Loyer has given us a careful and detailed analysis and comparison of Thomas Aquinas and John Wesley on the Holy Spirit, with an emphasis on the Spirit as divine love. This is a significant contribution to the study of both theologians with important implications for contemporary theology. Along with the other excellent comparison of Aquinas and Wesley by Edgardo A. Colón-Emeric on *Wesley, Aquinas & Christian Perfection: An Ecumenical Dialogue*, we now have two major works comparing these two important theologians.

The issue that drives Loyer’s project is his concern that there is a “pneumatological deficit” (2) in contemporary Methodist theology, which takes the form of either language about grace that lacks explicit reference to the triune God or the Holy Spirit, or reducing the work of the Spirit to political agendas. (4) Talk of the Spirit then is reduced to talk about us or the world. (2) Thus there is need for theological grounding for sanctification among Wesleyans. “The primary argument advanced throughout this book,” he says, “rests on the assertion that apart from a massive retrieval effort supported by external assistance, the tradition of John Wesley is imperiled” (4). His candidate for that external assistance is Thomas Aquinas.

Loyer is acutely aware of the challenge of engaging these two very different theologians. In addition to their divergent historical and cultural contexts, Aquinas was a more speculative theologian while Wesley was a practical theologian. Loyer handles these differences with great skill, and in the process shows the advantages of each approach.

He devotes the first two chapters to Wesleyan theology, in the first outlining in detail the deficiencies of contemporary Wesleyanism and the second to an examination of Wesley’s theology. There Wesley is shown to have an understanding of Christian perfection as participation in God, “rooted in the God of perfect love and directed toward communion with this God,” giving the doctrine “an implicitly trinitarian basis and end” (30). The love that sanctifies is God’s love, imparted to persons through the Holy Spirit. It is this same Spirit that gives us the faith to know and love God, enabling our participation in the life of God. He concludes that Wesley provides resources for a “pneumatological theology of holiness and love” but his implicit trinitarianism could be “given greater clarity and depth” (62) for which he then turns to Aquinas.

In chapters 3–5, Loyer examines the theology of the Holy Spirit in Aquinas. Chapter 3, foundational to the rest, presents Aquinas’ argument that the Holy
Spirit is personal love. The question Aquinas addresses is, if the triune God is love, how then can the Spirit be said to be love in a distinctive way? The answer is that, while the Godhead is essentially love, the “Spirit is love proceeding from the Father and Son,” and as the “expression of the love between Father and Son, the Holy Spirit is love in person” (68–69). This also means “that the proper basis of pneumatology is the doctrine of the Trinity” (70).

Having established that the Spirit is love in person, Aquinas discusses the Spirit as the mutual love between the Father and Son. Against two divergent interpretations of Aquinas, Loyer offers his own interpretation by emphasizing how Aquinas first establishes the personhood of the Spirit before examining the Spirit as mutual love. Hence the mutual love is significant but not foundational. From the perspective of origin, the Spirit is a person proceeding from the Father and Son; from the perspective of relation the Spirit is the mutual love or bond between the Father and Son (115–116).

His transition to chapter 5 on the gift of the Spirit is made by the claim that God loves persons with the same love as that of the Father and Spirit for one another (140). The focus of this chapter is on the Christian life. In it the Spirit is described as a gift from God, and as a gift to humanity the Spirit is the gift of love that enables friendship and union with God. This means that the Christian life itself is a gift. Loyer also shows how Aquinas distinguishes the missions of the Son and Spirit: the Son impresses wisdom on that soul and illumines the intellect, while the Spirit impresses love on the soul and kindles affection.

It is in chapter 6 Loyer integrates the two theologies, comparing Aquinas and Wesley on virtues and tempers, assurance of salvation, and merit, finding areas of mutual enrichment and clarification as well as disagreement. He concludes that Aquinas can assist Wesleyans with an explicit trinitarianism that emphasizes the Spirit as love, and a distinction between the operative and cooperative nature of grace that would resolve disputes over the instantaneous and gradual work of the Spirit in Wesley. Wesleyans in turn can aid Thomists in conceiving of Christian perfection as a work of the Spirit available to all believers. Finally, in his brief conclusion, he suggests five paths to further conversation between Thomists and Wesleyans.

While I agree with Loyer that making Wesley’s trinitarianism more explicit would strengthen Wesleyan theology, I wonder if the intricate logic of Aquinas’ scholastic theology is the best way to accomplish that. At the same time some of the careful distinctions Aquinas makes may well assist Wesleyans in explaining more clearly how they see God at work in the Christian life.

This is a book that will not only benefit Wesleyans and Thomists, but Pentecostals, Charismatics and others who have theologies that strongly emphasize the person and work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians. As a study of