

THE HOLY SPIRIT

SINCLAIR B. FERGUSON

CONTOURS *of*
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GERALD BRAY
General Editor



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Preface

The Holy Spirit! It was commonplace in my student days for authors, lecturers and preachers to begin their comments on the subject of the Holy Spirit with some such statement as, 'The Holy Spirit has been until recently the forgotten person of the Godhead.' No-one writing on this topic today would employ such language. Such has been the widespread impact of Pentecostalism and the charismatic movement that literature on the Holy Spirit is now of such proportions that the mastery of the corpus would be beyond the powers of any individual.

The Holy Spirit is no longer thought of as the 'forgotten person' of the Godhead, and insofar as this is true, Christians of all persuasions should rejoice. Indeed, it might be thought that the pendulum has swung so far in the direction of an obsession with the powers of the Spirit that a moratorium on books on the Holy Spirit is a great desideratum; only the exigencies of a series would seem to justify the writing of yet another study on a now well-worn theme.

Yet the assumption which became virtually an article of orthodoxy among evangelicals as well as others, that the Holy Spirit had been discovered almost *de novo* in the twentieth century, is in danger of the heresy of modernity, and is at least guilty of historical short-sightedness. It forgets that it was with good reason that the Reformation pastor-theologian John Calvin was described as 'the theologian of the Holy Spirit'.¹ Moreover, each century since his time has witnessed events which were ascribed to the unusual working of the Holy Spirit. Even in the late twentieth century, the two *opera magna* on the Holy Spirit remain the extensive studies by the seventeenth-century Puritan John Owen, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford, and by the great Dutch theologian-politician, Abraham Kuyper, founder of the Free University of Amsterdam. Looking back even further, the assumption that the twentieth century had recovered truth lost since the first two centuries displays a cavalier attitude to the material unearthed by H. B. Swete in his valuable series of studies on the Spirit begun more than a century ago. These richly demonstrate the attention which much earlier centuries gave to honouring him along with the Father and the Son.

The assertion that the Holy Spirit, once forgotten, is now forgotten no longer needs rephrasing. For while his *work* has been recognized, the Spirit *himself* remains to many Christians an anonymous, faceless aspect of the divine being. Even the title 'Holy Spirit' evokes a different gamut of emotions from those expressed in response to the titles 'Father' and 'Son'. Perhaps the facts of the situation would have been better stated by describing him as the *unknown* rather than the *forgotten* (or even 'shy', as has recently been done) person of the Trinity.

The demands of a doctrinal series require contributors to cover the basic ground of the locus assigned to them. In this volume in the *Contours of Christian Theology* series, the focus of the concern is to trace the revelation of the Spirit's identity and work in a biblico-theological and redemptive-historical manner. This is not to say that historical theology is bankrupt, and certainly not to reject the apostolic principle that we understand the riches of the gospel in concert with the whole church (Eph. 3:18-19). My interest in and sense of indebtedness to the church's understanding of the Spirit will, I hope, be evident.

According to Thomas Aquinas, theology comes from God, teaches about God and leads us to God (*a Deo docetur, Deum docet, ad Deum ducit*). That is true in a special sense of the theology of the Holy Spirit. The great desideratum in all our reflection on the Spirit is surely the goal of personal and intimate communion with him by whom we are brought to worship, glorify and obey the Father and the Son. This marriage of theology and doxology is normative in the pages of Scripture, and it is for that reason that the pages which follow trace the work of the Spirit in a biblico-theological way.

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, and that the form in which it has come to us (undoubtedly by various means) is the only reliable foundation on which to build a theology of the Holy Spirit. But, in keeping with the general concerns of the *Contours of Christian Theology* series, along with the Pilgrim Father John Robinson, I share the conviction that there is still fresh light breaking out on the church from the word of God.

The person and work of the Holy Spirit continue to be an area of controversy among Christians. In this respect, some readers, perhaps many, will believe that they themselves see light where I do not. It is a remarkable fact of recent church history that convictions which were controversial in my student days in the 1960s and 70s have now become so broadly adopted that it is the mainstream views of those days which are now regarded as controversial. That notwithstanding, I have tried to keep in mind both the apostolic injunction to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and my own ordination vows to maintain a spirit of brotherhood to all the Lord's people. My hope and prayer is that the opinions expressed in areas of controversy touched on in this book will not prejudice fellow-Christians against the whole.

This volume stands in the *Contours of Christian Theology* series between the study of *The Work of Christ* and *The Church*; it therefore includes some discussion of elements of soteriology (the application of Christ's work) and ecclesiology (the gifts of the Spirit to the body of Christ). It thus serves as a bridge between these companion studies and, it is hoped, will be read in conjunction with them.

I wish to thank Gerald Bray, the General Editor of this series, for the invitation to contribute the volume on *The Holy Spirit*. I am grateful to David Kingdon, Theological Books Editor of IVP, both for his friendship and for his patience with a procrastinating author, seasoned with only the occasional pinch of cajoling! The completion of these pages represents a downpayment on two further debts: first to the Board of Trustees of Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, for granting me sabbatical leave in the Fall Semester of 1994; and chiefly to my wife Dorothy, who more than anyone has encouraged me to complete this work.

Sinclair B. Ferguson
Westminster Theological Seminary
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania