

BOOK REVIEW

He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit by Graham A. Cole. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007. 310 pp. \$30.00

Graham Cole, currently professor of biblical and systematic theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Deerfield, IL), brings an Anglican evangelical background and nearly three decades of teaching experience (Moore College; Ridley College) to bear on the topic of pneumatology in this latest contribution to Crossway's Foundations of Evangelical Theology series. Citing growing interest and changing attitudes toward pneumatology in both Pentecostal and mainline churches, Cole argues the need for a fresh, systematic study of the Holy Spirit for a new day. He begins by carefully defining his theological method, arguing for the priority of the Scriptures, properly compared, in his study. In true Anglican fashion he gives significant place to the collected witness of Christian thought through the centuries, and also makes room for general revelation and the discursive and empirical discovery of truth, but renders all of these sources subservient to Scripture. He promises to approach the topic subjectively and narratively, being sure to "take off his shoes" while treading this holy ground, not merely "taking snapshots" of the burning bush (pp. 32–33).

Chapter two is given to a discussion of divine incomprehensibility, and begins with the reminder that sometimes we must humbly concede "mystery" and simply obey. Cole cautions, though, against opting prematurely for mystery. He also warns against falling prey to "mysticism," which opts for immediate knowledge of the Spirit where Scripture is silent. Summarizing this key point, Cole writes, "I would contend that the Scriptures don't demand the language of mysticism in any technical sense to do descriptive justice to its stories, whether of prophet or apostle, not for us to understand its normative expectations of the godly life" (p. 55). This refreshing affirmation of sola scriptura is an encouraging sign in the present milieu of pneumatological study.

Cole turns next to matters of ontology. He argues primarily from the relational nature of the Holy Spirit that he is a person, giving a nod to the Spirit's self-consciousness and personal activities and emotions as further evidence. His arguments that the Spirit is God (as seen in his name, activities, attributes, reception of prayer/worship, and the capacity for being blasphemed) and also a distinct person in the godhead break little new ground, but are necessary to a comprehensive treatment. A helpful section on the Spirit and gender language concludes that while assigning gender language to God is analogical in nature and while feminine imagery may be used of God, the Bible is consistent in

assigning only masculine names and pronouns to all three members of the Godhead. Oddly, Cole is noncommittal about the filioque clause, and fails to give the controversy any serious treatment—perhaps he is one of those whom he describes as failing to “find the debate of gripping interest” (p. 78).

Cole’s fourth chapter, on the Holy Spirit and creation, is given mostly to hermeneutical discussion. Since (arguably) the Trinity is not revealed until the NT, Cole wonders whether it is possible that Moses/Job/David could have referenced the Holy Spirit in their respective creation accounts. Cole is noncommittal, but ultimately finds the question of minimal concern since he opts for a canonically contextual (Christian) reading of the OT, arguing that “the scope of the author’s intention...does not necessarily exhaust the scope of intended meaning” (p. 109). This conclusion is troubling, though the alternative, that the third person of the Godhead is unknown in the creation accounts, will not find much resonance with conservative evangelicals either. Cole closes this chapter with a token discussion of common grace that is much too brief to warrant the author’s casual dismissal of the concept. One wants for a healthy interaction with Calvin and Kuyper on this topic.

Having made his hermeneutical concession, Cole has no reason to doubt the clear activity of the Spirit in the OT, a topic which he takes up in the following two chapters. The Spirit is primarily concerned with God’s “divine project” of building a new people, Israel. The Spirit is at work, caring for, assisting in the governance of, giving revelation to, and dwelling in the midst of Israel. Cole disappoints with his failure (1) to discuss the critical, but often neglected idea of theocratic anointing in the governance of Israel or (2) to wrestle with the clearly eschatological context of the OT promises regarding the Spirit and the new covenant. Here, perhaps, is the most glaring example of Cole’s disinterest in dispensational concerns, which he barely mentions (p. 138, n. 34), ignoring substantive contributions on pneumatology by Walvoord and Pettegrew. Surprisingly, however, Cole’s discussion of the progressive nature of the content of saving faith will resonate with dispensationalists (p. 142), and his ambivalence toward OT regeneration and sharp denial of OT indwelling out-dispensationalizes even some dispensationalists (including this reviewer).

The seventh chapter documents the role of the Spirit in Christ’s earthly ministry, a topic that Cole believes to be a neglected one. Cole argues that in all but two of the seven “nodal points” of Christ’s life and ministry, the Holy Spirit was highly active. Cole’s thesis seems to guide his exegesis in this chapter, and he seems to be vulnerable to theological speculation (the purpose of the virgin birth, the role of the Spirit in preventing the “implosion” of the Trinity while Christ was on the cross, etc.), all the while chastising others likewise guilty of theological speculation. Despite his incomplete attempts to systematize the Spirit’s activity in the ministry of Christ (again I think, due in part to his neglect of dispensational concerns), however, Cole is still successful in identifying

heightened activity of the Spirit in the life of Christ.

Cole next moves to the Spirit's new role as promised in the Gospels and enacted in the book of Acts. Cole is fair with the material, leaves room for traditional dispensational arguments (including baptism and the bestowal of the Spirit as symbolic of the formation of a regenerate new body, the church, and not entailing empowerment for service—pp. 195, 212), and carefully parses between multiple activities of the Spirit at Pentecost. In this Cole offers a refreshing improvement on much pneumatological material circulating today that tends to collapse the works of the Spirit into the amorphous work of the Spirit (pp. 197f). Cole sagely denies the normative nature of much of the Spirit's novel activity in Acts (p. 196), and rejects the Pentecostal/holiness dogma of "subsequence" allegedly found in Acts. Cole generally refrains from dogmatism on details such as the Spirit's "new" ministries (e.g., conviction, guidance, filling, "internal" ministry, and the Christ's insufflation of the Spirit on the disciples). On two occasions, however, Cole breaks his tolerant pattern to affirm (with meager or no argument), (1) that indwelling is something new to the book of Acts, and (2) that Joel 2:28–32 has been fulfilled in Acts 2.

Cole details the role of the Spirit in today's church in chapter nine, carefully subsuming the Spirit's work in individual believers under the umbrella of his work in the church. He discusses first the initiation of members into the body, following a Reformed understanding of union with Christ and effectual calling (though, oddly, denying the role of the Spirit in the latter—p. 215), and describing Spirit Baptism as the point of entry into the new community. Cole adopts a mostly Reformed understanding of sanctification (but erroneously appeals to John Murray to retain the idea of "positional" sanctification!). Sharply rejecting the Keswick view of "filling" in Ephesians 5:18 as individually sanctifying/empowering, Cole argues that the events of Pentecost (e.g., revelatory Spirit-filling) are not "archetypal" for the church (though he apparently allows for some sort of iterative empowerment [p. 246]). He has similar doubts about the normative nature of tongues, but is somewhat non-committal on this point, taking an "open but discerning" stance.

The tenth chapter turns to the Spirit's role in epistemology, chiefly his role in proclaiming and receiving the Word. As in the previous chapter Cole seems to allow for a role for the Spirit not only in prophecy, but also preaching (functions that to a degree he amalgamates), though he elaborates little on this. He apparently sides with Fuller in the Fuller/Erickson debate on illumination. Cole takes a mediate view of the Spirit's witness to the believer's sonship, and gives tentative support to Calvin's view of the internal testimony of the Spirit to the identity of Scripture. One looks in vain for a discussion of the guidance of the Spirit that would fit naturally here.

No one will agree with all that Cole says. His avoidance of dispensational themes and dismissal of common grace are troubling to me, as is his hermeneutical theory outlined in chapter four. His tepid treatment

of the continuationist/cessationist debate will no doubt also draw criticism from some readers of this journal. These criticisms aside, however, Cole's overall treatment is reasoned, irenic, and at all points governed by appeal to Scripture. It is destined to take a prominent place among evangelical systematic pneumatologies.

Mark A. Snoeberger