

Gregg R. Allison and Andreas J. Köstenberger. *The Holy Spirit. Theology for the People of God*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2020. 485 pp. + 31 pp. (front matter) + 66 pp. (back matter).

This is the premier title of a newly proposed multi-volume series (Theology for the People of God) that primarily targets “students, seminarians, pastors, and other church and ministry leaders” (xxii). Each volume in the series will be co-authored by a pair of convinced evangelical Baptists (xxi). What is most intriguing, however, is that the volumes “emphasize integration of biblical and systematic theology in dialog with historical theology and with application to church and life” (xxii). In keeping with this primarily bi-perspectival approach, part 1 (219 pages) lays the groundwork with a biblical-theological survey of the Holy Spirit through the Old and New Testaments. Part 2 (262 pages) then explores specific systematic-theological issues related to the Holy Spirit, incorporating relevant historical theological insights along the way.

The biblical-theological methodology progresses straightforwardly through each successive corpus of both Testaments, pausing along the way for summaries of the data and charts that helpfully track every reference to the Spirit in each corpus. The following systematic-theological analysis covers a wide array of issues, including the Spirit’s deity and personhood, intratrinitarian relations, relation to Scripture, and the Spirit’s role in creation, providence, salvation, the Church, and the future. A chapter on contemporary issues briefly evaluates Pentecostalism, the charismatic movement, and third-wave evangelicalism (including its more recent Reformed expressions). Given the authors’ affirmation of continuationism (see below), their concluding application is unsurprisingly generic: “Our pneumatology urges believers and churches to avoid easy reductionism by which Pentecostal and charismatic phenomena are dismissed as either the highest expression of divine blessing [sic; “dismissed” as such?] or the derelict result of demonic activity” (470).

The fundamental theological posture of the authors is solidly orthodox. A smorgasbord of positions espoused in the book will give readers a feel for its contents and orientation. (1) The trinitarian formula in Matthew 28:19 is attributed not to “Matthean parlance” but directly to “Jesus’s ipsissima verba” (59). (2) The authors’ “pneumatological interpretation of the creation account stands against all non-creationist views,” “rejects theistic evolution” (299–300), and holds the *ruach* in Genesis 1:2 to be the Holy Spirit (11–12). (3) They helpfully trace the source of the Bible as a “trinitarian revelation, initiated by the Father, expressed through the Son, and terminating in the Holy Spirit, who inspired it” (307–09). (4) Summarizing four views on the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, both authors hold that this sin involves “malicious, irrational rejection and slander” of the Spirit’s testimony to Christ that attributes it to Satan, but they disagree on whether that sin may be committed today (343–44). (5) The authors embrace the priority of regeneration to conversion (369). (6) Several pages argue for the eternal, double procession of the Spirit. The promise of biblical passages that confirm *eternal* procession (259) never actually materializes, however; while several passages are adduced for the *double* procession, arguments for the *eternal* procession are limited to assertions from church fathers. The authors acknowledge that the church’s historic formulation of the doctrine “*added* to the biblical affirmation of John 15:26 but *did not contradict* it” (258, emphasis original). (7) The Holy Spirit gives individual believers “specific guidance as to the where, when, how, and whom of career, ministry,

marriage or singleness, family and more. While controversial in some circles, such guidance is well supported by Scripture” (400). (8) In a discussion of soteriological inclusivism, which argues that the Spirit himself may be an avenue of salvation within other religions even apart from any knowledge or confession of the death of Christ, the authors soundly conclude, “Our doctrine of the Holy Spirit . . . holds to exclusivism and rejects inclusivism” (474).

Some omissions are a little surprising for a volume dedicated to a thorough unfolding of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Though the authors seem to imply indirectly that OT believers were not permanently indwelt by the Spirit (22, 54), they include no detailed, systematic discussion of that issue (nor any footnote reference to one). Likewise, in tracing the biblical theology of the Spirit through Acts, the authors propose no potential resolution to the apparent contradiction between 20:22 and 21:4 and 11 beyond stating the obvious: “It is difficult to understand how the same Spirit who constrained Paul to go to Jerusalem leads believers and Agabus to warn him against doing so” (96); granted, an extensive German study is footnoted for further reference, but that is an odd option for a volume expressly intended “not first and foremost [for] other ‘professional’ theologians” (xxii).

For many readers, the most debatable position espoused by Allison and Köstenberger will be their defense of continuationism. The biblical-theological survey on passages relating to tongues concludes that the phenomenon in Acts 2 involved xenoglossia—the ability to “miraculously speak in foreign languages” (84). The authors never address, however, whether the tongues-speaking practiced in Corinth and regulated by Paul was also xenoglossia. What are readers to make of this? Should we assume that they believe the tongues-speaking in Jerusalem and Corinth were identical, since they never say otherwise? Or does their silence on this point intentionally leave the door open for their later affirmation of continuationism (429–34)? The failure to clarify this point vexes their defense of continuationism, since at the core of that position is the argument (and therefore the need for biblical-theological data) that the Corinthian tongues-speaking was not xenoglossia. Avoiding any discussion of the nature of tongues outside of Acts (Corinthian or modern) is conspicuously unhelpful for any fair and biblically informed presentation of the debate.

The authors’ summary of the cessationist position is equally disappointing. “Cessationism points to the following support in its favor,” it begins. “(1) First Corinthians 13:8–13 associates the cessation of sign gifts . . . with the completion of the New Testament canon” (431). Granted, point (2) acknowledges “a modification” of this view that rejects this interpretation. But why begin by attributing to cessationism a view that, in point of fact, most cessationists reject? One expects a bit more informed accuracy in an academic work of this caliber. The authors cite Anthony Thistleton (a continuationist) over a dozen times elsewhere in the book; this might have been an apropos time to cite him once more, for even Thistleton concedes that “*few or none* of the serious cessationist arguments depends on a specific exegesis of 1 Cor. 13:8–11.”⁷ Listing the completion-of-the-canon view as central to cessationism also undermines the relevance of their further arguments against this view. For example, they pose the following question: “As the early church read these passages . . . what would

⁷ Anthony C. Thistleton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1063 (emphasis added).

have signaled to them that these apostolic instructions no longer apply” since “no such signal appears in the texts themselves” (432)? But if the sovereign Spirit simply ceased giving a particular gift, no such signal in the text would be necessary. Indeed, the counter-question might be posed: what text signaled to the early church the cessation of normative, inspired Scripture? A formidable argument has been made that the cessation of tongues need not be argued for on any textual grounds but on purely historical grounds—just as all orthodox believers (the authors included) would argue for the cessation of inspired Scripture not on any textual grounds but on historical grounds.⁸ Similarly, the authors argue against the cessationist view: “At what point and in what manner did the early churches and their leaders *know to suspend the operation of the gifts* of prophecy, speaking in tongues, and the other sign gifts?” (432, emphasis added). This is an astonishing question to pose in a book on the theology of the Holy Spirit, given the unequivocal biblical-theological data that churches and their leaders have nothing to do with either instigating or suspending spiritual gifts in the first place (1 Cor 12:7–11, 18, 24, 28); such gifts are purely at the sovereign disposition of the Spirit—a point the authors rehearsed just four pages earlier (428) but overlook in their critique of cessationism.

All that being said, the book’s strengths far outweigh its weaknesses, and the authors have made a significant contribution to pneumatology specifically and to theological method in general. Hopefully this model of directly interfacing biblical and systematic theology within the same volume will find its way into other theological studies in the future.

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⁸ See Alan N. Grover, “Canon Theology As a Model for Cessationist Theology: A Biblical Case for Cessationism (PhD diss., Bob Jones University, 2015). Part of Allison’s and Köstenberger’s argument, of course, is the debated assertion that “the historical record of the continuation of the sign gifts is solid. It is simply not the fact that these gifts died out after the apostolic age was over or that their continuation was confined to marginal, even heretical, groups” (432). See Grover, chapter 9, “Historical Evidence for Cessationism.”