Michael Welker, ed.

_The Spirit in Creation and New Creation: Science and Theology in Western and Orthodox Realms_ (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012). xvi + 204 pp. $32.00 paperback.

Formerly, it could be said there existed an often tense debate between science and theology; this has now become a far more constructive dialog with scholars on both sides coming together for fruitful exchanges benefitting theology and science alike. The essays edited in this volume attest to this; herein one finds scholarship continuing the dialog focusing on the critical place of Spirit (or spirit) in the created order now and in the new created order to come. I expected important insights into the science side of the dialog—and was not disappointed—but I was pleasantly surprised by the rewards provided by the various contributions for the continuing development of pneumatology. In particular, the association of pneumatology and the traditional doctrine of divine providence receive fresh analysis in these pages. In the following, I offer a selective preview of these creative and occasionally provocative submissions.

No stranger to the dialog between science and theology, John Polkinghorne offers an essay showing that what may be termed scientific mystery—in the Greek sense of hidden, not the modern sense of inexplicable or puzzling—could very well be the sovereign work of the Spirit. The Spirit works “at the edge of chaos” generating new forms of life, much as one sees depicted in Genesis 1:2 where the Spirit hovers over disorder and vacancy. Polkinghorne recommends science as having the potential to manifest what remains hidden about the work of the Spirit in creation.

Denis Alexander, also a veteran of this dialog, provides a helpful parallel between the Spirit’s work in creation and careful reconstructions of selected events in evolutionary history, in an effort to show that evolution proleptically reveals a pneumatological rubric. The burden to relate biblical wisdom traditions with evolutionary history is lightened considerably with Alexander’s assistance.

Jeffrey Schloss’ contribution is perhaps the strongest in terms of its deep analysis of the intersection of pneumatology, evolutionary biology, and the doctrine of providence. He suggests the sciences may provide “conceptual resources” for identifying and articulating the many ways the “Spirit tills the soil” of human existence. This is a delightful way of talking about the Spirit: at once a nod to the biblical language of Spirit providing the breath of life in the antediluvian soil of the garden resulting in human life, and a clear reference to the tangibility of existence here and now. Schloss advances the pneumatology-providence-science discussion by highlighting the ways “nature” appears to
progress and provide (or follow) direction as if with a purpose given by something or someone. While it would not be fair to say that Schloss has proved the presence of teleology in Darwinian Theory, he has certainly complexified (in a helpful way) the matter substantially.

Some of the more inventive essays come from the Eastern Orthodox contributors. For an example, Vladimir Katasonov develops an imaginative proposal involving the mathematics of infinity and what is called “orthodox name worshipping tradition”—the latter, a topic concerning which I knew very little before reading this piece. The essay enlightens by providing a unique conceptual apparatus to reinvigorate Platonic, Neoplatonist, and even Heideggerian notions of being (or Being) in relation to perceiving the presence and activity of God through Spirit in the world today. When one invokes one of God’s names in worship—Lord, Father, Creator, and so forth—one invokes all of God’s names in worship (Gregory of Nyssa). One of God’s names is the Infinite, a category important to mathematics. For Katasonov, the designation Infinity is the figure or appearance of God’s image in mathematics. And, as he indicates, this holds potential for approaching the ontological condition of being in human life and experience.

Sergey Horujy offers a delightful piece exploring how the Spirit is present in creation. Many contemporary theologians are heavily influenced by panentheism, which claims that God is present in creation. This has led some to conclude that the world is in some sense divine. Horujy, in contrast to such a view, cites approvingly Orthodox theologian John Meyendorf who claimed that “secularization of the cosmos was a Christian idea from the start.” The world is not divine in any way. How, then, is God present if not in the created order? The covenant bond between God and humankind is that which establishes God’s ontological reality in the cosmos—the relation is God–Human, not God–Universe. This is good theology but has potentially negative implications for science; it may make it more difficult, for example, for theologically-minded scientists to establish a connection between the Divine and the world. Despite this potential problem, Horujy’s perspective is an important reminder that Spirit is present in humans in a way that Spirit is not in trees, aardvarks, and sea bass—and this peculiar way of presencing in humans is the manifestation of God’s presence in the world.

Cyril Hovorun offers a hopeful viewpoint of a possible rapport between science and theology using the convergence evident in the church fathers as an example. However, the essay is hampered by an anachronistic bent that diminishes the clear differences between the disciplines that have developed since the first millennium of the church. Moreover, the operating assumption here suggests that science and theology share common methodological approaches,