Nélida Naveros Cordova  
Loyola University Chicago  
Chicago, Illinois

The first edition of Volker Rabens’s *The Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul* was well enough received that Mohr Siebeck has published this second edition with a number of corrections but the same pagination. In the preface to the second edition Rabens notes that some reviewers misunderstood his arguments, so this second edition tends to clarify such misunderstandings and stresses the goal of his thesis: “How the Spirit enables believers to live according to the values of Paul’s gospel” (vii). Rabens’s study reaches a profound understanding on the ways in which the Spirit in Paul enables ethical conduct. It not only challenges the so-called “infusion-transformation approach” to the empowering work of the Spirit in Paul’s ethics but proposes a new approach. It is “through a deeper knowledge of, and an intimate relationship with God, Jesus and the community of faith that people are transformed and empowered by the Spirit for religious-ethical life” (124).

Following an introduction that systematizes the analysis (ch. 1), the work falls into three parts. Part 1 explores the infusion-transformation approach in Paul’s context (ch. 2) and Paul’s writings (ch. 3). Rabens’s close analysis of Jewish and Hellenistic sources, called upon by the proponents of the infusion-transformation approach, lead him to conclude that neither Hellenism nor Judaism supports the claim that the Spirit is a material substance (Philo is the only exception [79]). Likewise, the *sōma pneumatikon* in 1 Cor
which is used as a major argument for the proponents of a material Spirit, does not truly focus on the Spirit as a material substance. Rabens argues that the focus of the text is rather on the resurrection body (96). In the same way, the “sacramental passages” in 1 Cor 6:11, 10:3–4, and 12:13 do not support the infusion-transformation approach, although Rabens recognizes that Paul’s Spirit language in 1 Cor 12:13c (“drink of the Spirit”) might have evoked Stoic pneumatology in Paul’s audience (120). Rabens’s argument, however, does not support an immaterial Spirit. The first excursus, “The Alleged Concept of the Spirit as Immortal Substance” (82–86), shows that in Paul’s letters there is no evidence of an immaterial concept of the Spirit. There is a great deal to commend Rabens in his detailed and critical examination of previous academic study of the Spirit and ethics in Paul. He not only brings to the surface comprehensively the view of the proponents of the infusion-transformation approach, but he also astutely proves their model wrong.

Part 2 turns to Rabens’s new model of the work of the Spirit in Paul’s ethics: the relational approach. While the infusion-transformation approach is static transformation, his relational model is dynamic and empowering transformation. After defining the terms useful for his argument, Rabens opens the treatment of his new model by arguing that ethical transformation in Paul is the result of the Spirit’s relational work (2 Cor 3:18 [ch. 4]). The believer’s intimate relationships—to God, Christ, and fellow believers—are strengthened and empowered by the Spirit for religious-ethical life. Rabens bases this upon Paul’s context (ch. 5) and Paul’s writings (ch. 6). Rabens argues that early Jewish and Hellenistic sources (Philo, Qumran, traditions based on Ezek 36:25–28 [Jub. 1:23–25; t. Jud. 24:2–3], and Cleanthes’s Hymn to Zeus) demonstrate that intimate relationships were understood as ethically empowering in Paul’s context. In the same manner, Paul’s writings (especially 2 Cor 3:18; Rom 5:5; 8:12–17; Gal 4:1–7; Eph 3:16–19) show that believers are not only transformed and empowered for religious-ethical life by the Spirit but that this transformation creates both a deeper knowledge of God (and Christ) and an intimate relationship with him (e.g., in the “Abba” cry [226]). Although his relational model is attractive, it is not, however, clear how the Spirit creates intimate relationships with God, Christ, and believers. Rabens never mentions “faith in/of Christ,” and one wonders whether “faith” is the means of how the Spirit creates such intimate relationships. Also, one wonders why Rabens does not engage passages from Wisdom of Solomon (e.g., 7:7, 22–25; 9:17) in his main discussion, since they identify the Spirit with ethical guidance (he only quotes some passages from Wisdom of Solomon in one footnote [155]). While Rabens strengthens his argument from Rom 8:12–18 with Gal 4:1–7, since the Spirit plays a role in both passages (especially Rom 8:15 and Gal 4:6–7), he overlooks the fact that Rom 8:12–17 goes beyond Gal 4:1–7 (e.g., in the way Paul describes the role of the Spirit).
Rabens’s further basis to his relational approach is the Spirit’s role in shaping the community of believers for ethical behavior through both spiritual gifts and common participation in the Spirit (Rom 1:11–12; 1 Cor 12–14; Eph 4:11–14; Phil 2:1–3 [237–41]). The Spirit’s power enables common participation in the community where believers move closer to one another. He points out that previous studies overlooked this aspect in Paul’s ethics (242). It is true that 2 Cor 3:18 and Rom 12:17 support his dynamic model, yet it is quite surprising that Rabens does not engage Gal 5:13–6:10 in his discussion. In this section of Galatians as in Rom 8, the Spirit’s role is to lead believers to act ethically. In fact, the presence of maxims in Gal 5:25–6:10 open the door to the possibility that they were directed not only to the ethical life of the individual per se but also to the community of believers. In short, more work needs to be done on the Spirit and ethics in relation to Galatians: How for example do Gal 4:1–7 and 5:13–6:10 demonstrate Paul’s view of the Spirit as empowering and transforming believers for religious-ethical life?

Part 3 turns to the conclusions and their significance for early Jewish and Pauline theology (e.g., for the imperative and indicative in Paul’s concept of sanctification). Rabens’s investigation of texts from early Judaism, Hellenism, and Paul support the view that the Spirit is understood as a moral agent. That is, ethical life is understood as being empowered by deeper knowledge of God and an intimate relationship with him and with the community of believers. At the same time, he has demonstrated that neither Jewish and Hellenistic sources nor Paul provides evidence of a material Spirit. Likewise, there is no indication from such sources that believers are empowered for ethical life through the transformation of a pneuma-Stoff (ch. 7). In fact, the language “drink of the Spirit” in 1 Cor 12:13 does not induce Stoic pneumatology. Rabens’s detailed analysis (against Horn’s and Engberg-Pedersen’s studies [while the former claims the Spirit as a material substance based upon Judaism and Hellenism, the latter suggests a division between either a Stoic or Platonic reading of pneuma in Paul]) leads him keenly to claim that Paul was not interested in viewing the Spirit as either material or immaterial substance (249). Rabens also recognizes that the ethical work of the Spirit in Paul is focused on the Spirit rather than on the work of the believer. The Spirit draws toward God and toward the community of faith; this is a continual process in which the believer is empowered and transformed to live ethically. Rabens concludes his book with a rich overview summarizing 140 years of research on the Spirit and ethics in Paul.

Rabens’s examination has convincingly demonstrated the importance of the Spirit for religious-ethical life. The examination of his relational model is more open to debate. His vision is provocative and worthy of serious debate. Whether or not he carries the day on all of the specific points, he has established the importance of how for Paul the Spirit not only enables religious-ethical life but also transforms and empowers believers through...
deeper knowledge of, and an intimate relationship with God, Christ, and the community of faith. This is a significant accomplishment.