

REVIEWS

Reinstating the Spirit

Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God, by Gordon D. Fee. Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1996.

In *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God*, Gordon Fee establishes a theology of the Spirit in the Divine Trinity, the scriptural basis for the experience of the Spirit, and the necessary convergence of the two. By filling the gap between the cold, prejudiced neglect of the Spirit in traditional theologies and the ill-founded excesses of "Spirit movements," Fee seeks to revitalize the people of God with a fresh and scriptural understanding and experience of the Divine Trinity, recognizing anew the crucial role of the Spirit in the teaching and living of Paul and the churches under his ministry. This book, an accessible version of his more thorough *God's Empowering Presence*, is truly commendable in its scholarship. It is consistently exegetical, considering in turn each of the Pauline texts concerning the Spirit. The objective reader feels that he is not being led through a history of academic thought or a spectrum of opinions and prejudices, but rather through the New Testament itself in a plain, frank study of the truth. As we shall see, however, a complete and enlightened theology of the Spirit is difficult to arrive at, and Fee's work is not free of omissions and misconceptions.

A Theology of the Spirit

By intention, Fee's book is "thoroughly exegetical" and "fully theological" (xv), and this indeed is its distinguishing feature, a characteristic which is all the more appreciable in the light of the author's long history in the Pentecostal movement. The Spirit, he says, is the foundation of the entire experience and understanding of the believer's life in Christ (3) and the crucial ingredient of the central aspects of Paul's gospel. Indeed, "Paul's entire theology without the supporting pinion of the Spirit would crumble into ruins" (7).

Much of Fee's theological emphasis is on establishing the coequal place of the Spirit in the Divine Trinity. Paul's revelation of God focuses on the person of Christ, asserting that "to us there is one God, the Father...and one Lord, Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 8:6). Yet throughout his Epistles, Paul's revelation of Christ emphasizes the Spirit as the realization of the Son with the Father. Thus, Paul was thoroughly trinitarian, Fee reminds us, teaching and ministering God in three *hypostases*, as Father, Son,

and Spirit. Although the arguments and conclusions to this end are centuries old, Fee adds insight to the matter by demonstrating that Paul's way of dealing with the truth of the Triune God is experiential and presuppositional, in practical rather than theological terms (38). He notes that Paul "experienced God, and then expressed that experience, in a fundamentally trinitarian way," affirming, asserting, and presupposing the Trinity in every way (38). The truth of the Divine Trinity, and thus of the divine Spirit, was not something Paul explicitly argued for as a "purely reflective theology" (38), but the "assumed, experienced reality of Christian life" (40). In fact, it was Paul's very disuse of strictly theological terms concerning the Trinity that led later believers to continue where Paul left off through the succinct but limited theological utterances of the councils.

Due to the needs of his readers, Paul was forced on occasion to use explicit, definitive utterances to reveal the truth of the Father and the Son (e.g., 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:15-23). Fee argues, however, that had only such polemic language concerning the Triune God defined the basic beliefs of the earliest Christians, they would indeed have been binitarian, for although Paul had very much to say concerning the Spirit, he did not speak in explicit theological formulations. The fact that Paul and the churches of his day were fully trinitarian adequately demonstrates that their living knowledge of the Father and the Son was in and through the Spirit of reality, presupposing their personal experience of God as Spirit, a God who is "experienced as a triune reality" (41). Fee points out that such an experiential understanding of the Triune God is clearly seen in Paul's major trinitarian texts, such as 2 Corinthians 13:14, 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, and Ephesians 4:4-6.

Fee completes his theological entry with his own experiential conclusions: "The Spirit must be reinstated into the Trinity, where he has never been excluded in our creeds and liturgies, but has been practically excluded from the experienced life of the church" (45). Moreover, he argues, the very nature of the Triune God, as being three yet one, must become the character of the church, in its function and oneness, by the Spirit's application of the threefold work of the salvation of the Divine Trinity.

The Spirit in the Move of God's Economy

Fee's theology of the Spirit is well founded on the side of

the Trinity, demonstrating the place of the Spirit in the Godhead through the “less explicit, but fully presuppositional trinitarian terms” (42) of Paul’s Epistles. In this way, he formulates a neat symmetry of three divine persons in one God, of whom the Spirit is the living presence and reality. However, no theology of the Divine Trinity is complete without stressing the following critical points concerning the Spirit of God in the move of God’s eternal economy, and these very points challenge Fee’s neat order of the Trinity. First, according to John 7:37-39, the Spirit, as the rivers of living water which would flow from the believers’ innermost being, “was not yet” before the glorification of Jesus through His death and resurrection (Luke 24:26). *Essentially*, God the Spirit existed from eternity, coequal with God the Father and God the Son. Yet, in the *economy* of the Triune God, He was “not yet” before the resurrection of Christ. After the resurrection of Christ, the Spirit who was “not yet” became the Spirit who now is, that is, the all-inclusive Spirit of Jesus Christ, who by that time had passed through the processes of incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection. Second, according to 1 Corinthians 15:45, in resurrection the last Adam, Christ in the flesh, “became a life-giving Spirit.” Thus, “the Lord is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:17), the Spirit who was prophesied in John 7:39. Third, the Spirit today is the compound Spirit, as fully typified by the anointing ointment in Exodus 30:23-25. The human nature and the divine nature, along with Christ’s death, the effectiveness of His death, His resurrection, and the power of His resurrection, have been compounded in the last Adam who became a life-giving Spirit. Fourth, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, Christ Himself, and the indwelling Spirit in Romans 8:2 and 9-11 are all interchangeable terms, referring to the compound Spirit who gives life. Such a Christ, who is identified with the Spirit, is the pneumatic Christ. Lastly, in Revelation 1:4, 4:5, and 5:6, the Spirit is intensified sevenfold to become the seven Spirits of God. Such a sevenfold intensified Spirit is identified with Christ in that He is the seven eyes of the Lamb (5:6).

Fee fails to see the identification of Christ and the Spirit, even in the direct light of key verses concerning this matter. He dismisses “the Lord is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:17), for example, as being a “form of Jewish interpretation” (32) in which the language of identity is used without the meaning of identity. Christ the Lord only “has to do with the Spirit” and is merely to be “understood in terms of the Spirit’s activity” (32), he says. In arguing that the persons of Christ and the Spirit are not to be identified, “either in essence or in function” (33), Fee seeks to guard the truth

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of the three of the Godhead and the divine, coequal place of the Spirit in the Godhead, a truth to which he devotes the major part of the theology of this book and a truth which is indeed basic in the divine revelation. However, to Fee, the economy of the Divine Trinity in His two becomings—God becoming flesh in the incarnation of Christ (John 1:14) and Christ becoming the life-giving Spirit in resurrection (1 Cor. 15:45b)—perturbs the truth of the Trinity out of its formulated symmetry. Yet, rather than being viewed as a threat to the truth of the three divine *personae*, the equally important, and mysterious, truth of the economy of God must be acknowledged as inherent and critical to the central revelation of God. In failing to be inclusive of the whole spectrum of the truth concerning the Triune God, Fee’s theology of the Spirit comes short.

The Experience of the Spirit

Fee’s experiential thesis is clearly stated very early in the book: “One reads Paul poorly,” he says, “who does not recognize that for him the presence of the Spirit, as an experienced and living reality, was the crucial matter of Christian life, from beginning to end” (xiii). Therefore, he says, “we must not merely cite the creed, but believe and experience the presence of God in the person of the Spirit” (34). In this light, Fee progresses through the numerous references to the Spirit in Paul’s Epistles, drawing relevance to his thesis, as summarized in the following statements: The New Testament believers, as the temple of God, are the people of God’s presence, the site of the renewed presence of God by virtue of the indwelling Spirit (chapter two). The Spirit is the experienced evidence and guarantee in the present time of the blessings of the ages to come (chapter five); thus the believers live an “eschatological” life by the Spirit. The Spirit is the “absolutely indispensable element” of our salvation (85), a salvation which is initiated by the Father, effected by the Son, and applied by the Spirit (161). The Christian life itself is fundamentally *pneumati* (“in/by the Spirit” 106), and the believers continue in it by walking in the Spirit, being led by the Spirit, and sowing to the Spirit (chapters seven through ten). Therefore, to be a believer “means nothing less than being filled with and thus to live in and by the Spirit” (184). The believers also war by the Spirit, and they worship in the Spirit with many manifestations of the Spirit (chapters eleven through fourteen). Finally, the Spirit’s operation is always with the church, the corporate Body of Christ, in view (chapter six), through the believers’ “common, lavish experience of the Spirit” (66). To all these preceding points, Fee offers many arguments

abounding in scriptural references. By his direct presentation and application of many key passages, Fee does well to expose the reader to the preponderance of the ministry concerning the Spirit in Paul's Epistles.

For the most part, Gordon Fee's exegetical exercise in *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* is inspiring and exemplary. To be sure, objective analyses of Scripture abound in the Christian heritage, but too often the issue of such academic exercises is a cold detachment from the very God revealed in the Scriptures (John 5:39-40). The issue of Fee's objective exegesis, however, is that we must know the Spirit "as a dynamically experienced reality" (108), and this issue is his real contribution to this subject. In addition, his theology of the Trinity offers the insightful perspective of a presupposed experience of the Trinity, although, as we have seen, his theology of the Spirit is not free of problems. Finally, Fee's call to know and experience God in a "vitaly trinitarian" way (188) by the Spirit captures the experiential emphasis of Paul's ministry. Ironically, however, this book offers little help regarding the actual, practical way to know and experience Christ by the Spirit (see 189-192). The seeking reader, having been inspired by the truth of the Spirit, must look elsewhere for the real keys to the experience of the Spirit.

By John Campbell

An Incomplete Gospel

In the Face of God: The Dangers and Delights of Spiritual Intimacy, by Michael Horton. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1996.

"Brilliant book," "spiritually vigorous," "'must' reading for our times," "challenging, disturbing, and enlightening," "shows what true spiritual intimacy is all about," "one of the significant books of our time," "a faithful exposition of the gospel," "offers a bracing recovery of authentic biblical spirituality": Such are the laudations printed on the sheet inserted into Michael Horton's *In the Face of God*. Although this volume has its merits—especially its strong and faithful presentation of the rudiments of the gospel of grace and the moderate tone of its polemics—in the opinion of this reviewer, *Face* falls short of the blurbists' accolades. The book is well-written and is a pleasure to read, and it may be regarded as challenging and disturbing; however, it is neither brilliant nor spiritually vigorous, and it fails to offer a "recovery of authentic biblical spirituality." Presenting itself as "one long sermon" that challenges the gnostic tendencies of "respected leaders who have wonderful ministries," *Face* has as its goal "not only a life that is more doctrinally grounded, but one that is more eager than ever to avoid the dangers and enjoy the delights of intimacy with God" (XVI-XVII). This analysis will focus on the salient features of the

book—structure, central idea, perspective, intent, strength, and shortcomings.

Face has an interesting structure. The introduction is followed by ten chapters: "Too Close for Comfort," "How to Be Too Spiritual," "Age of the Spirit or Spirit of the Age?" "Jacob's Ladder," "Who May Ascend the Hill of the Lord?" "They Touched God," "The Cost of Intimacy," "Receiving Christ," "Life in the Spirit," and "The Way of the Cross." The two appendices are respectively entitled "A Perspective on the Spiritual Drift in Hymnody" and "Questions for Further Reflection." The last section articulates the message of CURE (Christians United for Reformation) and suggests that the aim of *Face* is to advance CURE's message, which supposedly models that of the Reformation. The end notes contain serious blunders, with some notes incredibly including comments such as "additional information required" (235), "missing info. here" (236), "need info." (238), and "need to track down source" (239). Furthermore, R. A. Torrey is quoted (163, 164), but the original source is not provided. Also, leaders of Dispensationalism are quoted (167), but no reference is given. At least in part, these errors invalidate the claim (on the jacket) that regarding "gnostic-like notions of inner light, immediate sanctification, experience-centered faith and mystical spirituality," *Face* dares to "cite book, chapter, and verse of modern Christian expressions of these modern-day heresies." The glaring errors in citation surely diminish the overall quality and value of the book.

The central question addressed in *Face* is: "Who is God and how can I know him?" (XVI). In an attempt to answer this question, the book claims to follow those "forbears" who "warned us that there are two poles we must keep in tension: God's distance (i.e., transcendence), and his nearness (i.e., immanence)" (XVI). The reader is assured that *Face* will pursue "the biblical pattern for approaching God and finding intimacy with him," a pattern that avoids the extremes of deism and pantheism and that involves a "balance between God's majesty, holiness, justice, wrath, and separateness from the sinful creature on the one hand, and God's mercy, love, freedom, and intimacy with his sinful creatures on the other" (20, XVI). In response to a perceived unbalanced emphasis on subjective spiritual experience, the purpose of *Face* is to recover an "objective, external, outward-looking theology" (170). In particular, the book's "purpose is not to deny that personal and subjective side, but to argue that this orientation has almost entirely shoved the external and objective message of Christianity aside" (34). Hence, the book's thesis is that today's Christians need to turn from gnostic or mystical subjectivity and return to the God-ordained objective means for approaching a holy and righteous God on His terms.

In the Face of God is written from the perspective of what the book calls "biblical Christianity" (35, 124) and advocates

“genuine biblical piety” (45), “biblical spirituality” (70), and “biblical orthodoxy” (151). The reader soon discovers that in *Face* this biblical piety, spirituality, orthodoxy, and Christianity are regarded as identical with what the book repeatedly calls “the classic Reformation balance” (XVI), “classical Christianity” (21, 150), “the Reformation’s orthodox stance” (29), “historic Christianity” (37, 63), “orthodox Christianity” (65), “historic Protestantism” (133), “classic Protestant teaching” (162), “classical Reformation Christianity” (166, 178), “Reformation spirituality” (169), “historic Christian belief” (197), and “the Reformation emphasis” (198). The book confidently asserts, “At the time of the Reformation, there was a recovery of biblical balance” (156). In *Face* “Reformation balance” is viewed as the same as biblical balance; “Reformation Christianity” is considered identical to “biblical orthodoxy”; and “Reformation spirituality” is held to be the equivalent of “biblical spirituality.” Hence, according to *Face* only by being a “Reformation Christian” can one be a biblical Christian.

Face’s perspective is intrinsically related to its intent, which is threefold. First, the intent is to examine and expose contemporary gnosticism and its influence on evangelical Christianity. That the effect of gnosticism on today’s spirituality is a major concern in *Face* is readily apparent. In fact, the words *gnostic* and *gnosticism* are frequently used in every chapter of the book and in both appendices. The book contains a plethora of references to Gnosticism: “ancient gnostics,” “gnostic in nature,” “gnostic influences,” “gnostic elite,” “gnostic heresy,” “gnostic individualism and narcissism,” “gnostic tidal wave,” “popularization of Gnosticism,” “new Gnosticism,” “gnostic spirituality,” “gnostic emphases,” “principles of Gnosticism,” “gnostic outlook,” “gnostic system,” “gnostic implications,” “Gnosticism’s ‘higher knowledge,’” “gnostic world-view,” “‘Pentecostal’ revival of Gnosticism,” “gnostic revolution,” “gnostic escapism,” “gnostic redemption,” “gnostic mysticism,” “gnostic undercurrent,” “gnostic overtones,” “gnostic impulse,” “Gnosticism’s disregard for sacraments,” “gnostic point of view,” “gnostic awakening,” “gnostic spirituality,” “gnostic separation,” “gnostic cults,” “gnostic directions,” “gnostic revival,” “gnostic disdain,” “gnostic pantheism,” “gnostic spirit of individualism.” To be sure, the intent of *Face* to examine Gnosticism is abundantly fulfilled. This volume attaches the labels *gnostic* and *gnosticism* to all manner of persons and things. Significantly and unfortunately, these labels are used freely and imprecisely even before they are properly described and defined (in chapter three), possibly giving the impression to some readers, as it did to this reviewer, that *Face* employs the practice of attaching a pejorative term—in this case *gnostic*—to matters, ministries, and movements with insufficient regard for evidence. The book gives the impression that gnosticism is to be found virtually everywhere—in society in

general and in Christian groups in particular—the one possible exception being those church groups which adhere to “Reformation balance.”

Second, *Face*’s intent is to present “classical Reformation Christianity” as the antidote to the poison of today’s Gnosticism. This is made apparent by the numerous references to “Protestant orthodoxy,” by the material covered and the ideas propounded in Appendix B, and by the addition of an unpaginated section “What Is CURE?” The aim both of *Face* and of CURE (of which the author of this book is the president) is to communicate “insights gained from the sixteenth-century Reformation to the contemporary church and society.” In brief, CURE is offered as the cure to the maladies afflicting evangelical Christians. “CURE believes not only that Christians today face a church that in many ways parallels its medieval counterpart, but also that the solutions forged by the reformers are applicable today.” As a careful reading of *Face* makes clear, this book suggests that only “Reformation Christians” have the solutions, for all other Christians—Roman Catholics, Arminians, Pentecostals, Charismatics, Dispensationalists, those who follow Keswick teachings, those who believe in “signs and wonders”—have been influenced by the gnostic revival and, displaying various sorts of “gnostic tendencies,” are a part not of the solution but of the problem.

This outlook toward the plague of Gnosticism and its cure leads to the third intent of *Face*—the proselytizing of believers. Admittedly, this intent is carried out in a rather pleasant manner, but it is nevertheless the actual and practical aim of the book. Evidence for this assertion is found in the book’s ecclesiology and in the suggestion, made in Appendix B, that Christians should leave their church and join a body of believers that bears “the marks of a true church.” Question 11 in Appendix B is “What is a true church? What are its marks?” (225). The answer is stated succinctly: “The Reformers narrowed the biblical marks down to two essential points: the Word rightly preached, and the sacraments rightly administered” (225). The word *rightly* is crucial here. According to *Face*, for the Word to be rightly preached it must be proclaimed according to the Law-Gospel paradigm, and for the sacraments to be rightly administered they must be performed according to the principles of “Reformation Christianity.” Any Christian body that does not rightly preach the Word and rightly administer the sacraments can, and should, be rightly forsaken. In effect *Face* is giving its readers the following message: “If in your ‘church’ the Word is not rightly preached and the sacraments rightly administered according to the way advocated in this book—that is, according to ‘classical Reformation Christianity’—your ‘church’ does not bear the marks of a true church and therefore is not a true church.” After this message has been communicated by the answer to Question 11, the

proselytizing intent of the book is furthered by the answer to the last question, Question 16: "What should I do if I am dissatisfied with my church?" In its answer to this question, *Face* offers the following advice:

Based on the comments above, we must follow good order and church discipline even when we are convinced that a body is no longer bearing the marks of a true church....We go first to our elders, including the pastor, and make our case in humility and gentleness, willing to be corrected if we can be shown by the Scriptures to be in error. If we still cannot, in good conscience, be a part of the church, we must make these spiritual officers aware of our intentions and transfer our membership as quietly and graciously as possible. (230-231)

Although *Face* may not appear on the surface to be divisive in attitude, it cannot reasonably be denied that one aspect of the book's threefold intention is, subtly and in a "kinder and gentler" way, to proselytize Christians by suggesting that they transfer their membership to a "true church," that is, to a Reformation church constituted of "Reformation Christians."

In the estimation of this reviewer, the outstanding strong point of *In the Face of God* is its faithful and forthright presentation of the basic elements of the gospel of the grace of God. Christ is the only way to God, and only through His redeeming death can sinners enter into the presence of a holy, righteous, and glorious God. This is a word that our "gnosticized" generation desperately needs to hear. The book clearly and emphatically declares that even in the earliest days of human history "the only way into God's presence was through a sacrificed substitute" and that "only because of a bloody sacrifice, received by faith alone as people called on the name of the Lord, could sinners ever again stand in the presence of a holy God" (8-9). Apart from Christ as our Mediator, "no one can stand in God's presence," because forgiveness "comes to us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He is the Sacrifice, and he is the Mediator" (18). Apart from Christ there can be no direct experience of God, except as a consuming fire. "To know God is to know Christ," for "it is in Christ, and Christ alone, that we are able to enjoy intimate fellowship with God" (107, 101). This is the foundation of God's salvation unveiled in the Scriptures, and any reader who accepts God's way of salvation in Christ disclosed in the Word of God should appreciate the book's uncompromising presentation of this foundational aspect of God's full salvation in Christ Jesus.

The major shortcomings of *Face* are related to the book's claim to set forth a "biblical spirituality." Judged by its own criterion—the biblical pattern for intimacy with God—*Face* has three principal shortcomings. The first

concerns God's salvation. According to the New Testament God's full salvation has a judicial aspect according to the divine righteousness and an organic aspect according to the divine life. The New Testament reveals that God's judicial redemption, which includes justification and reconciliation, is not an end in itself but is a procedure that qualifies and positions the believers in Christ to experience and enjoy God's organic salvation. Romans 5:10 speaks of both aspects of God's full salvation: "For if we, being enemies, were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more we will be saved in His life, having been reconciled." "Reconciled to God through the death of His Son"—this is judicial; "saved in His life"—this is organic. *Face*'s "one long sermon" concentrates on the judicial aspect of God's full salvation and virtually ignores the organic aspect. This is a serious shortcoming. A book that claims to pursue the biblical pattern should present much more of the "much more" of Romans 5:10.

The second shortcoming is closely related to the first. Despite its claim to be balanced, *Face*, in its advocacy of an "objective, external, outward-looking theology" (170), is unbalanced with regard to the objective and subjective sides of the biblical revelation concerning genuine spiritual experience. In an attempt to redress one kind of imbalance—"gnostic" mystical subjectivity—the book displays another kind of imbalance—an emphasis on the objective biblical truth concerning Christ almost to the point of excluding, if not denying, the biblical testimony concerning the subjective experience of Christ. The balance lacking in *Face* is seen in Romans 8, where Paul, the paragon of balance, speaks both of the Christ who is at the right hand of God (v. 34) and of the Christ who is in us (v. 10). If *Face* had truly followed the biblical pattern, a great deal of attention would have been given to the New Testament revelation regarding the organic union with Christ, the subjective experience of Christ, and the personal enjoyment of Christ.

Because *Face* ignores the organic aspect of God's full salvation and is unbalanced between objective biblical truth and subjective biblical experience, the gospel it proclaims is incomplete. This volume does discuss certain crucial aspects of biblical orthodoxy and spirituality but only in a partial and superficial way. *Face* presents the gospel, but it is an incomplete gospel, not the complete gospel revealed in the New Testament as a whole and in Romans in particular. *Face* enunciates the foundational truths of the gospel, and this we affirm; however, *Face* ignores many other truths of the complete gospel, and this we critique. What will meet the need of our "gnosticized" generation is not the incomplete gospel promulgated in *Face* but the complete gospel proclaimed in the holy Scriptures.

By Ron Kamgas