jn. 20 is largely symbolic. Jesus breathed on the disciples as God breathed the breath of life into Adam. So, the symbolism of Jn. 20 is that of the beginning of new life (65).

Ferguson also provides brief comment on Jn. 7:37-39, and he devotes a more robust discussion to Jn. 14-16. He finds four aspects of the Spirit’s ministry in Jn. 14-16, each of which sheds light on what the Spirit was sent to accomplish (68). First, the Spirit convicts and converts (69). Second, the Spirit is connected to the function of the apostles in the writing of the New Testament Scriptures (70). Third, the Spirit’s coming inaugurates a communion with Christ in which the Spirit who dwelt on Christ now dwells in Christians. Ferguson states:

Now as the bond of union to God, the Spirit indwells all who believe as the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a development of epochal proportions. The Spirit who was present and active at Christ’s conception as the head of the new creation, by whom he was anointed at baptism (Jn. 1:32-34), who directed him throughout his temptations (Mt. 4:1), empowered him in his miracles (Lk. 11:20), energized him in his sacrifice (Heb. 9:14), and vindicated him in his resurrection (1 Tim. 3:16; Rom. 1:4), now indwells disciples in this specific identity. This is the meaning of our Lord’s words, otherwise impossible to comprehend: “It is for your good that I am going away” (72-73).

Fourth, in the farewell discourse, Jesus sends the Spirit from the Father as the one who goes out from the Father. The Spirit is, in Ferguson’s view, sent by the Father and sent by the Son; there is a twin source to the Spirit’s mission (73).

_Pentecost Today?_
The analysis of Pentecost continues in chapter four; however, the attention now shifts to the question, “Does Pentecost have ongoing implications for the life of the church?” (79).

Ferguson begins by investigating the details of the Pentecost event, as recorded in Acts 1-2. He concludes that the disciples’ experience is not paradigmatic for the church for the obvious reason that they, uniquely, lived during the transition from the old to the new covenant (80). He states clearly, “Their experience is epoch-crossing, and consequently atypical and non-paradigmatic in nature” (80).

Ferguson moves on to address the coming of the Spirit in Samaria (Acts 8), the house of Cornelius (Acts 10), and Caesarea (Acts 11). His thesis in this chapter is that the mission programme of Acts 1:8 is the interpretive key of the book, especially for the passages that deal with the coming of the Spirit. The Cornelius event, in keeping with the programme of Acts 1:8, marks the breakthrough of the gospel into the Gentile world. The event, then, is programmatic rather than paradigmatic (81). All pneumatological passages in Acts should be interpreted within this framework, Ferguson argues. The gospel advances from Jerusalem (Acts 1-2) to Judea and Samaria (Acts 8), and to the ends of the earth (Acts 10-11 are representative of the entire world). These specific events following Pentecost mark the second and third stages of the three decisive points of advance in the kingdom of Christ, and they do not hold out an experience that is normative for future Christians. Ferguson concludes that what was necessarily effected in the early believers in two stages (i.e., conversion and baptism with the Spirit) because of the nature of redemptive history now becomes a unified reality in the experience of later believers (85).

### The Spirit of Order

In the fifth chapter Ferguson turns to the *ordo salutis*. Discussions of the *ordo salutis* attempt to unpack the inner coherence of the Spirit’s application of the work of Christ (97).
Ferguson rightly points out that debate ensued from the earliest articulation of the *ordo salutis* in the English-speaking tradition. Ever since William Perkins (1558-1602) published his work, *The Golden Chaine*, saints have been divided on the questions of chronological arrangement and logical relationship in the order of salvation (97). Despite the disagreements surrounding this topic and the desire of some to simply sweep the order of salvation under the rug, Ferguson firmly believes that this is an important matter to consider. He explains the significance of the subject: “[This] discussion is important in heightening awareness of the logic embedded in our understanding of the way the Spirit works in the individual, as well as clarifying the matrix of thought which governs the way in which the Christian gospel is proclaimed” (97).

After building a case for the necessity of analyzing the *ordo salutis*, Ferguson poses the question: “On what principle or model is the order of the Spirit’s work to be construed?” (100). The model he employs for structuring the Spirit’s ministry is that of union with Christ. For Ferguson, this approach has numerous advantages over the series or causal chain model that has dominated expositions of the *ordo salutis*. To be united to Christ by the Spirit means that the believer shares in his justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification. In Christ, these are the believer’s immediately, eschatologically, and simultaneously (106). In an effort to clarify, Ferguson adds: “Of course, justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification are distinct categories of the application of redemption and should never be confused. But they are not to be viewed as separate events; they are aspects or facets of the one event of our union with Christ…” (106).

*Spiritus Recreator*

Building on the foundation established in the previous chapter, Ferguson begins chapter six with the assertion that union with Christ is multidimensional in character, and because it is
multidimensional it is necessarily viewed from various perspectives in the New Testament. It involves identification with Christ in his death, resurrection, and ascension. It also involves a correlation of the action of God with the action of man (115). On this note, Ferguson zooms in on two threads—regeneration and faith—which he argues are inextricably intertwined. He explains, “These strands are capable of separate analysis… but they cannot be existentially separated from each other. They belong together in such a way that we cannot mark a join where the monergistic action of God ends and the activity of the believer begins” (116).

Union to Christ is inaugurated by the life-giving work of the Spirit, the work of regeneration. In Ferguson’s view, regeneration is not merely an inner change; rather, it is the incursion of a new order into the present order of reality. Regeneration denotes not merely the phenomenon of spiritual change from within, but transformation from without, caused by participation in the power of the new age (118). The New Testament teaches that regeneration is the sovereign, monergistic work of the Spirit, and that the necessity of regeneration is universal. Without this new birth, no one can see or enter the kingdom of God (Jn. 3:3, 5). Ferguson highlights three aspects of the Spirit’s work of radical renewal. First, regeneration implies intellectual illumination. The kingdom of God, which was unrecognized previously, becomes clearly visible. Second, regeneration involves liberation of the will from its bondage in a nature dominated by sin. Third, there is a cleansing aspect to regeneration (121). Ferguson clarifies this beautifully:

The Spirit’s work in regeneration is thus total in the extent of its transforming power. It is the individual as an individual who is regenerated, the whole man. For regeneration is the fulfillment of God’s promise to give us a new heart (Ezk. 36:26; cf. Je. 31:33), indicating that the Spirit’s renewing work is both intensive and extensive: it reaches to the foundation impulses of an individual’s life and leaves no part of his or her being untouched (122).

Faith is distinguishable, though not separable, from regeneration. Ferguson has
much to say about faith as the fruit of the Spirit’s ministry (126). He also carefully and helpfully articulates the relationship between faith and repentance. Both faith and repentance, Ferguson claims, are essential for conversion and one cannot exist apart from the other. He adds, “As a consequence, the one may be used where both are intended—as though either faith or repentance can function in synecdochal fashion for faith and repentance” (132). In his conclusion to the chapter, Ferguson insists that faith and repentance, as expressions of regeneration, are not merely inaugural aspects of the Christian life; rather, they are fruits of the Spirit’s ongoing ministry (138).

The Spirit of Holiness

Chapter seven introduces the idea that the Holy Spirit works in regeneration in order to unite believers to Christ through faith, and the goal of the Spirit’s activity is transformation into the likeness of Christ (139). Ferguson explores the biblical teaching on holiness and sanctification, looking briefly at the Old Testament and much more in-depth at the New Testament. He crafts a simple definition of sanctification. “To sanctify” means that God repossesses persons that have been devoted to other uses, and have been possessed by purposes other than his glory, and takes them into his own possession in order that they may reflect his own glory (140). Ferguson indicates that in the Old Testament God’s person and character provide the motive for sanctification: he is holy, therefore his people are called to be holy. God is also the agent of sanctification; he is the Lord who makes his people holy. Ferguson adds, “The pattern of holiness is always in the form of imperatives of obedience arising out of indicatives of grace” (141).

The motive, goal, and pattern of sanctification in the New Testament is consistent with that of the Old Testament, though the doctrine is more fully, or Christocentrically, defined in the New
Testament. In the most fundamental sense, the New Testament views Jesus as the author of sanctification. Ferguson is quite helpful at this point. He states: “Just as [Jesus] did not die for himself, but to make the effect of his death as propitiation available for us, neither did he live for himself, but to make available to us, by union with him, the sanctification he had accomplished in our humanity” (143). Sanctification can be achieved only by means of the resources of Christ, brought to the believer through the Holy Spirit as he takes what is Christ’s, reveals it to the believer, and thus conforms the believer more and more into the likeness of Christ (144).

Ferguson continues to unpack the doctrine of sanctification by exploring some of the major Scriptural themes, such as: participation in Christ (144), imitation of Christ (152), Spirit against flesh (153), and Spirit and law (162).

The Communion of the Spirit

Next, Ferguson turns his attention to the topic of the communion of the Spirit. He begins chapter eight by indicating that the entire Christian life, with its deep roots in the love of the Father and its foundation in the grace of Christ, is characterized by what the Apostle Paul referred to as the koinonia of the Holy Spirit (175). The Christian is, in the present mortal body, indwelt by the Spirit (I Cor. 6:19) and in the future his mortal body will be raised and transformed in incorruption, power, and glory (I Cor. 15:42ff.). Ferguson highlights three metaphors that express this sub-eschatological indwelling.

First, the Spirit is an arrabon (II Cor. 1:22), a Semitic word for a pledge or down-payment, a guarantee that the final installment of salvation is assured (177). Second, the Spirit is the firstfruits of the eschatological consummation (178). Third, the Spirit is the seal. Sealing may indicate a variety of things: it secures and may also authenticate an object with a view to some future occasion (180).
After dealing with these three important metaphors—pledge, firstfruits, and seal—Ferguson moves into a lengthy discussion of the Spirit of sonship and a brief reiteration of the Spirit as Paraclete. Regarding sonship, he writes:

The Spirit whom believers have received is not a spirit of bondage, but the ‘Spirit of sonship.’ The evidence of this is that in the Spirit we cry “*Abba*, Father”, the implication being that the Christian participates in a communion with God first experienced by Jesus himself, hence the echo of Jesus’ own prayer-language in the prayer life of the church (183).

In his reiteration of the Spirit as Paraclete, Ferguson underlines the role of the Spirit as teacher (187) and intercessor (188). “To pray in the Holy Spirit” (Eph. 6:18), for Ferguson, is not to pray unintelligently; rather, this is an analogy in the life of prayer to what walking in the Spirit is in the whole Christian existence: conformity to the Word of God. Praying in the Spirit is “prayer which conforms to the will and purpose of the Spirit” (188).

*The Spirit and the Body*

Ferguson is quick to point out, in chapter nine, that personal regeneration is only one aspect of a new creation that is still to be consummated. Personal regeneration must be seen in the light of the corporate work of renewal in which the Spirit of Christ is engaged throughout history. Christ’s programme is summarized in the words, “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18). Ferguson rightly notes that it is in the midst of this eschatological conflict that Christ is calling not merely individuals to himself, but an *ekklesia* (191). Christians are baptized into the body of Christ, and the Spirit is the medium of this baptism. Life in this body is governed by the means Christ himself established for the church’s development and growth: in particular by the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper (194).
Water baptism, for Ferguson, is a sign of inauguration. Baptism with the Spirit inaugurates the believer into the life of union with Christ. Baptism with water marks this outwardly (195). Ferguson directs the reader to Acts 2:38, and explains: “Here repentance, water baptism, the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit are seen as correlative aspects of the one reality of entrance into Christ, and thus into (the fellowship of) the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” (195).

Where baptism is inaugural and is received only once as a sign of union with Christ, the Lord’s Supper is a sign of ongoing communion with Christ and is to be received frequently (200). In Ferguson’s view, an accurate understanding of the Spirit’s role in the Lord’s Supper is key for avoiding misinterpretation of the Supper. Only by understanding the role of the Spirit can one avoid the mistakes made by both Catholics (ex opera operato) and Protestants (memorialism). Ferguson carefully articulates his position:

It is not by the church’s administration, or merely by the activity of our memories, but through the Spirit that we enjoy communion with Christ… Christ is not localized in the bread and wine (the Catholic view), nor is he absent from the Supper as though our highest activity were remembering him (the memorialist view). Rather, he is known through the elements, by the Spirit. There is a genuine communion with Christ in the Supper. Just as in the preaching of the Word he is present not in the Bible (locally), or by believing, but by the ministry of the Spirit, so he is also present, in the Supper, not in the bread and wine, but by the power of the Spirit. The body and blood of Christ are not enclosed in the elements, since he is at the right hand of the Father (Acts 3:21); but by the power of the Spirit we are brought into his presence and he stands among us (201, emphasis original).

**Gifts for Ministry**

The New Testament also emphasizes, in addition to the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, that the ascended Christ strengthens the unity of his body by gifts given through the Spirit. These “spiritual gifts,” as they are often called, are the subject of chapter ten. Ferguson rightly asserts that central to the exercise of any gift of the Spirit is the ministry of the
Word given to God’s people. “There is no comprehensive list of the gifts of the Spirit in any one passage,” he explains, “but in the lists which do exist (Rom. 12:3-8; I Cor. 12:7-11, 28-30; Eph. 4:11; I Pet. 4:10-11), it is clear enough that the ministry of God’s revelatory word is central to the use of all other gifts… they give expression to the word in various ways” (208). Ferguson is also extremely helpful in pointing out that spiritual gifts reflect more about the grace of the Giver than they reveal about the gracious condition of the recipient (209). Additionally, he highlights that all gifts are given to enable their recipients to minister to others in Christ’s name (209).

Ferguson offers a detailed and fair discussion of the gifts of tongues and prophecy, presenting both the continuationist and the cessationist sides of the debate. He carefully considers the four basic factors of this debate: contemporary experience, the alleged silence of the New Testament with regard to temporary gifts, distinct dispensations versus one age, and the reference to “when the perfect comes” in I Cor. 13:10 (223). He also brilliantly draws the reader’s attention to the relevance of the sufficiency of Scripture in the continuationist and cessationist debate. He points out, “The logical implication of the sufficiency of Scripture is that no additional revelation is needed by the church or the individual. What is needed is illumination” (231).

In the end, Ferguson concludes that there is only one kind of tongues-speaking in Scripture, and this is a God-given ability to speak foreign languages ordinarily unknown to the speaker (234). Therefore, much that is claimed today as “tongues” cannot be identified with the New Testament phenomenon. In the case of prophecy, Ferguson suggests that it would be more consistent for continuationists to recognize that their insights into God’s Word and their sense of God’s plan and purpose are not actually prophecy at all, but illumination (236).

The Cosmic Spirit
In the final chapter of the book, Ferguson poses an important question: if the Spirit is creator Spirit, can he also be spoken of as cosmic Spirit, so that God’s purposes for the entire world will be brought to consummation through his ministry (242)? Is the Spirit active in and through all (including unregenerate individuals), and the one who brings about God’s purposes in all events? Ferguson approaches this question with seasoned hesitation, stating: “The wisest theological approach, here as elsewhere, is always to move outwards from concrete biblical statements to settled principles, only then extrapolating to broader generalizations. Any other procedure lacks control…” (245).

Ferguson begins to answer the aforementioned questions, most unexpectedly, by discussing Bezalel (Ex. 31:1-15) and Frank Sinatra. He introduces the dangerous hermeneutical principle of universalizability: since the Spirit endowed Bezalel with gifts of design and craftsmanship, it may be assumed that all artistic gifts—including Frank Sinatra’s voice—are endowments of the Spirit (246). Ferguson offers a great word of warning at this point: “It is appropriate to believe, with Calvin and many others, that all truth is God’s truth, even when it is found in the mouth of the ungodly, and that all good gifts come from above (Jas. 1:17). Yet it is quite another thing to assume that this is an evidence of the Spirit’s saving or transforming presence” (246).

Ferguson transitions to and briefly discusses the topics of the Spirit and the last Adam (250) and the spiritual body (252) before drawing his final conclusion. In his view, Adam was created as the vicegerent of all creation and the head of the entire cosmos under God. When Adam fell, then, the whole human race and all of creation fell with him into bondage. The resurrection of Christ marks the beginning of the grand reversal of this fall, the transformation that will reach its consummation in the final resurrection. At this final resurrection, heaven and earth will form one domain of righteousness in which “the Spirit will be the all-pervasive
atmosphere, just as the Lord God and the Lamb will be the temple, the glory of God its light, and the Lamb of God its lamp” (254). The Spirit is not only the author of this resurrection act, but the substratum of the resurrection life (254).

Critique and Conclusion

Now that the work has been summarized and the particularly helpful aspects of the work have been noted, a few critical comments must be made.

First, a word about Ferguson’s craft. His writing is not always clear. At times, he goes places but fails to take the reader with him. This is no doubt due to the fact that he is attempting to cover dense theological truths. But, the deeper the truth the better the writing must be for the reader to comprehend it. Ferguson sometimes moves too quickly through subjects and often leaps from one discussion to the next without establishing a clear link. The result is that the reader is left in a fog, wondering, “Where are we?” More attention needs to be given to the oft-overlooked (especially in academic writing) art of taking the reader along for the ride. Ferguson needs to work harder at: 1) clearly stating where he is going, 2) taking the reader there, and 3) stating where he has gone. An example of this is that rarely, if ever, does Ferguson summarize and comprehensively conclude at the end of the chapter. The “where we have been” is altogether overlooked.

Second, a word about content. Theologically, Ferguson’s work is robust. This author found no major areas of disagreement and only a few minor differences, areas in which theological hospitality should be exercised. But, practically, Ferguson’s work is anemic. He assumes that his readers will see, on their own, the practical implications of his lengthy pneumatological discussions. This is dangerous. More attention needs to be given to implications for belief and practice. Only a few times in the book does Ferguson highlight the
implications of the doctrine being discussed (112, 129).

On the whole, however, Ferguson’s book is an excellent intermediate-level introduction to pneumatology, from the Reformed point of view. He interacts with the best thinkers of the Reformed world—past and present—and he argues from the Scriptures. The book is a great tool for the motivated student of the Bible, and especially for those who know the Spirit only as the “anonymous, faceless aspect of the divine being” (12).