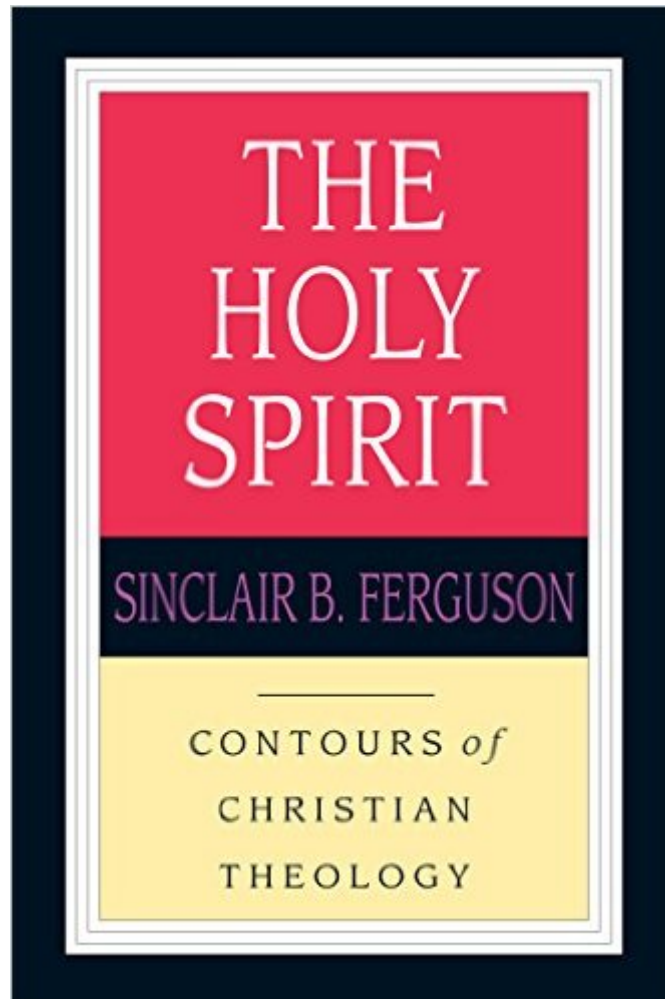


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The Holy Spirit (Contours Of Christian Theology)



Synopsis

The Holy Spirit, once forgotten, has been "rediscovered" in the twentieth century--or has he? Sinclair Ferguson believes we should rephrase this common assertion: "While his work has been recognized, the Spirit himself remains to many Christians an anonymous, faceless aspect of the divine being." In order to redress this balance, Ferguson seeks to recover the who of the Spirit fully as much as the what and how. Ferguson's study is rooted and driven by the scriptural story of the Spirit in creation and redemption. Throughout he shows himself fully at home in the church's historical theology of the Spirit and conversant with the wide variety of contemporary Christians who have explored the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Foundational issues are surveyed and clarified. Hard questions are explored and answered. Clarity and insight radiate from every page. Here is the mature reflection of a Reformed theologian who will summon respect and charity from those who disagree.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book by Ferguson is now 7 years old, but it remains an essential treatment of the Holy Spirit from a Reformed perspective. As Ferguson aptly notes early on, fascination with the work of the Holy Spirit has greatly increased in the last 100 years in Christian circles, but knowledge and understanding of the Spirit Himself remains more elusive than ever it seems. This book is a wonderful remedy to this starvation. Ferguson takes a very mild mannered tone throughout his presentation. Even the section of the book where he registers his sharpest theological disagreement

(in this case, with Grudem), he is charitable and properly recognizes the importance of theology's role to increase understanding and knowledge, but also the depth of Christian community. As is to be expected from a book written by a professor from Westminster Seminary, the reader can expect to get a healthy dosage of Vos/Ridderbos Biblical theology in here. Ferguson adopts the favored Westminster view that the New Testament needs to be seen within the context of redemptive history, and particularly eschatology. As a result, Ferguson's treatment of the presence and work of the Holy Spirit is seen within an eschatological context that stresses His role in the 'already/not yet' period of the coming of the Kingdom. What this means is that a reader who picks up this book who is enamored more with a systematic theological approach will find a different approach undertaken here. Particularly in Ferguson's treatment of the *ordo salutis*, the scholastic approach is mostly spurned in favor of a Biblical Theological approach that stresses the believer's unity in Christ within redemptive history as the predominate motif of the Spirit's work.

Sinclair Ferguson's biblical-theological treatment on the Holy Spirit is a rich and sumptuous theological feast for any serious-minded believer who wants to know more about the so-called "shy member of the Trinity." In eleven meaty chapters, Ferguson gives a comprehensive, if not exhaustive, biblical overview of the person and work of the Holy Spirit, all along the way drawing on historical theology and charitably interacting with perspectives different from his own. Chapter one, "The Spirit and His Story" surveys the Old Testament's more shadowy teaching on the Holy Spirit with a careful biblical-theological approach. "The Spirit of Christ" (chapter two) is an exceptionally rich chapter on the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus. Christ is seen as the quintessential "Man of the Spirit." Because his entire life was lived in the Spirit's power (Ferguson starts with his conception and moves through the various aspects of Jesus' life all the way to exaltation), Jesus is now the "Lord of the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18) - the One who sends the Spirit to his church to reproduce the "human holiness" of which he (Jesus) is the pattern. This moves into the next two chapters, which focus on "The Gift of the Spirit" and "Pentecost Today?", exploring the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost and its significance in redemptive history and for believers today. "The Spirit of Order" (chapter five) discusses the *ordo salutis* (order of salvation) and how the Spirit applies the redemptive work of Christ to the individual believer. This is an excellent chapter which focuses on union with Christ as the central motif for understanding how the Spirit applies salvation in our lives.

I found this book to be very difficult to follow. Perhaps this is because it is as the Preface states, the book was written for students in academia. I would suggest that for those who are newbies to

theology or this issue, that they might consider starting with say ... another book (e.g. see Graham Cole) and then move on to this book later. Ok. That said... some comments about what you can find discussed in the book. The book starts off with two prefaces. One by Gerald Bray and another by Ferguson himself. Then what follows are 11 chapters. In chapter 1, we find mostly a discussion of Pneumatology (doctrine of the Holy Spirit (HSP)) as found in the Old Testament (OT). A discussion of some Greek and Hebrew terms such as ruach and pneuma is given. Ferguson suggests interestingly enough that of the various possible meanings that can be suggested for the terms, the most dominant one in Scripture is that of power. The OT emphasis is "overwhelming energy." Chapter 2 is concerned with tracing the ministry of the HSP in the life of Jesus Christ. One question that Ferguson raises and answers is: Why was there any need for a coming of the HSP at Jesus' baptism if Jesus was born full of the Spirit? Good question. Read it to find out what Ferguson says. Chapter 3 concerns the pouring out of the Spirit on Pentecost. Ferguson also points out that there are four aspects to the HSP's ministry that help us to understand who He is and what He does. Also included in this chapter, is a discussion of Filioque. Chapter 4 has to do with the continuities and discontinuities associated with Pentecost. Can Pentecost or Pentecost-like events be repeated today? Ferguson's answer is no.

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