John R. Levison, *The Holy Spirit Before Christianity*

(Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019), pp. xiii + 258. $39.95.

Andrew T. Abernethy

Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL, USA (andrew.abernethy@wheaton.edu)

John R. Levison is a prolific modern Bible scholar when it comes to the spirit (always lower case in the volume). Yet, unlike most in biblical studies, he does not shy away from addressing systematic theology. In *The Holy Spirit Before Christianity* he tells the story of the historical origins of pneumatology, 'the birthplace of the holy spirit' (p. 87) in a community in crisis during the post-exilic era in Isaiah 63. Theologians, of course, will bristle at claims that the 'holy spirit' has a birthplace, yet Levison recounts the historical moment when the holy spirit enters the script of the Jewish community.

Levison presents his case over five chapters. In chapter 1, 'The Emergence of the Spirit', he offers a forecast for the book and hints at a few implications; namely, if pneumatology finds its origins in the faith of ancient Israel instead of later Christian beliefs, then Christians must acknowledge more solidarity with Jews in theological belief. In chapter 2, 'The Essence of the Spirit', the focus is on the agents by which God is said to be present in the exodus and wilderness traditions: the pillars, the angel, the presence-face and the cloud.

Chapter 3, 'The Absence of the Spirit', is the heartbeat of the entire work, as it analyses the first use of the term 'holy spirit' in human history in Isaiah 63. This prophetic lament recounts how the 'angel of God's presence-face saved them' (63:9 [10]) out of Egypt, a fusion of two agents from the time of the exodus. In the following verses, the prophet uses 'holy spirit' to describe this presence of God during the exodus: 'they rebelled and grieved his holy spirit … Where is the one who put within them his holy spirit?' (63:9–10 [10–11]). Across these verses the 'holy spirit' is identified as the 'angel of God's presence-face'. Central to Levison's argument, then, is that 'holy spirit' becomes a means of referring to God's active presence during the exodus, whereas previously other agents were said to fill this role (see chapter 2).

Although this singular insight from Levison is important, I found myself asking: 'But what did the author in Isaiah 63 gain by using "holy spirit" to convey this?' As Levison's *modus operandi* is historical – describing where an expression fits within a tradition of thought development – an equally historical and literary question emerges: 'How does "holy spirit" fit within the Isaiah tradition in the Book of Isaiah?' Holiness is a hallmark of Isaiah (e.g. 6:3, 13), and there are numerous references to the spirit in the book (e.g. 11:2–3; 32:15; 40:13; 42:1; 48:16; 61:1), so one wonders what one gains semantically and affectively through this change of script to 'holy spirit', beyond merely observing that it takes over from previous traditions in conveying God's active presence in the exodus.

Chapter 4, 'The Assurance of the Spirit', looks at the promise of God's spirit in Haggai 2:4–5 ('my spirit stands among you'). Levison argues that Haggai 2:5, like Isaiah 63, calls to mind the exodus tradition. Just as the pillar of cloud 'stood' behind the Israelites to protect them from Egypt at the Sea of Reeds (Exod 14:19–20), so Haggai 2:5 assures the post-exilic community that God's active presence continues to 'stand' with them. Although Haggai

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930620000460 Published online by Cambridge University Press

2:5 does not mention '*holy* spirit,' its use of 'spirit' in conjunction with the exodus motif justifies his inclusion of the chapter in a volume centred around Isaiah 63.

This chapter made me wonder how Levison's story might look different if he adopted an ancient, though less popular, reading of Haggai 2:5 (see my article 'The Spirit of God in Haggai 2:5: Prophecy as a Sign of God's Spirit', *Vetus Testamentum* forthcoming). On three occasions the 'pillar of cloud' is said to 'stand' in the tent of meeting to reveal his thoughts to Moses and/or Aaron and Miriam (Exod 33:9–10; Num 12:5; Deut 31:15). So, the 'spirit' of God standing in Haggai 2:5 may refer to God's continuing to speak to his people through prophetic activity. If correct, a wider swath of post-exilic texts that present the spirit as the means of revealing divine knowledge would become part of the story (e.g. Joel 3:1–2 [2:28–30]; Zech 7:12; Neh 9:20; 2 Chron 15:1; 20:14; 24:20). Levison's story would extend beyond the moment when 'spirit' came to be spoken of as the deliverer of exodus (Isaiah 63) to a moment that also includes the 'spirit' spoken of as the means of divine self-revelation to the community.

Chapter 5, 'The Significance of the Spirit', challenges the field of pneumatology to recognise that pneumatology's birthplace is not in debates over the inner logic of the Trinity. He, thus, challenges the tendency among Christian theologians and scholars to speak of the 'holy spirit' in these passages in terms of hypostasis. His solution is to affirm more continuity with Judaism by recognising that 'holy spirit' refers to God's active presence in the world (and not to a hypostasis), is intertwined with the notion of exodus deliverance and emerges amidst crisis and community.

The Holy Spirit Before Christianity is a fascinating study and written in a lively fashion. I suspect it will provoke discussion and productive thinking among those interested in pneumatology. What makes this work perhaps most significant is that it forces readers to reckon with the tension between historical description – the historical moment when 'holy spirit' enters the script – and divine ontology – the theological prolegomena that affirms God's eternal existence as triune. Levison stands as a prophet in the midst of pneumatology, not allowing discussions to evade the historical realities within which 'holy spirit' found its way into the religious language of Israel hundreds of years before Christ's incarnation.

doi:10.1017/S0036930620000460

Daniel P. Horan, *All God's Creatures: A Theology of Creation*

(Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2018), pp. xiv + 251. $110.

Jeff Astley

Durham University, UK (jeff.astley@durham.ac.uk)

This monograph argues in detail for a Christian understanding of creation in which human beings are firmly located within 'a broader community of all God's creatures'. The rise and fall of the stewardship model of creation (which, it is argued, has