In this short book, theology professor and Free Methodist elder Daniel Castelo not only strives to incisively review the key issues that have surrounded Christian theology of the Holy Spirit, but also to offer his own creative proposal for how to resolve some important ecumenical conundrums. The first chapter sets the stage with a discussion of reasons for the marginalization of the Spirit, focusing especially on its indeterminacy, transpersonal character, and tendency to play on or outside the boundaries of both language and life. The second chapter provides a whirlwind tour of biblical “tags, patterns and themes” for giving language to the activity of the Spirit. Their diversity and lack of easy coherence are regarded by some as a problem, but Castelo frames this as a gift that funds Christian responsiveness to diverse times, places, and situations. In the third chapter he succinctly reviews the doctrinal baseline provided by the pneumatological controversies and resolutions of the first six centuries.

In the remaining chapters Castelo’s own focus, which is on the centrality of the living Spirit in Christian life, comes more strongly to the fore. Chapter four deals with the Spirit’s place in creation and cosmology, seeking a way beyond the confrontation between metaphysical naturalism and interventionist supernaturalism. In his view, both parties to this dyad contribute to an assumption that the Spirit is fundamentally irrelevant to ordinary life. His solution is to put the Spirit back at the center of creation, thus recognizing that “Nature is Spirit-graced to its core so that what is fundamentally characteristic of nature is that it is Spirit-related.” (74) He adds that this view makes it possible to believe that people really can be “reconstituted and made anew by the presence and work of the Holy Spirit.” (79)

Chapter five proposes that the Spirit is mediated through what William J. Abraham called “canons,” here defined as “various materials, persons, and practices . . . that are set apart by God’s Spirit so as to help the church grow and mature in its terrestrial sojournings.” (83–84) Scripture is obviously a primary example, but Castelo wants to move beyond a view of “inspiration” that makes it a property of the text itself. Instead, he presents the Spirit as involved in every moment of the scriptural event, from production to inclusion in the canon to translation to biblical criticism to preaching to personal meditation. Through the diversity of meanings that are generated in this way, the Spirit works incessantly for the maturing of human faith.

Chapter six deals with differences among sacramental, evangelical, and Pentecostal views of “baptism in the Spirit.” There is a basic incompatibility in these three views, yet Castelo suggests that all may be able to find consensus in concern for the lifelong maturation and transformation of Christians—what Paul called “being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18). Finally, the concluding chapter explores the classic theme of discernment of the Spirit. The author argues strongly that only an “epicletic”
self—that is, a receptively worshipping self who is actively invoking the Spirit—can discern in the true sense. This excludes approaches to discernment that rely on formulas; the example given is the “Wesleyan quadrilateral” which involves sequentially consulting scripture, tradition, reason, and experience.

This text is styled as a “guide for the perplexed,” but it is probably not the kind of book one would hand to a non-theologically educated general reader or to a brand-new theology student. While it does provide a succinct introduction to classical and contemporary issues in the field of pneumatology, the material presented is at times fairly dense as well as subtle. Also, especially in the latter chapters, Castelo is not just introducing issues, but also arguing for his own creative pneumatological proposals. These proposals are fresh and compelling, and they appear to have potential to be an important contribution to ecumenical conversations on the theology of the Holy Spirit. For those in ministry, Castelo’s insistence that theology must keep its focus on the living Spirit and its role in Christian life makes his perspective quite relevant for pastoral and spiritual purposes. In view of this, I would recommend the book quite highly for upper-level theology courses, as well as for those who have completed a theological course of studies and are interested in a short but highly stimulating reflection on the elusive topic of the Holy Spirit.