

# Pentecost

Christian Reflection

A SERIES IN FAITH AND ETHICS



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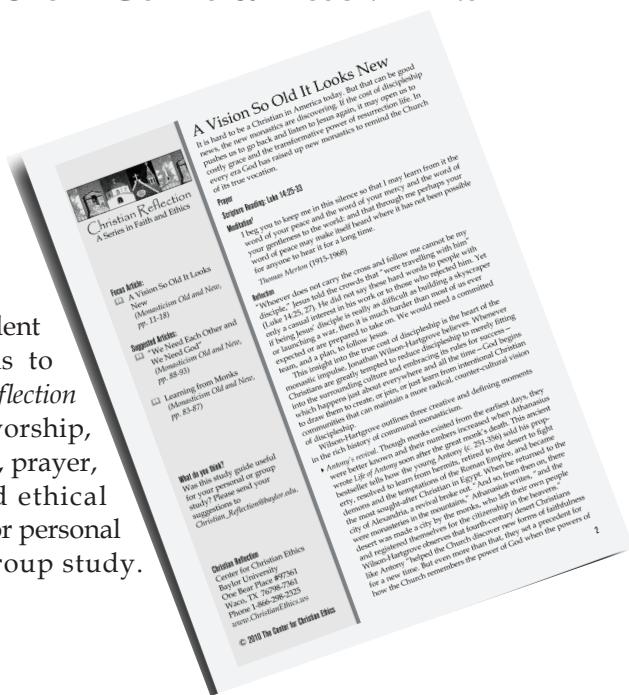
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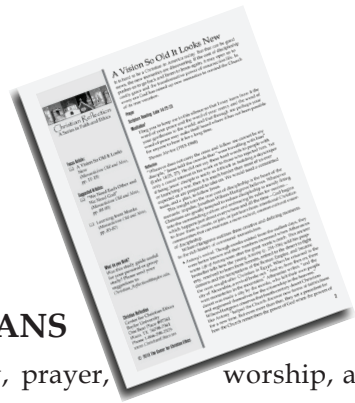
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The Spirit prays for us whether we are aware of it or not, but for our own comfort and confidence it is important that we should be aware of what the Spirit is doing on our behalf. God knows our hearts and is intimately acquainted with our groaning. And that should cause us to love and praise him.

### THE SPIRIT'S "SUPREME AND FIERY FORCE"

Always a pioneer, Hildegard of Bingen is one of the first writers to include illustrations with her text, not as "mere decoration" but as integral to her theology. The importance to her thought of the Holy Spirit—the "supreme and fiery force"—is most evident in these brilliant miniature illuminations.

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# Introduction

B Y R O B E R T B . K R U S C H W I T Z

**On Pentecost Sunday we recall the gift of the Holy Spirit to Jesus' disciples and rejoice in the Spirit's continuing comfort, guidance, and intercession for us today. Our contributors explore the central roles of the Holy Spirit in motivating and guiding our discipleship.**

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**T**his issue joins two earlier ones, *Lent* and *Easter*, in exploring how this second great cycle of preparation, celebration, and rejoicing in the church year should mold our discipleship. On Pentecost Sunday we recall the dramatic gift of the Holy Spirit to Jesus' first disciples and rejoice in the Spirit's continuing comfort, guidance, and intercession for us today.

Robert Jewett has observed that for the early Christians "the Spirit was the Lord's presence among and within believers, evoking obedience," drawing them ever deeper into service in God's kingdom as "the natural expression of spiritual enthusiasm, not the consequence of dutiful obedience to moral obligations or a violation of freedom." He concludes, "The task of Christian ethics is to keep the spiritual current flowing in responsible channels." In this issue our contributors explore the central roles of the Holy Spirit in motivating and guiding the Christian moral life.

Since the crowd who gathered at Pentecost were devout Jews resettled in Jerusalem (perhaps from the Diaspora), Aaron Kuecker assumes they already shared a language. In *The Spirit's Gift and Witness: Communities of Reconciled Difference* (p. 11), he suggests their hearing Christ's Spirit-filled disciples speak to them in their birth-languages was "not the reversal of Babel, but the subversion of shared language as a necessary basis for common identity. At Babel, the proliferation of languages leads to the proliferation of



social identities and profound disunity. At Pentecost, it leads to the formation of one new social identity and profound unity." Luke's story, then, challenges church members today "to offer ourselves to a vision of reconciled diversity so that we might receive and testify to the gift of peaceable community in a world of violence."

The multiple languages puzzled the crowd, and some people scoffed at the disciples. But the Apostle Peter recalled the prophecy of Joel to reorient their interpretation of the moment and the place. "Peter said a new day of the Lord had dawned," Bill Shiell writes in *Revising Memories at Pentecost* (p. 79): the "harvest festival designed to remind them of receiving God's law was transformed into a day to empower them by the Spirit" and the nearby tomb of David became a symbol of the risen Davidic Messiah. In *Dreams, Visions, and Prophecies* (p. 21), Alicia Myers reminds us that Joel's wonderful expectation that "your sons and your daughters shall prophesy" is not as thoroughly fulfilled in the rest of Luke's story as we would hope and might expect. The disciples and their churches in Acts remain imperfect and unfinished by the standards established in the marvelous events of Pentecost.

Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will be an "advocate" or "helper" in our discipleship. How should we understand this? Perhaps we focus too much on "the dramatic events of Pentecost and the marvels of the early church (e.g., speaking in tongues, miraculous healings, and prophecies)," Brandon Dahm notes in *Friendship with the Holy Spirit* (p. 28). He draws our attention to "the ordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit—the ones that grace the Messiah: wisdom, knowledge, understanding, counsel, piety, courage, and fear of the Lord (Isaiah 11:2)—[as]...worthy of our attention as well, for they are part of something equally marvelous: our being drawn into friendship with God." In *When the Holy Spirit Intercedes* (p. 37), Timothy Wiarda explores another important, but mysterious role of the Spirit in praying for us. "The Spirit prays for us whether we are aware of it or not, but for our own comfort and confidence it is important that we should be aware of what the Spirit is doing on our behalf," he writes. "God knows our hearts and is intimately acquainted with our groaning. And that should cause us to love and praise him."

The worship service for Pentecost Sunday (p. 70) by David Music invites us to love and praise God as we follow the first disciples' track from startled confusion to unity of purpose and understanding. The liturgy includes Music's 2010 hymn "A Rushing, Mighty Wind" (p. 67), which recalls when "a Pentecost of tongues explode[d] in praise of Jesus' name," and concludes with this prayer: "Lord, make our breath a wind and let our tongues be fire, / and as at that first Pentecost your people's lives inspire."

Heidi Hornik's *Descent of the Holy Spirit* (p. 44) compares how four artists over ten centuries portrayed "the dramatic arrival of the third person of the Trinity" at Pentecost. She notes that Luke's complex story—with a mighty wind from heaven, tongues of fire on the disciples, the disciples speaking in various languages, and a crowd reacting to this marvel—allows

“an extraordinary level of artistic interpretation and creativity.” Beginning with a 10-11<sup>th</sup> century manuscript illumination, *Descent of the Holy Spirit*, and continuing with Duccio’s *Pentecost* (1311), El Greco’s *The Pentecost* (c. 1600), and Emile Nolde’s *Pentecost* (1909), she examines how the fire is distributed, whether Mary is present, the location of the event, and the role of God the Father in each image.

Theologians struggle to articulate the Spirit’s work in creating the world, inspiring prophets, and drawing all creatures into the love and life of the Trinitarian God. Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) “is one of the first writers to include illustrations with her text, not as ‘mere decoration’ but as integral to her theology,” Carmen Butcher explains in “*Supreme and Fiery Force*” (p. 52). She explores the importance of the Holy Spirit in Hildegard’s thought as expressed through her prose, poetry, and brilliant miniature illuminations.

In *Tracing the Spirit through Scripture* (p. 83), Dalen Jackson commends four recent books that examine how the Holy Spirit is characterized in various parts of Scripture: Christopher H. Wright’s *Knowing the Holy Spirit through the Old Testament*, Amos Yong’s *Who Is the Holy Spirit? A Walk with the Apostles*, Gordon D. Fee’s *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God*, and Anthony Thiselton’s *The Holy Spirit – In Biblical Teaching, through the Centuries, and Today*. Wright reminds us of “the identity, presence, and impact of the Spirit in the Bible before Pentecost.” The last three authors develop their studies “in conversation with perspectives that have developed in Pentecostal movements and in charismatic ‘renewal’ movements within mainline traditions.”

Barbara Mutch admits the study of the person and work of the Holy Spirit is “often polarizing” in the Christian tradition. Yet, in *Who Is the Holy Spirit?* (p. 89) she guides us to resources that employ “careful consideration of Scripture, primary sources, historical interpretation, and personal experience... [to] present a dynamic picture of the Holy Spirit as the One who empowers believers to live, is described in diverse images, serves as the locus of authority for this age, and is experienced at the intersection of inspiration, virtue, and learning.” Craig S. Keener’s *Gift and Giver: The Holy Spirit for Today* focuses on the New Testament to help us “better understand how the Spirit empowers Christians to live.” Phyllis Tickle’s *The Age of the Spirit: How the Ghost of an Ancient Controversy is Shaping the Church* defends the Spirit’s centrality in ethics for our age. Jack Levinson’s *Inspired: The Holy Spirit and the Mind of Faith* emphasizes the Spirit’s role in developing virtue, comprehending the things of God, and interpreting Scripture. Finally, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen’s anthology *Holy Spirit and Salvation* provides “an impressive collection of primary sources on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, briefly situating each within its historical time period and particular context, and then mostly [letting] them speak for themselves.” Mutch concludes, “Readers will be enriched intellectually and encouraged spiritually by time spent in these authors’ good company.” ❖

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# The Spirit's Gift and Witness: Communities of Reconciled Difference

BY A A R O N J . K U E C K E R

**Pentecost marks not the reversal of Babel, but the subversion of shared language as a necessary basis for common identity. At Babel, the proliferation of languages leads to the proliferation of social identities and profound disunity. At Pentecost, it leads to the formation of one new social identity and profound unity.**

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**T**wo of the most significant orienting questions in human existence are “Who am I?” and “Who are my people?” The answers to these questions give us our sense of identity, social location, and belonging. Even in a highly individualistic twenty-first-century American context, the answer to the question “Who am I?” emerges from (and cannot be separated from) the answer to the question “Who are my people?” I am African American. I am Latina. I am a white male. I am Christian. I am Muslim. I am Buddhist. I am a Democrat. I am a Republican. These statements of identity, and countless other examples that we could easily produce, point to deeply personal yet profoundly social identities.

It is frequently at the boundaries of these social identities that antagonism—whether explicit or implicit, passive or active—erupts. The reconciliation of these social identities, history proves, is complex and often tenuous. For

example, the closing months of 2014 brought to the fore the painful American history of race. The shooting of Michael Brown by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, and the powerful reverberations across the United States of that tragedy and similar episodes were but symptoms of a long, tragic history of injustice that exists as an unhealed wound just beneath the surface of America's shared public life. These events bear testimony to the power of identity, which shapes our interpersonal and intergroup relationships in ways that are profound, mysterious, and undeniable.

This narrative of social disintegration is not particularly American. In the world of the New Testament, markers of social identity were perhaps more evident and more closely linked to status, but the strife that comes from competing social identities – particularly ethnic identities – is a social reality shared by the New Testament and contemporary worlds. In the context of typically antagonistic (or just coldly ambivalent) relationships between different social groups, Luke the Evangelist announces the gospel of reconciliation in Jesus Christ by the power of the Spirit. It is the coming of God in Christ that reconciles humanity to God and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, reconciles humans to one another. For Luke, the central work of the Spirit is the formation of a peaceable community of reconciled difference – God's one new humanity, to use a Pauline idiom – whose life and practices bear witness to the reign of God.

### **THE SPIRIT AND THE RECONCILIATION OF DIFFERENCE**

Luke is well known for his vision of salvation that extends to include Israelites and non-Israelites, enfranchised and disenfranchised, men and women, and rich and poor. Yet it is this expansive and hospitable vision of salvation, and the identity-related issues that it creates, which provides much of the narrative tension in Luke-Acts. As the Christian community encounters those who are in some way "other," it again and again must struggle with how to incorporate those who had not been a part of the early church's conception of "my people." It is in these moments of narrative tension at the boundaries of identity that the Holy Spirit bursts upon the scene in the book of Acts. We can see the significance of the Spirit's work at the boundaries of identity if we compare two texts – one before and one after Pentecost – as they describe the practices of the community of Jesus followers toward outsiders.

The climactic moment of the Spirit's identity-forming and reconciling work in Acts comes at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 where one of the central questions in the book comes to its resolution: "Can non-Israelites worship the covenant God of Israel *as non-Israelites*, or must they first be joined to the Israelite ethnic group through circumcision and Torah observance?" The Council's answer is no. Non-Israelites as non-Israelites can worship the God of Israel through Christ by the power of the Spirit. The letter that bears the conciliar decision is remarkable for its implications for identity and intergroup reconciliation within the Church.<sup>1</sup>

The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers from the nations in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings.<sup>2</sup>

*Acts 15:23*

This text has two radical ramifications for the way the Spirit forms a community of reconciled difference. First, aside from one politically expedient letter written nearly two hundred years before Luke-Acts,<sup>3</sup> this text contains the first instance in the Gospels and Acts and, indeed, in Second Temple Israelite literature as a whole, where Israelites refer to non-Israelites as “brothers.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, the Gentiles, whose very existence in Israel’s perspective created an ethnic social category that meant “not one of us,” are here named as belonging to the same people and sharing the same identity as these Israelite followers of Jesus. Second, and equally important, these non-Israelite brothers and sisters are fully brothers and sisters even as they retain their non-Israelite ethnic identities. They are “brothers and sisters from the nations.” In other words, we see here that the criteria for unity and shared identity within the Church is not social homogeneity. This is an important claim to be made, especially in light of postmodern critiques of subtle power plays that level diversity through cultural homogeneity prescribed by the powerful. For Luke, the unity of the Church is not based upon shared cultural patterns, preferences, or practices. Instead, Luke sees the possibility of a community of reconciled difference in which profound intergroup reconciliation can take place without the obliteration of ethnic or gendered identities. This, however, is only possible through the work of the Spirit. After all, the decision of the Council in Acts 15 “seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us [the Israelite Christians in Jerusalem]” (Acts 15:28).

To appreciate Luke’s radical vision in its context, we only need to look at the intergroup behavior of some of those same Israelite

followers of Jesus in Luke 9 prior to the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost. The scene comes as Jesus and the disciples are leaving relatively safe home territory in Galilee for a more perilous time in Judea. There, in the span of just ten verses, Luke narrates three stories that portray the disciples as favoring their own identities at the expense of those who are in some way “other.” Each story is remarkable for its self-centrism and social antagonism.

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**For Luke, the Church is not unified by shared cultural patterns, preferences, or practices. Instead, it is a community of reconciled difference in which intergroup reconciliation can take place without the obliteration of ethnic or gendered identities.**

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First, the disciples argue about which of them was the greatest, manifesting the self-centrism that often attends to personal identity (Luke 9:46-48). Then John attempts to stop ministry in Jesus' name performed by someone outside of the immediate group of disciples (9:49-50). And, finally, James and John offer to call down heavenly fire to consume a village of Samaritans who do not extend hospitality to Jesus and his followers, manifesting perhaps the most ugly and violent instance of inter-ethnic hatred in the New Testament (9:51-55).

For Luke, the ability to exercise love for those who bear competing identities appears to be beyond the grasp of the disciples in the Gospel, perpetually beyond the grasp of those who do not follow Jesus, and very difficult even for the post-Pentecost church in Acts. In Luke's view it is God alone, and those upon whom God has poured out the Holy Spirit, who can practice the kind of self-giving love that results in reconciliation and shared identity with those who are profoundly other.<sup>5</sup> The distance between the self- and group-centrism of the disciples in Luke 9 and the self-giving love of the disciples in Acts 15 is traversed with nothing less than the work of the Spirit of God, and it is to this journey that we now turn.

## **THE SPIRIT AT PENTECOST: FORMING GOD'S ONE NEW HUMANITY**

The initiation of a Christian community of reconciled difference comes at Pentecost. The Pentecost narrative is rich with Old Testament resonances that evoke themes of Mount Sinai, the Temple, and the Tower of Babel. But it is the Babel narrative, with its proliferation of language, whose echo is loudest. Luke tells the story of Pentecost not as the reversal of Babel, but as the subversion of shared language as a necessary basis for common identity. At Babel, the proliferation of languages (and, by extension, the cultural differences created and carried by linguistic diversity) leads to the proliferation of social identities and to profound disunity. At Pentecost, the proliferation of languages leads to the formation of one new social identity and to profound unity. Close attention to the contours of the text illuminates the social implications of the Spirit's work in Jerusalem.

Luke reports that all those gathered for the Pentecost festival were Judeans (Acts 2:5). That is, the group had a shared Israelite ethnic identity.<sup>6</sup> The majority of the crowd was comprised of those who had resettled in Jerusalem after previous existence in the Diaspora. This is evident from Luke's use of the word *katoikountes* in Acts 2:5, a word that means something more permanent than the temporary residency of visitors or pilgrims. Israelite resettlement was common in the first century, as (especially devout) Israelites were often eager to return from the Diaspora to Jerusalem.<sup>7</sup> The diversity of the crowd was not therefore in its ethnic identity, but there was variation in the linguistic identities of the Pentecost crowd. This requires further explanation.

As at least semi-permanent residents of Judea, it is most likely that these Israelites possessed the linguistic skills necessary to communicate in Jerusalem – an assertion underscored by the fact that first-century residents of the Mediterranean basin were overwhelmingly polylingual. The two main trade languages in the early first century were Aramaic (in the eastern Roman Empire) and Greek (in the western Roman Empire). Palestine lay at the overlap of these regions, and the polylinguistic skill of at least some of the residents of this area is exemplified by Paul's use of his Greek and Aramaic linguistic ability to great advantage in Jerusalem (see Acts 21:37, 40; 22:2). In other words, the Pentecost crowd would have had no difficulty understanding the apostolic preaching in at least Greek or Aramaic, and perhaps many in the crowd could have understood both languages. Yet Luke is at pains to tell us that the Spirit empowered the disciples to bear witness to Jesus in what Luke describes as "their own language" (Acts 2:6)<sup>8</sup> and in what the crowd describes as "in the language of our birth" (2:8). These languages were the smaller, localized languages that were spoken in the Mediterranean regions described in the Pentecost catalogue of nations in Acts 2:9-11. It may be hard for twenty-first-century Americans to imagine such a context, but a good analogy is the contemporary linguistic situation in regions of Africa where tribal communities bear their own language or dialect but also have the capacity to speak a more regionalized trade language, such as Swahili. The disciples at Pentecost spoke not in the Aramaic or Greek that would have been shared by most all in the crowd, but in the birth languages of the Diaspora regions from which these Israelites had come. With regard only to the possibility of communication, the linguistic miracle was unnecessary for the proclamation of the gospel to the crowd in Jerusalem.

Yet in another important sense, the linguistic miracle was utterly necessary. The proliferation of languages at Pentecost was a significant step toward the formation of a community whose shared identity is not based upon shared culture or shared language (which is the prime carrier of culture), but instead is based upon the Spirit's gathering of a people under the Lordship of Jesus.<sup>9</sup> The Spirit shaped this community of common identity not by *eliminating* linguistic diversity, but by *amplifying* it. It is not too much to say that the Spirit resisted cultural

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**For Luke, the ability to exercise love for those who bear competing identities appears beyond our grasp. It is God alone, and those upon whom God has poured out the Holy Spirit, who can practice any kind of self-giving love that results in reconciliation and shared identity with those who are profoundly other.**

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homogeneity in the Jesus-movement at Pentecost (and the resulting danger of cultural imperialism) through the proliferation of languages with which the apostles bore witness to Jesus. Peter immediately capitalized on the significance of the Spirit as the central identity marker for followers of Jesus in his quotation of Joel 3:1-5. Citing Joel, he insisted that it is the Spirit (rather than any ethnic or linguistic identity) that ultimately marks humans as slaves belonging to God (Acts 2:17-21, especially 18).

The proximity of this emerging community of reconciled difference to the account of Jesus' ascension must not be overlooked. The Pentecost account ensures that Jesus' exaltation to the right hand of the Father (Acts 2:33-36) is exaltation to a universal lordship. That is, Jesus is not Lord of just one kind, just one cultural group, or just one people out of many. Jesus is Lord of all kinds, of all cultural groups, of all peoples.<sup>10</sup> When the people of God, by the power of the Spirit, live as a community of reconciled difference – where identity is shaped by shared allegiance to Christ and diversity is not crushed in the name of unity – the very presence of the community bears witness to the universal lordship of the God made known in Christ. At Pentecost we see that such a community, and the resulting identity of those who belong to that community, is the work of the Spirit.

### **THE SPIRIT USING COMMUNITIES TO SHAPE IDENTITY**

Pentecost begins the road to the full reconciliation of competing identities under the lordship of Jesus in Acts 15. But that road has many twists and turns in the first half of Acts. Just *how* the Spirit does this transformational work is mysterious. Because Luke writes in narrative and not with the dogmatic claims at home in the New Testament epistles, we have to be content to let Luke *show us* the work of the Spirit in the formation of a community of reconciled difference, even if his chosen genre does not always *tell us* explicitly about the mechanics of the Spirit's transformational work. But once we tune our ears to listen for the appearance of the Spirit at key moments of intergroup contact, we can see that Luke appears to be convinced that the Spirit works in a particular way to create a community of reconciled difference. For Luke, the Spirit does an ongoing work of social re-location, forming a new community that is *constituted by* and *constitutive of* people whose self-giving love allows for deep works of justice and intergroup reconciliation. Participation within this community appears, for Luke, to be the means by which the Spirit continues to shape humans who are disposed toward acts of self-giving love toward those who are "other." At every point in the narrative of Acts, we can see that these communities are simultaneously *a gift of salvation*, functioning as a new family in which followers of Jesus experience a foretaste of God's kingdom, and *an act of witness*, as the peaceable practices of those communities bear testimony to a new way of being human in community. At every turn, the Spirit ensures both that the primary identity of Jesus-followers is their identity in Christ as



members of the people of God and that secondary identities (such as ethnicity) have ongoing salience within a community of reconciled diversity.

The relationship between the Spirit and the practices of the early community of believers could hardly be clearer. Luke's two major descriptions of the early community follow immediately after his first two accounts of the Spirit's irruption into the life of the community. Immediately after Peter's Pentecost proclamation that all who repent and are baptized will receive the Spirit, Luke describes a community of incredible relational solidarity. This community is comprised of Israelites with diverse Diaspora identities, who now share fellowship that crosses socio-economic boundaries. In Acts 4:32-37, on the heels of the church's plea for boldness to witness and a second powerful manifestation of the Spirit (4:29-31), Luke again describes a community of intense social, economic, and spiritual solidarity. In other words, Luke's narrative shows us that the immediate ramifications of the gift of the Spirit is a peaceable community that, here at least, crosses socio-economic and linguistic boundaries.

In Acts, the community functions well whenever believers' identity *in Christ* is their primary identity. However, whenever subgroup identities become primary, injustice and ruptured relationships are close at hand. One initial example of this occurs in Acts 6:1-7. In that short but telling episode, the community's practice of caring for widows breaks down along linguistic lines and favors those with a more prototypically Israelite linguistic identity. In light of the crisis, which is

clearly a failure of apostolic leadership and a reversion to pre-Pentecost models of linguistic identity, it is seven men *full of the Holy Spirit* who are capable of helping the community become the kind of people who can maintain the primacy of their Christian identity while living as a community of reconciled difference. The narrative is clear: when a subgroup identity becomes primary, the community

becomes dysfunctional and perpetuates injustice. It is not an accident that it is believers that, in some noteworthy way, bear the mark of the Spirit who are equipped for work of reconciliation. However, this is not only a "spiritual" decision by the community. The community intentionally selects seven believers who bear Greek names, and hence belong to the disenfranchised group, to remedy this injustice. We see

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**These communities are a gift of salvation, functioning as a new family in which followers of Jesus experience a foretaste of God's kingdom, and an act of witness, as their peaceable practices bear testimony to a new way of being human in community.**

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again that the Spirit resists the destruction of diversity even as it works profound social reconciliation.

On the heels of this event, Luke testifies that the existence of the Church as a peaceable community of reconciled difference is, itself, an act of witness to the lordship of Jesus. Luke tells us that after the healing of the rift in the community, “The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7). This is an important pattern in Acts; there are several occasions where Luke explicitly tells us that the Spirit’s work in shaping this community serves as an act of witness to the surrounding cultures. In Acts 2:47, after the initial description of the unity of the reconciled community, Luke tells us, “And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.” Similarly, after the church reconciles with its murderous enemy, Saul of Tarsus, Luke tells us, “Meanwhile, the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was built up. Living in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers” (9:31). When people of unlike kind live in peace through the Spirit’s work, it is an act of public witness.

If space permitted, we could walk through the text of Acts 8-15, demonstrating again and again the way that the Spirit orchestrates inter-group encounters that lead toward the formation of a community of reconciled difference that is both constituted by and constitutive of believers who are capable of exercising the self-giving love made known by Christ. We see this in the transformation of Peter and John from skepticism about the conversion of Samaritans to their fervent evangelism (see especially Acts 8:25), which is based upon the Spirit’s anointing of Samaritans *as Samaritans*. We see this in the Spirit’s intricate orchestration of Phillip’s encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch, a figure who was a stock character for the grotesque “other” in both Israelite and Roman contexts (8:26-40). We see this in the Spirit’s orchestration not only of Saul’s conversion, but of Saul’s incorporation into the very community that he had sought to destroy (9:1-31). We see this in the Spirit’s orchestration of Peter’s visit to Cornelius, and in the Spirit’s timely confirmation of these Gentiles *as Gentiles* coming to full membership in the people of God (chapter 10).

The Spirit converts *non-believers*, joining them to the people of God and the Spirit continues to convert *believers*, ensuring that their primary identity is in Christ so that they can keep up with God’s expansive work of salvation. Identity in Christ transcends every other identity, and yet the Spirit does not obliterate diversity. To the contrary, it is the Spirit’s preservation of diversity, reconciled in Christ, which bears witness to the fact that Jesus Christ is Lord of all peoples. Within communities like this, the Spirit continues to shape humans marked by the kind of outward-looking love, even toward enemies, that mirrors God’s outward-looking love. This Christ-like love is capable of remarkable acts of reconciliation.

## CONCLUSION

There is much more to be said concerning Luke's vision of the Spirit and the communities and identity it produces. We ought to speak about the cross-shaped life of Jesus, about salvation as participation in God's life of self-giving love, and about what the Spirit's community-forming work means for resources within the Church today. At the very least, perhaps this brief overview helps us to see that the work of intergroup reconciliation and justice-doing that is offered to us as a part of the gift of our shared identity in Christ is not an optional extra tacked on to a more spiritual gospel. In this work of reconciliation, the Church receives the gift of participating in God's kingdom as a colony of new creation whose practices bear witness to the reign of God. Acts shows us in no uncertain terms that church-optional Christianity is not Lukan Christianity. Moreover, Luke presses us to offer ourselves to a vision of reconciled diversity so that we might receive and testify to the gift of peaceable community in a world of violence. This gift comes only from the Spirit, who can enable the legitimately hard work of reconciling and living in peace across lines of ethnic, linguistic, gendered, and economic distance. Given the current reminders of the painful racial disintegration in modern America, the Church would do well to plead for the Spirit to teach it anew how to receive the gift of this deep, multilayered reconciliation. Indeed, communities of this sort would be a powerful public witness in a culture marked with both old scars and new wounds caused by injustice at the boundaries of identity.

## NOTES

1 The significance of the four prohibitions given in the conciliar decision is a debated issue. Markus Bockmeuhl, in *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches: Halakah and the Beginning of Christian Public Ethics* (Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 2000), suggests that they are an early version of the Noachide laws, a later rabbinic notion of a set of laws given to Noah that apply universally to all humans. Richard Bauckham, "James and the Gentiles," in Ben Witherington III, ed., *History, Literature, and Society in the Book of Acts* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 154-184, argues that these prohibitions are drawn from Leviticus, which has a number of laws for foreigners living in the midst of Israel. Ben Witherington III, in *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 460-467, most persuasively in my view, argues that the prohibitions are all connected to practices associated with pagan worship and its public practice. The force of the prohibitions, in Witherington's view is something like, "Stay away from idol worship and its associated practices." This coheres well with Luke's vision of non-Israelites, which typically treats non-Israelites as tending toward the worship of created things (see especially Acts 10:24-26; 14:8-18).

2 This translation follows the NRSV, with the exception of "brothers from the nations," which the NRSV translates as "believers of Gentile origin," thus obscuring the verbal link between the Greek word *adelphoi* (brothers) that is used to describe both the Israelite Christians in Jerusalem and the non-Israelite Christians in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia.

3 Flavius Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 12.225-228; 13.43-45, 163-170. Cf. the parallel account in 1 Maccabees 12:1-23.

4 The Greek *adelphoi* implies "brothers and sisters."

5 Beyond the well-known outward-looking love that earns Jesus a reputation for being a

friend of sinners, tax collectors, and prostitutes (see Luke 15:1-2, for one example), Luke's most direct characterization of the Father in the entire Gospel shows the Father to be characterized by outward-looking enemy love and radical generosity that are meant to be imitated by God's people who share in Jesus' identity as children of the Most High (cf. Luke 1:35): "But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:35-36).

6 This is true, too, for the "proselytes" in Acts 2:10 who had undergone what amounts to an ethnic conversion from their former group to Israelite ethnic identity.

7 The return of Diaspora Israelites to Judea in general and Jerusalem in particular was common in the first century, as is attested by a good deal of both literary and inscriptional evidence. See here Lee I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years*, second edition (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 45-80.

8 It is interesting that "their own" is here again the Greek word *idios*, which is the way Luke deals with possessions and relationships as they are related to identity in the texts from Acts 4 discussed above.

9 This point is even more powerful when we note that there was an increasing expectation in Second Temple Judaism that at the Day of the Lord all people would speak Hebrew, which was thought to be the language of angels, Eve and Adam, and Abraham, according to texts like *The Book of Jubilees* and 4Q464.

10 This concern seems to be similar to Paul's resistance to circumcision and Torah obedience for non-Israelites in Romans: "For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith" (Romans 3:28-30).

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# Dreams, Visions, and Prophecies

BY ALICIA D. MYERS

**Due to the outpouring of God’s Spirit “upon all flesh” at Pentecost, we expect Spirit encounters that resemble it in the rest of Luke’s story. What should we think when his reports of dreams, visions, and fulfilled prophecies in the believing community do not live up to those high expectations?**

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**T**he coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, in a dramatic scene that features wind and fire and multiple languages, is the primary text for Pentecost Sunday worship in Christian traditions. It is read as providing not only a guide for understanding the early Christian communities in the book of Acts, but a standard of experience for contemporary believers.

Peter interprets this marvelous event as fulfilling Joel’s prophecy of the coming salvation on the day of the Lord:

‘In the last days it will be, God declares,  
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,  
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
and your young men shall see visions,  
and your old men shall dream dreams.  
Even upon my slaves, both men and women,  
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;  
and they shall prophesy.’

*Acts 2:17-18*

Yet, as we watch events unfold in the remainder of Acts, this wonderful image of inclusivity – of God’s Spirit being “poured out upon all flesh” –

remains undeveloped, if not directly contradicted, by Luke's focus on the prophetic and visionary experiences of certain Judean, freeborn men.

Given this apparent gap between the promise of Pentecost and the reality of those early communities of believers described in Acts, can or should we regard this story as recording a standard of Christian experience, and if so, in what way? In other words, is God's Spirit really poured out on all flesh?

### **READING THE PENTECOST STORY IN CONTEXT**

The book of Acts continues the narrative that Luke began in his Gospel. "The first book," Luke explains to Theophilus, emphasized Jesus' life and teachings "until the day when he was taken up into heaven" (Acts 1:1-2a); this second one will recount the events subsequent to Jesus' ascension, with special attention given to the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit's arrival in Acts 2 marks a turning point in the story. It fulfills Jesus' promise that his disciples "will receive power" and "will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Thus, it is only after the Holy Spirit comes that the disciples are equipped to move forward from their place of "waiting" in Jerusalem (cf. 1:4).

The disciples only become Jesus' witnesses as they are imbued with this Spirit, who enables them to imitate Jesus' teachings, miraculous works, and manner of suffering and death. Just as Jesus' anointing with the Holy Spirit emphasized his divine appointment and access to God (Luke 3:21-22; 4:1), so it does for the disciples. Like Jesus, they experience greater access to discerning the divine will through visions, angelic visitations, dreams, and prophetic utterances that guide their ministry – both in bringing the message of Jesus to new contexts, and in teaching existing believers how to live with one another faithfully. In this way, the disciples show themselves to be faithful to their Lord and consistent to his commission.

The events of Acts 2, therefore, work in tandem with Jesus' instructions in Acts 1:4-8 to set the stage for the remainder of the narrative. The events recall John's baptismal teaching – that "all flesh shall see the salvation of God" and "I baptize you with water; but.... He [Jesus] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Luke 3:6, 16) – as well as Jesus' promise that the disciples will receive "power from on high" in order that they might be "witnesses" to proclaim the Messiah's name to all nations (Luke 24:44-49). They also echo the guidance provided by the Holy Spirit at many other key points in Luke's Gospel (e.g., 1:15, 35, 41, 67; 2:25-26; 4:1; 10:21 and 12:12).

Yet the coming of the Holy Spirit not only fulfills all of these expectations established in Jesus' ministry, it also realizes the promise of Joel 2:28-29 (3:1-5 LXX).<sup>1</sup> Jesus' disciples are not a drunken rabble, but are filled with God's Spirit and caught up in a prophetic ecstasy; they retell God's mighty deeds in various languages to all present in Jerusalem. In a way that parallels other spiritual possessions in the ancient world, they seem taken over by

God's Spirit.<sup>2</sup> While they are not rendered unintelligible, their dramatic behavior attracts attention and is interpreted by Peter as an eschatological sign for those gathered, both believers and non-believers.

Peter tells the crowd that this event is the outpouring of God's Spirit "upon all flesh." Sons and daughters, old and young – *all* those who are "slaves" of God – are enabled to "prophesy" (*prophēteuō*, 2:17–18) because it is God's Spirit who speaks through them. In a way that transcends classic gender divisions in the ancient world – male, female, and slave – Peter proclaims that God chooses to speak through "all flesh" as a sign of God's ability to save.<sup>3</sup> Peter's version of the Joel passage actually places special emphasis on prophesy by adding a second "and they will prophesy" in Acts 2:18, which does not appear in either the Hebrew or Greek versions of Joel (Joel 2:28 or Joel 3:2 LXX). This addition creates the following parallelism:

- A. And it will be in the last days, says God,
- B. I will pour out from my spirit upon all flesh,
- C. and they will prophesy –
- your sons and daughters,
- and your young ones will vision visions,
- and your old ones will dream dreams,
- and even upon my male slaves and upon my female slaves.
- A.' In those days,
- B.' I will pour out from my spirit,
- C.' and they will prophesy.

The parallelism not only emphasizes prophesy with repetition, it also highlights the inclusive nature of this gift for "all flesh" by bracketing off the precise descriptions – sons, daughters, young, old, and slaves – in these two verses.

Peter claims, therefore, that Joel's words are dramatically actualized in the mixed gender gathering of Spirit-filled believers, as well as the diversity of the "Judeans and proselytes" who have been enabled to hear these words (1:12–15; 2:1–4, 6, 10).<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Peter's emphasis on *these* components from Joel to be evidence of God's Spirit "upon all flesh" – that is, a variety of people seeing visions, dreaming dreams, and, above all, prophesying – provides cues for the audience of Acts to look for as they track the progress of the disciples' witness through the narrative. For example, noticing the variety of Diaspora Judeans and proselytes who have gathered for Pentecost in Acts 2, the audience of Acts is prepared for the welcoming of the Gentiles who will come, beginning in Acts 8 with Philip's baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch, and in Acts 10 with Peter's baptism of Cornelius and his household. In this microcosm of the world's population, gathered at God's Temple in Jerusalem for Pentecost, is a foretaste of the nations whom Isaiah proclaimed would come to worship God.

Yet, if the audience of Acts is prepared for such inclusivity, the characters within Acts are not. In fact, it is *Peter* who needs repeated visions upon a

roof-top as well as a second “outpouring” of God’s Spirit (Acts 10:45) to convince him of Cornelius’s true acceptance by God. The contrast, then, between the Spirit-filled, prophetic Peter of Acts 2 and the conflicted, oppositional Peter of Acts 10 also prepares the audience of Acts for additional narrative twists – perhaps including the surprisingly un-inclusive narration of visions, dreams, and prophecy among *all flesh*.

### **UNREALIZED EXPECTATIONS IN ACTS**

Due to the crucial role of the Pentecost story, we expect Spirit encounters that resemble it in the rest of Luke’s story. In a number of instances our expectations are realized. Just as Joel makes an appearance in Acts 2, other Old Testament figures like Moses, David, and Isaiah repeatedly appear as “prophets” in the narrative, offering words fulfilled either in the past by Jesus’ own ministry or in the narrative present among the disciples (e.g., Acts 3:17-26; 8:26-39; 13:27-41; 15:15-18; 26:22-27; 28:23-30). In this way, Luke emphasizes that the Spirit that inspires these believers is the same Spirit active throughout Israel’s history.

Angelic visions and dreams occur at crucial plot points in Acts. Stephen’s vision of Jesus at the right hand of God (Acts 7:54–56) not only reinforces Peter’s interpretation of Psalm 110 offered in Acts 2:32–36, but also sets the stage for the disciples moving beyond Jerusalem in Acts 8. The well-known vision of Paul on his way to Damascus (Acts 9:3-7; cf. 22:6-11; 26:12-18), is paired with Ananias’s more detailed vision to heal and instruct Paul in spite of Ananias’s understandable resistance (9:10-16). Indeed, from chapter 16 onward, it is Paul who most regularly experiences dreams and visions, which guide his ministry and travels to Jerusalem and onward to Rome (16:6–10; 18:9–10; 22:17–21; 23:11). Cornelius and Peter’s visions in Acts 10 also feature prominently in Acts’ plot. These visions enable Peter to interpret properly the “Second Pentecost” scene in 10:45 – when the Holy Spirit is again “poured out” on Cornelius’s household – and later they act as divine proofs for others to verify God’s inclusion of the Gentiles in Acts 11:1-18 and 15:6-21.

These various visions and dreams, as well as the prophetic interpretations offered of them, remain consistent with the introduction of the Spirit’s activity in Acts 2. They continually point us back to Acts 2, reminding us of the realization of Joel’s words in the believing community. The visions, dreams, and fulfilled prophecies experienced by men like Stephen, Paul, and Peter anchor them firmly in the outpouring of God’s Spirit, thereby adding to the legitimacy of their ministry even in the face of frequent and often violent persecutions. Such signs and wonders lead us to agree that these leaders are following God’s will rather than the human authorities that threaten them (Acts 5:29).

Yet, in other ways these reports of the activities of God’s Spirit within the believing community do not live up to the expectations established by



Acts 2:17–18. In fact, the clustering of visions and dreams upon a select group of Judean, freeborn men appears to undercut the very promise of Joel on which their authority is built—namely, that God’s Spirit would not be limited, but would be “poured out upon *all flesh*” (2:17). The participation of prophetic women and slaves in Acts, therefore, is surprisingly sparse. For instance, there is nothing comparable to the lengthy Song of Mary, or *Magnificat*, (Luke 1:46–55) for the women and enslaved believers of Acts. Instead, when women and slaves do appear, they are either silent or silenced by the narrator and events of the narrative. Thus, the slave girl, Rhoda, is ignored and becomes an object of comic relief even when she reports accurately of Peter’s return from prison (Acts 12:12–17). Lydia of Philippi speaks only briefly and she does not have a visionary experience to inaugurate her conversion (16:11–15) as Cornelius did in chapter 10. When the unnamed slave girl possessed by a Pythian spirit proclaims Paul and his companions’ identities correctly as “slaves of the Most High God,” she is not credited with “prophesying” (*prophēteuō*, 2:17–18), but rather “divining” or “giving oracles” (*manteuomai*, 16:16). Moreover, “annoyed” by her behavior, Paul silences the Pythia within her (16:18). In so doing, he demonstrates the triumph of Jesus over other spirits, but nevertheless his actions show no regard for the slave; she is left without explicit reception of salvation *and* without value for her owners, the ones who remain firmly in control her physical fate. Even the one group of women noted for their prophetic gifts in Acts, the four “unmarried/virgin” daughters of Philip, never speak. Instead, Luke introduces the women and then abruptly recounts the words of the Judean male prophet, Agabus, who warns Paul of his impending arrest in Jerusalem (21:8–11). Is it any wonder, then, that Beverly Roberts Gaventa asks: “What ever happened to those prophesying daughters?”<sup>5</sup> We might also add, “and slaves?” If God’s Spirit has truly been poured out on all flesh as Peter claims, then why do we not see more consistent evidence of this in Acts?

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**The participation of prophetic women and slaves in Acts is surprisingly sparse. If God’s Spirit has truly been poured out on all flesh as Peter claims, then why do we not see more consistent evidence of this in Luke’s narrative?**

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## **DREAMS, VISIONS, AND PROPHECY BEYOND ACTS**

These observations raise larger questions regarding the role of the Bible for contemporary believers. What is the role of the Bible in guiding our own

experiences in the faith? Should we expect outpourings of the Spirit that are similar to Acts – and if so, in what ways? Can God’s Spirit be manifest in *any* believer – be they a son *or* a daughter, young *or* old – anyone who is a “slave” of the Lord as Peter’s quotation of Joel indicates, but Acts nevertheless leaves partially unrealized?

When engaging these questions with my students, we often find that the biblical books we study and hold dear are much more complex and open-ended than we first expect or acknowledge. Context matters when we interpret Scripture, both the ancient context and our own. It is important that we identify what we understand the Bible to be, and what we expect these passages to provide for believers today. Rather than a book of one-to-one correspondences that need only be mapped onto current conditions, these biblical books – Acts included – communicate messages rooted in ancient expectations that must be analyzed before they are applied to contemporary settings. While such a move may not – and indeed often does not – answer all our questions about a biblical passage, it does provide us a way to understand and appreciate these passages, even when they confuse, confound, and, yes, disappoint.

Returning to Gaventa’s work on Acts, she helpfully reminds us that when approaching Luke’s vision of the Spirit’s activities, it is important to compare Luke to his own context, and not only our own. In this way, she suggests that while Luke’s presentation of women and slaves is less than what we would hope for, his narrative does offer glimpses of women who operate in “relative independence” from male controls (e.g., John Mark’s mother, Jesus’ mother, Lydia, and Tabitha).<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Lydia even “prevails” over Paul to convince him to stay with her while in Philippi (16:15). Women and slaves are never denied access to God’s Spirit in Acts. Thus, while Luke may not be explicit about the visions and dreams experienced by these and other women and slaves in Acts, he “does not go out of his way to depict male power over females” either, when compared to literature of his era.<sup>7</sup> The brief mention of the “daughters” of Philip in Acts 21, therefore, is not only a disappointment in contrast to the fuller report of Agabus’s words, but also a positive hint at the greater reality of their speech that falls outside the plot of Acts. Like Peter, who in Acts 2 certainly could not have fathomed the inclusion of Gentiles that was to come in subsequent chapters, perhaps Luke likewise would be surprised at the fuller realization of God’s declaration in Joel 2 in other chapters of the Christian tradition. Perhaps the confines of his narrative account or vision, or both, led him to emphasize God’s Spirit upon certain Judean, freeborn men. Nevertheless, in so doing, Luke leaves plenty of room for the telling of God’s involvement with humanity outside his own plot – which is, after all, only one story in the midst of so many others both inside the New Testament and beyond it.

Such a hopeful reading, however, should not prevent us from asking questions and indeed challenging the gaps in Luke’s narrative. Rather, tak-

ing Scripture seriously as believers means we must persist! This persistence encourages us to push against the seams, to find the gaps and plumb them in our Spirit-filled desire to understand God more clearly. Acknowledging the continued activity of God's Spirit even in this day, we too proclaim the reality of the last days when we offer witness and when we listen to the prophetic voices of those on the margins.

While such demonstrations of God's Spirit "upon all flesh" may have surprised Luke, they are faithful to God's all-inclusive message of salvation he reports. The freedom and inclusion granted by God's Spirit in this Pentecost time invites all of us to continue reading, reflecting, and even challenging passages like Acts 2, the larger narrative of Acts, and Scripture as whole. Without such questions we run the risk of divorcing these passages from their contexts and, therefore, missing the reality of God's interaction with human believers in the ancient world as well as in our time.

## NOTES

1 "LXX" is the abbreviation for the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament and some related materials), which is called the Septuagint. Luke's citations of Scripture in both his Gospel and Acts regularly correspond more closely to LXX versions rather than Hebrew versions, indicating that he worked with these Greek materials.

2 On expectations surrounding spirit possessions in the ancient world, see Pamela E. Kinlaw, *The Christ is Jesus: Metamorphosis, Possession, and Johannine Christology*, Academia Biblica, 18 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 41–67.

3 The ancients attributed a feminine status to slaves, who could not defend their own bodies or honor as freeborn men could. The inclusion of slaves (alongside "daughters") among the ones receiving God's Spirit demonstrates a full *gender* inclusivity beyond biological categories of sex. For more on this topic, see Jennifer A. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2006 [2002]).

4 In agreement with the Venerable Bede (673–735), Mikeal C. Parsons suggests that the miracles of Pentecost are speaking *and* hearing (*Acts*, Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008], 50).

5 Beverly Gaventa, "What Ever Happened to Those Prophesying Daughters?" in Amy-Jill Levine with Marianne Blickenstaff, eds., *A Feminist Companion to the Acts of the Apostles* (London, UK: T&T Clark, 2004), 49–60.

6 *Ibid.*, 55.

7 *Ibid.*, 58.



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# Friendship with the Holy Spirit

BY BRANDON DAHM

**The marvel of God making us friends is given practical contours through the gifts of the Spirit, which are interpersonal dispositions that allow us to relate to God. By living through these gifts, we live in personal contact with the Gift—the Holy Spirit.**

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**W**ho is the Holy Spirit? That question can be difficult for us to answer, in part because we pay less attention to the Holy Spirit than to the other persons of the Holy Trinity. We pray familiar prayers to God the Father (“Our Father who art in heaven...”) and our imaginations are filled with arresting images of God the Son in the Gospels, but God the Spirit does not seem so much like a person. When the new Testament depicts the Holy Spirit as like a dove that descends from heaven during Jesus’ baptism (Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; and John 1:32) or as tongues of fire resting on the disciples at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4), these images are not personal in the way the Father and Jesus are. Perhaps more personal is Jesus’ description of the Spirit’s role in our discipleship, as like an “advocate” or “helper” or “someone else to stand by you” (John 14:16-17, 26).<sup>1</sup>

Often when we try to flesh out this role of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we focus on the dramatic events of Pentecost and the marvels of the early church (e.g., speaking in tongues, miraculous healings, and prophecies). When I was in seminary, we debated whether these gifts of the Spirit

continue to this day and whether we should seek them. These are important questions. But the ordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit – the ones that grace the Messiah: wisdom, knowledge, understanding, counsel, piety, courage, and fear of the Lord (Isaiah 11:2) – are worthy of our attention as well, for they are part of something equally marvelous: our being drawn into friendship with God.

In this article I will borrow from the writings of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) to reflect on these ordinary gifts and roles of the Holy Spirit in our discipleship. Aquinas draws special attention to one of the Spirit's proper names: Gift. The way that he unpacks this important name can help us better understand how to relate at a more personal level to the Holy Spirit.



Aquinas worked within the long tradition of Trinitarian theology that recognizes the Holy Spirit as the love between the Father and the Son. Thus, he notes, one proper name of the Holy Spirit is Love. He goes on to point out

...it is manifest that love has the nature of a first gift, through which all free gifts are given. So since the Holy Spirit proceeds as love... he proceeds as the first gift. Hence Augustine says (*On the Trinity*, xv, 24): "By the gift, which is the Holy Spirit, many particular gifts are portioned out to the members of Christ."<sup>2</sup>

In other words, within his very nature as Love, the Holy Spirit has the aptitude for being given to others. We see this aptitude in Christ promising to send the Gift to his disciples in order that they may love others as he does (John 14:15-30).

Thus, the Holy Spirit is both Love and Gift. But why are these facts so important, and how do they help us encounter the Holy Spirit as a person? To answer those questions, Aquinas examines the nature of personal relationships.

From antiquity, friendship was considered to be the most significant and rich relationship possible between persons. But the ancients could not imagine any friendship existing between a human being and a divine being. That was because friends must be equal in some way, they must share something in common. Thus, the philosopher Aristotle (384-322 BC) reasoned that any friendship between a king and a peasant must be strained at best and that friendship would become impossible when "one side is removed at a great distance – as god is."<sup>3</sup> The Christian God, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, is transcendent beyond what Aristotle thought. Thus, any friendship between a human being and the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would seem to be even less likely. But, according to Aquinas, this deep relationship is precisely what the sharing of the Holy Spirit – the giving of the Gift – accomplishes.

For Aquinas, a Christian's relationship with God begins with an infusion of God's grace (i.e., a gift) that includes the three virtues enumerated by the Apostle Paul—faith, hope, and love (or charity, from the Latin *caritas*). While many other important virtues, like prudence, justice, courage, and temperance, are “natural” in the sense that we can gradually develop them by living in the ways recommended to us by wise men and women, we cannot work ourselves up to these three—faith, hope, and love; we can only receive them as a gift from God. That is why they are called “theological” virtues. As Paul explains, “the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13). This suggests to Aquinas that it is this love, poured into us by the Holy Spirit, who is Love, which enables us to be friends of God.

Recall that friendship requires that the friends share something in common, but on our own (as the ancients rightly anticipated) we can have nothing in common with God. So our relationship with God is only possible if God communicates God's life to us, which is Love. And this is what God does when, through the Spirit, he gifts us with the divine love.<sup>4</sup>

In a sermon on Pentecost, Aquinas comments on the psalmist's praise of God as the sustainer of all creatures:

When you send forth your spirit, they are created;  
and you renew the face of the ground.

*Psalm 104:30*

In like way, Aquinas explains, we are created anew when we receive God's love: “Love (*caritas*) gives life to the soul, for just as the body lives through the soul, so the soul lives through God, and God dwells in us through love (*caritas*).” He goes on to relate this to Paul's teaching: “From where is this love (*caritas*) in us? From the Holy Spirit, as the Apostle says: ‘The love (*caritas*) of God is spread in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who is given to us’ (Romans 5:5).”<sup>5</sup> Elsewhere in his commentary on Romans, Aquinas expands on this verse:

For the Holy Spirit, who is the love of the Father and of the Son, to be given to us is our being brought to participate in the love who is the Holy Spirit, and by this participation we are made lovers of God.<sup>6</sup>

A friendship between unequals is thus established by God sharing his life with us.



Our becoming friends of God despite our immeasurable inferiority is a greater marvel than tongues or even healings. Yet, Aquinas's account of it remains abstract. How does God sharing the divine life change our lives in

the concrete? For this we need a more experiential account of our receiving the virtues and gifts infused in us by God's grace.<sup>7</sup>

Let's begin with two relevant psychological concepts: second-person awareness<sup>8</sup> and joint attention. A second-person experience of another must have these characteristics: you are aware of the other person as a person, your personal interaction with the other person is relatively direct and immediate, and that person is conscious.<sup>9</sup> It is called a "second-person" experience for a reason. It is not reducible to introspective knowledge about one's own self (which would be first-person knowledge) because it requires knowledge of the other person. And it is not reducible to knowing true propositions about the other person, or knowing about that person through another person's experience (third-person knowledge) because it requires experience of the person as a person.

Psychologists use the concept of irreducibly second-person experience to describe cases of autism spectrum disorder. Autistic persons know about other persons (that is, they know a lot of true propositions about them), but do not see and interact with them as persons.<sup>10</sup> That is, they possess third-person knowledge but not second-person awareness of others. In order to have second-person awareness of others, we must see them as persons in light of their desires, history, preferences, motivations, and so on. In short, the difference between third-person and second-person knowledge of others is like the difference between looking at them and looking into their eyes.

Second-person awareness – an awareness of a person as a person – is often accompanied by joint attention. To jointly attend to some object is to share a stance toward that object with another person. Andrew Pinsent writes, "The key point is that although it is the object, rather than the other person, that is the focus of one's attention, the presence and attention of the other person seem to make a qualitative difference to one's experience."<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, as Peter Hobson explains, one "needs to be aware of the object or event as the focus of the other person's attention."<sup>12</sup>

Two examples will help make the nature of joint attention clear. Suppose you are watching a movie with mildly violent or sexual content, but you are so engaged in the narrative of the movie that you aren't paying attention to its vulgarities. Then your grandmother comes and sits beside you. Instead of just being aware of the story in the movie, you are now also aware, maybe even predominately so, of your grandma's perspective on the movie. Although attending to the movie, you are also attending to your grandmother's values, motivation structures, tastes, personality, and so on. That is, you have a joint attention with her of the movie. This is a consequence of second-person knowledge because you are seeing the film in light of your understanding of the person of your grandmother. Something similar happens when you bring a friend from another denomination to church with you. For example, when I bring my Reformed family to Mass with me, I am now aware of the liturgy and homily through their beliefs, concerns,

histories, and sensitivities in a way I'm normally not. I share a stance with them: I see the Mass through their eyes.

Something similar happens as we grow in the life of the Spirit. As we grow in friendship with God, we begin to have second-person awareness of God in our ordinary lives and this can lead us to jointly attend to daily events with God.

The experience of prayer is an example. John Vianney, who served as the curé or parish priest of Ars, France in the early nineteenth century, tells a story about a local peasant who often spent long hours sitting in prayer. Curious about this, Vianney one day asked the man what was going on in his mind.

"Going on in my mind, M'sieur Curé?" The old man smiled. "Nothing. I am not much good at thinking, nor do I know many prayers. So I just sit here, as you see, looking at God. I look at Him and He looks at me. That is all."<sup>13</sup>

As two lovers might look into each other's eyes, the peasant, aware that God was looking at him, simply looked at God. The man's prayer was clearly a second-person experience of God.



We can now use these concepts of second-person awareness and joint attention to understand how the ordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit – wisdom, knowledge, understanding, counsel, piety, courage, and fear of the Lord – can thoroughly transform us into friends of God. Aquinas notes that the Holy Spirit, or Gift, who is poured into our hearts, "reaches to the perfecting of all the moral habits and acts of the soul."<sup>14</sup> In other words, the divine love (*caritas*) does not just provide an additional motivation to care for others, but it reshapes for the best every aspect of our thinking, feeling, and acting.

In general, the gifts of the Holy Spirit make us open to God's guidance. They "dispose all the powers of the soul to be amenable to the divine motion" and "perfect the soul's powers in relation to the Holy Spirit their Mover," Aquinas writes.<sup>15</sup> Columba Marmion (1858-1923), an Irish, Benedictine monk, puts it this way: as we embrace the Gift and the gifts, we receive "a supernatural tact [or keen sense], a divine instinct of spiritual things" by which we can know, embrace, and obey the inspirations of the Holy Spirit "promptly and easily."<sup>16</sup>

Two gifts of the Holy Spirit transform our intellectual life, with *understanding* helping us grasp supernatural things, and *knowledge* helping us recognize the things we should believe.<sup>17</sup> The second-personal aspect of knowledge becomes clear in Marmion's explanation:



The gift of knowledge makes us see created things in a supernatural way only as a child of God can see them. ... The child of God sees creation in the light of the Holy Spirit, as the work of God wherein His eternal Perfections are reflected.<sup>18</sup>

By these gifts, then, we share a perspective toward the world with the Holy Spirit.

Although *wisdom* might also seem like a merely intellectual gift, Aquinas connects it more closely to love, because it enables us not only to think about but also “judge aright about [divine things] on account of connaturality with them.”<sup>19</sup> By “connaturality” he means a sympathy that is grounded in a similar nature. An example will show it is a familiar concept. As a husband and wife grow together through their marital love, they come to share attitudes and emotions. Thus, the husband will have a spontaneous, sympathetic understanding of his wife’s emotional state after a disappointment at work. Through his love for her, he connaturally recognizes that something is wrong. By wisdom, we connaturally recognize, and moreover, delight in, the things of God. As Marmion says, wisdom “is an intimate, deep knowledge that relishes the things of God.”<sup>20</sup>

The gifts of *counsel* and *courage* are helpfully paired. “By the gift of counsel, the Holy Spirit responds to this prayer of the soul: ‘Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do!’” writes Marmion.<sup>21</sup> It is through this gift that we share a stance with God about

what we should do. Yet, actually doing what we should do is often difficult, and may be beyond what we are capable of achieving in our fallen state. The gift of courage sustains us in such difficult situations.

Aquinas explains: “A certain confidence of [everlasting life] is infused into the mind by the Holy Spirit who expels any fear of the contrary. It is in this sense that courage is

reckoned a gift of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>22</sup> Andrew Pinsent, who has argued persuasively for the gifts being second-person traits, explains how the gift of courage also involves joint attention: “Being moved by the gift of courage can therefore be interpreted as a sharing in God’s confidence that a good outcome is possible, in the face of every particular danger on the way to eternal life.”<sup>23</sup>

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**The gifts of the Holy Spirit make us open to God’s guidance. As we embrace the Gift and the gifts, we receive “a supernatural [keen sense], a divine instinct of spiritual things” by which we know, embrace, and obey the inspirations of Spirit “promptly and easily.”**

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The gifts of *piety* and *fear of the Lord*, according to Marmot, are complimentary: “Far from excluding each other, these dispositions can be perfectly allied; but it is the Holy Spirit Who will teach us in what measure they are to be harmonized.”<sup>24</sup> Let’s look first at the fear of the Lord, for it is often misunderstood today. Recall that according to Isaiah this gift, like the others, is best exemplified in the Messiah; so, it cannot refer to groveling, servile fear of divine punishment. The Apostle Paul teaches that when we are redeemed, we become children of God: “God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God” (Galatians 4:6-7). One implication of our new status, Aquinas suggests, is that we come to fear God in a very different way – not as a slave fears to be punished by a vengeful master, but as a child fears to abuse the trust and respect of a loving parent. The gift of fear, therefore, is filial fear, which is tied to our love of God: “Filial fear must needs increase when love increases,” Aquinas explains. “For the more one loves a person, the more one fears to offend him and to be separated from him.”<sup>25</sup> Filial fear is closely tied to piety because the gift of piety inclines our affection towards God the Father. Through our love of our Father, we also have affection for others because God is their Father. The “gift of piety implants in us, as in Jesus, the tendency to refer everything to our Father.”<sup>26</sup> We thus attend to our lives with the Holy Spirit, and this includes our being alert to the danger, in errant thoughts and deeds, of hurting our friendship with God.

Through the gifts of the Holy Spirit, then, God shares the divine life with us. Each one “can be interpreted as *participating in God’s stance* toward various matters.”<sup>27</sup>



More than any human relationship of deepest affection and trust, friendship with the Holy Spirit requires our proper attention. “The action of the Spirit in the soul is delicate because it is an action of completeness, of perfection,” Marmion observes; “His touches are of infinite delicacy.”<sup>28</sup> We must especially avoid deliberate and calculated resistance to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, because such resistance is incompatible with love and therefore with Love.

Marmion also urges us to invoke the Holy Spirit: “Like the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit is God; He too desires our holiness.”<sup>29</sup> An old Latin hymn, *Veni Sancte Spiritus*, traditionally sung at Pentecost services, is the sort of entreaty Marmion commends:

Come, Holy Ghost, send down those beams,  
which sweetly flow in silent streams  
from thy bright throne above.

O come, thou Father of the poor;  
 O come, thou source of all our store,  
 come, fill our hearts with love. . . .

Grant to thy faithful, dearest Lord,  
 whose only hope is thy sure word,  
 the sevenfold gifts of grace.

Grant us in life thy grace that we,  
 in peace may die and ever be,  
 in joy before thy face.

Amen. Alleluia.

The marvel of God making us friends is given practical contours through the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, which are interpersonal dispositions that allow us to relate to God. By having joint attention with God, we can then have second-person awareness of the Holy Spirit. Recognizing this is one way of engaging in what Brother Lawrence calls “practicing the presence of God.” By living through the gifts, we live in personal contact with the Holy Spirit. Once we realize we are sharing a stance with the Holy Spirit, we realize we are in personal relationship with the Gift. In short, we look at the Holy Spirit while the Holy Spirit looks at us.

## NOTES

1 The last is J. B. Phillips’s dynamic translation of *paraklēton* in *The New Testament in Modern English* (New York: Touchstone, 1996 [1958]).

2 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, Q 38, a 1. My translations of the *Summa Theologiae* (hereafter, *ST*) are drawn, with minor changes, from the English Dominican Brothers translation. For instance, I change their translation of “*sancta spiritus*” from “Holy Ghost” to “Holy Spirit.”

3 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VIII, 7 (1159a4-7), translated by Roger Crisp (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 152.

4 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, Q 23, a 1.

5 Thomas Aquinas, “Sermon 11: *Emitte spiritum*,” in *The Academic Sermons, The Fathers of the Church: Mediaeval Continuation*, translated by Mark-Robin Hoogland, C.P. (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 149-150.

6 Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans* (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), 5:2:392.

7 My reading of Aquinas in this and the next section is deeply indebted to Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Evil* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), and Andrew Pinsent, *The Second-Person Perspective in Aquinas’s Ethics: Virtues and Gifts* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

8 Although the psychological literature identifies technical differences among second person “experience,” “awareness,” and “knowledge,” I will be using these terms fluidly to refer to the same range of phenomena.

9 Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 75.

10 *Ibid.*, 65-73. On the use of second-person experience and joint attention to understand autism spectrum disorder, see Pinsent, *The Second-Person Perspective*, 41 ff., and Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 64 ff. and 112 ff.

11 Pinsent, *The Second-Person Perspective*, 42.

12 Peter Hobson, "What Puts the Jointness into Joint Attention?" in Naomi Eilan, et al., eds., *Joint Attention: Communication and Other Minds*, Issues in Philosophy and Psychology (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 185-204, here citing 185.

13 Milton Lomask, *The Curé of Ars: The Priest Who Outtalked the Devil* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1998 [1958]), 114.

14 Aquinas, *Commentary on Romans*, 5:2:392.

15 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ*, I-II, Q 68, a 8.

16 Columba Marmion, *Christ the Life of the Soul* (Tacoma, WA: Angelica Press, 2012 [1925]), 118.

17 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ*, II-II, Q 9, a 1.

18 Marmion, *Christ the Life of the Soul*, 122.

19 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ*, II-II, Q 45, a 2.

20 Marmion, *Christ the Life of the Soul*, 120.

21 Ibid. 121.

22 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ*, II-II, Q 139, a 1.

23 Pinsent, *The Second-Person Perspective*, 55.

24 Marmion, *Christ the Life of the Soul*, 122-123.

25 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ*, II-II, Q 121, a 1, reply 3.

26 Marmion, *Christ the Life of the Soul*, 123.

27 Pinsent, *The Second-Person Perspective*, 54.

28 Marmion, *Christ the Life of the Soul*, 125.

29 Ibid. 124.

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# When the Holy Spirit Intercedes

BY TIMOTHY J. WIARDA

**The Spirit prays for us whether we are aware of it or not, but for our own comfort and confidence it is important that we should be aware of what the Spirit is doing on our behalf. God knows our hearts and is intimately acquainted with our groaning. And that should cause us to love and praise him.**

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**I**n Romans 8:26-27 the Apostle Paul says the Spirit intercedes for Christian believers: “In the same way the Spirit also helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what we should pray, but the Spirit himself intercedes with groans not expressed in words. And the one who searches hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because he intercedes for the saints according to God’s will” (my translation).

What does Paul mean in this passage and how can what he says impact our lives? As a first step towards answering these questions we must establish whether Paul actually means to say that the Holy Spirit prays for us. This issue must be faced because, when we think about it, the idea that the Spirit communicates with God on our behalf is puzzling. There are at least two reasons why this is so. First, if on the basis of the total testimony of Scripture (including that of Paul himself) we believe in one God who eternally exists in three Persons, then to speak of one Person of the Godhead interceding with another seems to run counter to what we understand about the unity of God. It would imply that one Person needs to inform another of something

he does not already know, or seek some benefit for us that God the Three-in-One does not already plan to give. Second, Paul together with other New Testament writers typically portrays the Spirit directing his actions earthward and human-ward. The Spirit opens hearts, strengthens faith, influences behavior, engenders praise, and enables response to God. When the Spirit communicates, he communicates to and through people on behalf of God. An action of the Spirit directed purely toward God would therefore break this Pauline and wider biblical pattern.

This latter factor has resulted in interpreters taking two significantly different approaches to Paul's words. Many commentators think that Paul speaks about the Spirit working in or alongside believers, helping *them* to pray. According to this view, at least part of the Spirit's intercession happens in and through the prayers he enables *us* to utter. But other interpreters insist that Paul is not thinking about our prayers at all. Instead, he is referring to actual communication that takes place directly and entirely between the Holy Spirit and God. For our present purposes it is not necessary to prove one of these views absolutely right and the other absolutely wrong. But we do need to establish where Paul's *primary* point and rhetorical emphasis lies. Is he primarily telling believers about the Spirit's activity in them or does he instead highlight something the Spirit does in relation to God? To put it another way, is Romans 8:26-27 primarily a text about Christian experience or Christian spirituality, or is it primarily designed to tell us something about God and his care for us?

I argue for the latter, that Paul points his readers first and foremost to an activity of God's Spirit lying outside of our own experience, an activity of communication, mysterious though it may be, directed toward God. But before explaining why this is the best way to understand Paul's words, let me mention two strong arguments that might be made in favor of the alternative interpretation, that Paul refers to the Spirit's work of enabling believers to pray. First, it must be admitted that a work in and through believers fits the predominant pattern of the Spirit's activity as Paul depicts it throughout his epistles. Second, in Romans 8:15, just a few verses before his reference to the Spirit interceding, Paul describes Spirit-enabled believers crying out, "*Abba, Father.*" So Paul definitely does teach that the Spirit helps believers to pray. And what is even more striking, in a closely parallel statement in Galatians 4:6 Paul changes his wording to say that it is the indwelling *Spirit* who cries out, "*Abba, Father.*" It is thus clear that Paul can speak of Spirit-influenced prayer as something the Spirit himself does. These arguments show that there is nothing unbiblical or un-Pauline about the idea that the Spirit works in the hearts of believers, helping them to pray, guiding their prayers, or even praying through them. But it is unlikely that this is the focus of Paul's thought in Romans 8:26-27.

Several factors support the view that Paul's primary thought concerns an activity that takes place entirely between the Spirit and God. I will

mention three. The first and most important is simply that Paul speaks twice of the Spirit *interceding*. This term normally refers to communication one party undertakes on behalf of another.<sup>1</sup> Paul specifies that the Spirit intercedes for the saints. As the prayed-for party, the saints stand somewhat apart from the Spirit in this process; they do not intercede for themselves. It is thus hard to see how Paul could use this particular form of expression to describe a kind of partnership in which the Spirit prays in and through the prayers of believers. Second, to further accentuate the distinct and direct nature of the Spirit's intercessory action, in 8:26 Paul includes an intensifying pronoun: "The Spirit *himself* intercedes."<sup>2</sup> Third, when Paul says the Spirit intercedes he uses language and imagery that are not easily assimilated to the language he uses elsewhere when describing the Spirit's believer-directed acts. This distinctive imagery points to a genuinely distinct concept. Even if these unique comments about the Spirit's intercession strike us as surprising, then, we should not quickly force them into a more familiar pattern.<sup>3</sup>



If it is indeed true that the Spirit prays for us, when does he do so? Paul does not indicate any boundaries to the Spirit's intercessory activity, but he does highlight two factors, and imply a third, that link this intercession to particular times and circumstances. First, Paul connects the Spirit's intercession with the believers' experience of weakness, waiting, and groaning. He introduces the thought that believers share in the suffering of Christ in Romans 8:17. The themes of suffering and waiting then dominate 8:18-25. So in 8:26, when Paul speaks of his readers' "weakness" as the occasion of the Spirit's intercessory help, he clearly refers to a situation marked by suffering. To be more precise, he links the groaning intercession of the Spirit to the believers' experience of groaning described in 8:23. Second, Paul indicates that the Spirit intercedes for believers who are in a state of ignorance – they do not know what they should pray. In saying this Paul is probably not specifying particular times when the Spirit intercedes (as if there were other occasions when believers did know exactly what they should pray) so much as calling attention a particular ongoing circumstance, our present ignorance, that makes the Spirit's intercession necessary.

Third, while Paul does not directly say so, a few factors suggest that he links the Spirit's intercessory action especially to times when believers themselves are trying express their thoughts, feelings, needs, and concerns in prayer. If we reflect on the concept of intercession we see that it can actually take two different forms. In one variety the intercessor makes an appeal on behalf of another person based simply on what he or she observes about that person's need; the one who benefits from this intercession is not trying to make a request and may not even be aware of his or her need.

Moses's prayer for the people of Israel (Exodus 32:31-32) and Jesus' prayer for Peter (Luke 22:31-32) exemplify this first type of intercession. In a second form of intercessory activity, however, the mediator takes up an appeal that another party is already concerned to communicate. Samuel's intercession for the people of Israel at Mizpah (1 Samuel 7:5-9) provides a good illustration of this kind of situation. In cases like this the mediator's role is to present the appeal in a more acceptable way than the needy party can do on their own. Two small clues imply that this second model comes closer to what Paul has in mind in Romans 8:26-27. First, he introduces his reference to the Spirit's intercessory action by saying that "we do not know what we should pray." This implies a situation in which the believers themselves would like to pray or are trying to pray. Second, Paul links the Spirit's groaning with the groaning of believers (mentioned in 8:23). Since "groaning" is a form of communication—it includes the idea of expressing as well as feeling suffering—it is easy to suppose that at least some of the believers' groaning enters into their prayers to God. If this is so, it implies that the Spirit intercedes by taking up the believers' own groan-filled attempts to communicate with God. So perhaps the Spirit carries out his intercessory activity especially at times when we ourselves are trying or wishing to pray.



We must now tackle another question. If the Holy Spirit communicates with God on our behalf, what kind of content does he convey? We know that whatever the Spirit conveys is fully received by God. Paul says that "the one who searches hearts *knows* the mind of the Spirit." "The one who searches hearts" is a common biblical description of God, and knowing "the mind of the Spirit," in this context, can only mean knowing what the Spirit seeks to communicate. Does this imply that God comes to know things about us and our needs through the Spirit's intercession that he would not know otherwise? This question admittedly brings us into areas of mystery. To say there are things that God does not know unless the Spirit informs him, or things he is not ready to do until the Spirit asks him, would seem to threaten fundamental Christian doctrines concerning God. But on the other hand, to say the Spirit's intercession communicates nothing that God does not already know would seem to empty the strong statements in Romans 8:26-27 of all their significance.

This dilemma becomes especially acute if we envisage the Spirit's intercession to be largely a matter of communicating information, ideas, or requests. Paul's comments suggest this kind conceptual content does form at least part of what the Spirit brings to God. He says believers do not know *what* to pray (or pray for). This implies that the Spirit makes up for our ignorance by saying or asking for more appropriate things than we



ourselves have sufficient understanding to say or request. But Paul also describes the Spirit's action in a way that points beyond the simple conveyance of better conceptual content and in so doing he may provide a clue to how it is that the Spirit can offer something distinctive and necessary without bringing God's omniscience or any other aspect of God's character into question. Paul says the Spirit intercedes "with groans *not expressed in words*." The term I have translated "not expressed in words" is *alalētos*. Other translation options include "which cannot be uttered" (KJV), "too deep for words" (NRSV, ESV), and "that words cannot express" (NIV). All of these choices hint that what the Spirit conveys to God exceeds mere conceptual content. Even more striking, perhaps, is that Paul depicts the Spirit's intercessory utterance as a matter of *groaning*. Groaning is a strongly emotive kind of communication. Rather than convey messages, groans typically express painful feelings, whether physical or emotional. So Paul implies that what the Spirit communicates, and what the heart-searching God thereby comes to know, includes a sizeable measure of feeling, particularly feeling relating to the believers' experience of suffering.

Before attempting to understand how the Spirit comes to know our experience well enough to communicate it to God, let's reflect a moment on what makes a good intercessor. In principle an ideal intercessor or mediator should be close and sympathetic to the one with a need or request, while at the same time very close and acceptable to the one to whom appeal must be made. In the case of the Spirit,

we know that he stands in perfect union with God and that God fully and willingly receives all he communicates on our behalf. Not only does Paul highlight that God knows the mind of the Spirit, he also says that the Spirit intercedes for us "according to God's will." While it is possible to take this last phrase as a description of the content of the Spirit's prayer (in the sense that the things the Spirit

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**What the Spirit conveys to the heart-searching God exceeds mere conceptual content. The Spirit's intercessory communication includes a sizeable measure of feeling, particularly feeling relating to the believers' experience of suffering.**

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seeks for us accord with God's will), it is probably best to connect it with the act of praying itself: Paul is saying that it is God's own desire that the Spirit should carry out this ministry of intercession. So as far as relation to God is concerned, the Holy Spirit is perfectly positioned to intercede for us.

But what of the Spirit's position in relation to believers, and particularly to their experience of suffering? Does the Spirit come into especially close

touch with believers? If so how? Once again we need to acknowledge there is much we are not told about the Spirit's intercessory activity. Paul nowhere directly explains why the Spirit is especially suited to this ministry or how the Spirit comes to know our sufferings intimately enough to groan on our behalf. Nevertheless, there is reason to think that Paul's concept of the Spirit *indwelling the hearts of believers* underlies what he says about the Spirit's intercession in Romans 8:26-27. He mentions this indwelling three times in Romans 8:9-11, and in 8:15 he mentions "receiving" the Spirit. Elsewhere he locates the Spirit in the "hearts" of believers (2 Corinthians 1:22 and Galatians 4:6). He frequently pictures the Spirit acting within believers, influencing and communicating to their inward selves. In Romans 5:5, for example, Paul says the Spirit pours out God's love in the hearts of believers. While passages such as these typically portray communication and influence flowing from the Spirit to the believer, they nevertheless show that Paul understood the Spirit to be in intimate internal contact with the inner life of believers. It is hard to divorce Paul's statements about the Spirit's groaning intercession from this larger picture of the Spirit indwelling believers' hearts.

To sum up our discussion to this point, Paul explicitly says the Spirit communicates with God on behalf of believers and that God receives what the Spirit communicates. In a less direct way, yet one that is signaled by a number of indicators in the text, Paul also implies that the believer's felt experience of weakness forms part of what the interceding Spirit brings to God. Our exegetical analysis suggests that Paul sees the intercessory action of the Spirit to be part of the process through which God searches the hearts of believers and comes to know something of their inner life and feelings of suffering. This last thought is quite significant because the question of whether God knows or is impacted by human suffering has been a concern for many Christian believers in recent years. On the one hand, many believers have felt that God must feel our pain if he is to enter into genuinely loving personal relationships. On the other hand, Christian theologians have traditionally held that the idea of God being impacted by suffering amounts to a denial of his transcendent holiness and perfection. Paul's brief comments about the Holy Spirit's intercession cannot resolve the deep theological complexities surrounding the question of God's passibility. But they may nevertheless offer an additional helpful perspective for those who wrestle with this issue. This is because Romans 8:26-27 suggests that God gets in touch with our suffering, but does so in a way that maintains his freedom and holiness. Intercession implies, first, a distance between suffering believers and God that must be overcome and, second, a mediating party who bridges the gap. What comes to God through intercession comes to him indirectly, through the mediation of the Spirit. So this scriptural picture suggests God gets in touch with human suffering even while remaining apart from it. It encourages us to affirm

two things at the same time: God is indeed holy, and he knows our struggles in a way that goes beyond mere conceptual understanding.<sup>4</sup>



We must finally ask why Paul tells his readers about the Spirit's intercession. Or to put this question a little differently, why does God include this intriguing picture as part of his word to us? The answer must be that, as with so much of what Scripture tells us about God and his redemptive work on our behalf, this picture is given to encourage us, comfort us, and give us hope—especially at times when we are conscious of the suffering, weakness, waiting, or groaning Paul describes in Romans 8. That the Spirit prays for us is a reality that occurs whether we are aware of it or not, but for our own comfort and confidence it is important that we should be aware of what the Spirit is doing on our behalf. So Scripture tells us about the Spirit's intercessory action. This brief passage in Romans also adds one more element of abundance to Scripture's already enormously rich portrayal of God's love for us. In his love for us God knows our hearts and is intimately acquainted with our groaning. And that should cause us to love and praise him.

## NOTES

1 In Romans 8:26 Paul uses the term *hyperentynchanō*, in 8:27 the expression *entynchanō hyper*. The latter expression appears again in 8:34, where Paul refers to Christ interceding for believers.

2 The phrase in Romans 8:26 is *auto to pneuma hyperentynchanei*.

3 For more detailed discussion of these and other exegetical issues relating to this passage see T. Wiarda, "What God Knows When the Spirit Intercedes," *Bulletin of Biblical Research*, 17.2 (2007), 299-304.

4 For further discussion of God's passibility in relation to both the Spirit's intercession and that of Christ, see T. Wiarda, "Divine Passibility in Light of Two Pictures of Intercession," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 66 (2013), 159-173.



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**This tenth-century manuscript illumination elaborates  
on the Lukan narrative to depict the coming of the Holy  
Spirit as a gift of new life to the Christian community.**

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# Descent of the Holy Spirit

BY HEIDI J. HORNIK

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Depicting the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost has fascinated artists for centuries. The dramatic arrival of the third person of the Trinity – with a sound like a mighty wind from heaven and a tongue of fire appearing to rest on each disciple, then the disciples speaking in various languages and the crowd reacting to this marvel – requires a complex composition. It also allows for an extraordinary level of artistic interpretation and creativity.

These events are recorded in Acts 2:1-4.<sup>1</sup> Generally speaking, the Lukan writings are a useful source for visualizing Christian liturgy since Luke's

vision was one that lent itself to liturgical performance: it became embedded in the daily and yearly cycles of Catholic and Orthodox devotion. And these cycles in turn form the underwater reef which gives their distinctive shape to the iconographic traditions of Eastern and Western religious art.<sup>2</sup>

This is certainly true in the case of the Pentecost episode. Luke's use of symbolic imagery was widely noted from very early on in biblical interpretation.<sup>3</sup>

Artists face a particularly difficult problem in visualizing the signs of Pentecost. Images of fire and wind are particularly poignant, as Loveday Alexander observes:

The thing about a flame is that the more you divide it, the more there is to go round: split a flame in half and you get more, not less. So the coming of the Spirit is a gift of new life to the community, which brings out the individual gifts of each member, a gift that brings God's living word to articulate expression in a host of individual tongues.<sup>4</sup>

The four artists represented here interpret in their paintings this dramatic sign of the Spirit's gift of new life.

In comparing these four works of art painted over a period of ten centuries, we should note how compositional organization and formal elements in the

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**Figure 2:** Duccio (di Buoninsegna) (c.1260-1319). *PENTECOST* (1311). From the upper section of the *Maestà* altarpiece. Tempera on panel. Museo dell'Opera Metropolitana, Siena, Italy. Photo: Scala / Art Resource, NY. Used by permission.

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images attend to these main narrative and/or iconographical themes: the way the fire is distributed, the presence or absence of Mary in the group, the location of the event, and the symbolic depiction of God the Father.

The manuscript illumination (Figure 1) was produced in one of the greatest monastic centers of the early Middle Ages on the island of Reichenau on Lake Constance in Germany.<sup>5</sup> The monastery, which was famous for its school and library, was one of the principal patrons of the arts under Otto I (r. 936-973). An important contribution of Ottonian art was the elaboration of pictorial cycles of the life of Jesus that carried a missionary message of salvation. These graphic narratives combined features from early Christian models and contemporary Byzantine manuscripts.<sup>6</sup> Robert Melzak explains,

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**Figure 3:** *El Greco* (1541-1614). *THE PENTECOST* (c. 1600). Oil on canvas. 9' x 4'. Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain. Photo: Scala / Art Resource, NY. Used by permission.

The traditional features of the scenes, derived from Early Christian art...are [Christ] performing the miracles with a blessing gesture, the use of conventional architectural motifs with diagonal sides and backgrounds of yellow, blue, and green bands. The figures' expressive poses, however, and the patterns of linear highlights on their draperies enliven the scenes, and the architectural details create spatial illusion while harmonizing with the overall framework.<sup>7</sup>

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**Figure 4:** Emil Nolde (1867-1956). *PENTECOST* (1909). Oil on canvas. 34" x 42". Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Germany. Photo: bpk, Berlin / Staatliche Museen / Jorg P. Anders / Art Resource, NY. Used by permission.

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The group of twelve are placed evenly and symmetrically (six on one side and six on the other) in a horizontal register in the lower half of the composition. The seated figures are in front of two columns and their feet dangle over the picture frame to show depth in the illumination. Mary is not present and there is some indication that the setting is an interior but not necessarily an upper story. The architectural elements under the blue sky and above the gold background of the apostles seem to convey an interior and exterior. The tongues of fire sit, as if they are hats, attached to the tops of their heads. The hand of God, holding the cross, extends from a round object along with the rays of fire that recede back into the heavens after their delivery to the apostles. The figures are stylized into "types" that are repeated with slight facial variations (facial hair, hair color, and hair style) and right hand gestures (blessing gesture, two fingers and thumb extended, and hand raised with fingers bent at a right angle).



Duccio, a Siennese artist painting just prior to the Italian Renaissance and working about 300 years after the monks produced the Reichenau illumination, chose to include the Virgin Mary, and to place her in the center of this composition. This *Pentecost* scene (Figure 2) was part of a large, multi-paneled, two-sided altarpiece known as a Maestà. The huge altarpiece (approximately 16' x 16') was dedicated to Mary and placed on the high altar of Siena Cathedral, after great procession, on June 9, 1311.<sup>8</sup> At the pinnacle of the back of the altarpiece, which was dedicated to events in the life of Christ, was this *Pentecost* image.<sup>9</sup> Although architectural elements are visible, it is difficult to determine if the scene is taking place on an exterior portico or in an interior room. The tongues of fire are centered on each gold halo and still linked to the rays of fire that come from an unknown source outside the composition.

Domenikos Theotokopoulos, better known as El Greco, worked during the sixteenth century in Italy and Spain. His *The Pentecost* (Figure 3), like Duccio's, positions the Virgin Mary in the center of the composition surrounded by the apostles. Mary's presence, not mentioned in scriptural accounts, is symbolic of the Church.<sup>10</sup> The tongues of fire descend from the dove, another symbol of the Holy Spirit, toward the heads of the apostles that are on either side of Mary. The Virgin and apostles appear to be on a stepped throne with a dark background. El Greco is not interested in depicting a precise setting of an upper, interior room.

*The Pentecost* is located today in the Prado Museum in Madrid, whose website notes that "the bald, bearded Apostle who looks at the viewer from the right of the canvas has been identified as a self-portrait, or as a portrait of the artist's friend, Antonio de Covarrubias." Along with other paintings in the Prado Museum, this work was painted as part of the main altarpiece for the church of the Augustine College of María de Aragón in Madrid. El Greco's signature (redone during an old restoration) is located on the second step in Greek letters.<sup>11</sup>

El Greco's style is at the end of Mannerism or Late Renaissance and the Baroque. Fernando Marías states,

The tendency towards a special treatment of lighting, and its effect on human forms within vertiginous compositions where mass and space merge is found in the canvases [for this altarpiece]. In these he achieved an extraordinary sense of the miraculous, possibly deriving from the mystical thinking of the preacher Alfonso de Orozco (1500-1591) or perhaps from El Greco's personal vision of the immanence of the divine.<sup>12</sup>

In either case, El Greco gives us a dramatic visual of the descent of the Holy Spirit for continued reflection.

The final version of *Pentecost* (Figure 4) is by the German Expressionist painter, watercolorist, and printmaker, Emil Nolde (1867-1956). Nolde,

primarily known as a colorist, was influenced by the stark landscape of his north German homeland. He produced landscapes but also favored religious subjects.<sup>13</sup> He interpreted the subjects in his own way with vibrant, bold color and often omitted some of the traditional iconographic elements, as he does in the 1909 *Pentecost*. Three of the four thematic elements that we have been tracing do not exist. Neither the presence of Mary, a symbol of the divine (either a hand or dove), nor the setting is a concern of the artist. Instead, he gives us a powerful painting of intense color with the flames painted in a purple teardrop shape. The viewer is given a space at the table (which without the tongues could easily be confused with a Last Supper) between two apostles who have joined hands in fear or prayer regarding what is happening to them. The eleven apostles seated around the table have mask-like expressions.

This painting was very controversial and became the center of the row that split the Berlin Secession – one of the most advanced exhibiting societies in Germany up until that time, which Nolde joined in 1908.<sup>14</sup> Jill Lloyd comments,

Nolde's primitivist treatment of this religious subject, rendered in glowing colours and bold, Expressionist brushwork, found little favour among the older members of the society, who had grown up in the Impressionist school. When *Pentecost* and the works of most other younger artists were rejected, Nolde attacked the leadership and principles of the Secession in an open letter to its President, Max Liebermann, whereupon he was expelled from the association. Until 1912 he exhibited alongside other rejected artists in the Neue Sezession in Berlin.<sup>15</sup>

Nolde would go on to be censored by the Nazis and continue to fight for an expressive and imaginative freedom for artists and individuals alike.

The manuscript illuminator, Duccio, El Greco, and Nolde each interpreted the biblical account of the gift of the Holy Spirit in a way that was exciting and unconventional. Regardless of which traditional narrative or iconographic elements were included or omitted (Mary, the divine, the upper room), all these painters found a way to share their individual artistic and interpretive gifts in depicting the coming of the Spirit as a gift of new life for their community.

## NOTES

1 For more on this interpretation of the Pentecost events, see Heidi J. Hornik and Mikeal C. Parsons, "Philological and Performative Perspectives on Pentecost," in Steve Walton, Thomas E. Phillips, Lloyd K. Pietersen, and F. Scott Spencer, eds., *Reading Acts Today: Essays in Honour of Loveday C. A. Alexander* (New York: T & T Clark, 2011), 137-153.

2 Loveday C. A. Alexander, "What If Luke Had Never Met Theophilus?" *Biblical Interpretation*, 8:1 (2000): 161-170, here citing 170.

3 For a discussion of the reception and interpretation of Pentecost, see the forthcoming

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Heidi J. Hornik and Mikeal C. Parsons, *The Acts of the Apostles Through the Centuries*, Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, forthcoming 2016).

4 Loveday C. A. Alexander, *A Bible Commentary for Every Day*, The People's Bible Commentary (Oxford, UK: The Bible Reading Fellowship, 2006), 29.

5 Robert Melzak, "Reichenau," *Grove Art Online*, *Oxford Art Online* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press), [www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T071196](http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T071196) (accessed March 18, 2015).

6 Michael Norris, *Medieval Art: A Resource for Educators* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2005), 14-15.

7 Robert Melzak, "Reichenau."

8 Dillian Gordon, "Duccio," *Grove Art Online*, *Oxford Art Online* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press), [www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T023857](http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T023857) (accessed March 18, 2015).

9 A diagram and conjectural reconstruction of the entire altarpiece can be found in Frederick Hartt and David G. Wilkins, *History of Italian Renaissance Art*, seventh edition (Upper Saddle River, NY: Prentice Hall, 2011), 106-107.

10 Herbert Kessler, "The Word Made Flesh in Early Decorated Bibles," in Jeffrey Spier, ed., *Picturing the Bible: The Earliest Christian Art* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 141-168, here citing 166.

11 "El Greco, *Pentecost*," On-line Gallery, (Museo Nacional del Prado), [www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/online-gallery/on-line-gallery/obra/pentecost/](http://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/online-gallery/on-line-gallery/obra/pentecost/) (accessed March 18, 2015).

12 Fernando Marias, "Greco, El," *Grove Art Online*, *Oxford Art Online* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press), [www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T034199](http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T034199) (accessed March 18, 2015).

13 Jill Lloyd, "Nolde, Emil," *Grove Art Online*, *Oxford Art Online* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press), [www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T062679](http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T062679) (accessed March 18, 2015).

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.



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# “Supreme and Fiery Force”

BY C A R M E N A C E V E D O B U T C H E R

Always a pioneer, Hildegard of Bingen is one of the first writers to include illustrations with her text, not as “mere decoration” but as integral to her theology. The importance to her thought of the Holy Spirit—the “supreme and fiery force”—is most evident in these brilliant miniature illuminations.

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**D**eclared a Doctor of the Church in 2012, Hildegard of Bingen joined Augustine of Hippo, Gregory the Great, Thomas Aquinas, twenty-nine other men, and the trio of Teresa of Ávila, Catherine of Siena, and Thérèse of Lisieux, but she had held that title unofficially for centuries. Contemporaries respected her highly; for example, University of Paris Master Odo of Soissons asked her perspective on a scholastic theological debate: “O wise woman, . . . we would like you to resolve a certain problem for us. Many contend that God is not both paternity and divinity. Would you please explain to us in a letter what you perceive in the heavens about this matter.”<sup>1</sup> And Barbara Newman expresses most modern scholars’ view of Hildegard’s papal elevation: “It appears that the Roman tortoise has caught up with the dashing seer of Bingen at last.”<sup>2</sup> From the esteem of her twelfth-century contemporaries to us who cherish her transformative theology, Hildegard offers much spiritual nourishment because her life was a sustained “experience of God,” as Carl Jung describes our one necessity, and also because, as Avis Clendenen observes, her worldview is “basically therapeutic: humanity-in-creation has the purpose and mission

of being healed and saved and, in turn, of healing and saving,...an enterprise...mediated through the gift of Christ."<sup>3</sup>

Only a complex woman with a uniquely gifted voice could have flourished as an influential theologian in a world of church authorities who were largely suspicious of women's gifts.<sup>4</sup> This Benedictine-abbess-artist-cosmologist-composer-counselor-dietitian-dramatist-epistoler-healer-linguist-mystic-naturalist-philosopher-poet-political-consultant-preacher-prophet-and-visionary wrote theological, naturalistic, botanical, medicinal, and dietary texts, also letters, liturgical songs, poems, and the first known morality play, while supervising brilliant miniature illuminations.<sup>5</sup> Regarding these miniatures, Bernard McGinn explains that for Hildegard, "theology is as much visual as verbal – neither side can be neglected in trying to gain an understanding of her teaching."<sup>6</sup> Heinrich Schipperges describes her as "a celebrant of great mysteries" who is relevant today for her belief that "human beings are responsible not only for their own lives and personal happiness but for their fellow humans, for the environment, for the world of the future, and indeed for the universe as a whole."<sup>7</sup> In short, Hildegard can help us regain our empathy as humans.

The Trinitarian theme of salvation history unifies her diverse, vision-inspired oeuvre of prose, poetry, liturgical music, illuminations, and drama. Her *Ordo virtutum* (*Play of the Virtues*) reveals the heart of her work, dependent on Christ's grace and intimacy with the Holy Spirit. In it, the heroine Anima, the feminine soul, finds in the personified feminine virtues the strength to triumph over interior evil. Beverly Mayne Kienzle describes this Hildegardian focus:

Christ's redemptive power and grace allow the human to work toward her own salvation, and the Holy Spirit inspires and guides this process of collective and individual construction. The Spirit sends the virtues to assist humans in the battle against sin...and... moves...the human...in a heavenly direction [towards]...renewal.<sup>8</sup>

Living in the Information Age, we profoundly need renewal, so Hildegard's "particularly vivid...perception of the Holy Spirit"<sup>9</sup> gains new significance in our third millennium. By focusing primarily on two of her major works, plus her poems and illuminations, we can explore her expansive, organic *Weltanschauung* and discover that for this "Sibyl of the Rhine," orthodox Christian doctrine and mystical consciousness were never separate; instead, doctrine was an ongoing divine "encounter" for Hildegard, whose intelligent theology is thankfully not head-bound. Beginning in early childhood, her visions animated doctrine throughout her life, and her orthodox faith – fed daily through *lectio divina* Bible meditation and liturgical prayer – nurtured her mystical consciousness; as Pope Benedict XVI remarked when he proclaimed her a Doctor of the Church: "Theological reflection enabled Hildegard to organize and understand, at least in part, the content of her visions."<sup>10</sup>

Benedict XVI also delineates Hildegard's non-dualistic experience of doctrine and mystical consciousness:

In Saint Hildegard of Bingen there is a wonderful harmony between teaching and daily life. In her, the search for God's will in the imitation of Christ was expressed in the constant practice of virtue, which she exercised with supreme generosity and which she nourished from biblical, liturgical, and patristic roots in the light of the Rule of Saint Benedict. Her persevering practice of obedience, simplicity, charity, and hospitality was especially visible. In her desire to belong completely to the Lord, this Benedictine Abbess was able to bring together rare human gifts, keen intelligence and an ability to penetrate heavenly realities.

So Hildegard's theology knows no divide between orthodoxy's grace and orthopraxy's action; thus, when she was writing her first major theological work, *Scivias*, she was also founding the Rupertsberg convent, engaging in the pastoral intensive vocation of a Benedictine abbess, working on poems and musical compositions later collected in her *Symphonia*, drafting the *Ordo virtutum* (an early version of which concludes *Scivias*), and writing letters to secular and religious leaders and lay-people. For her, no gap existed between "praying" and "doing." All was one in God's love.

But how can a modern reader grasp the visions of a medieval woman? The short answer is—by embracing their beautiful spiritual truths until they become practice. Hildegard begins *Scivias* with a vibrant invitation: "Look with me!" and its twenty-six recorded visions show that her basic premise is Augustinian: God is merciful and creation is good (if fallen). She improves, however, on Augustine in her persistent articulation of a glass-half-full, God-is-love theology.

Illuminating the intense visions that became Hildegard's *Scivias* are thirty-five equally striking miniatures. Hildegard knew the art of illumination and probably supervised the design and creation of these in her own scriptorium at the new abbey of Rupertsberg. The illuminated paintings are done in a fresh naïf style, not unlike Hildegard's own peculiar, powerful, and grammatically loose Latin. What the miniatures lack in formal polish is more than compensated by their bright colors and numinous designs. Always a pioneer, Hildegard is one of the earliest writers to include illustrations alongside the written text, not as "mere decoration" but as integral to her theology.<sup>11</sup> In *Scivias*, Hildegard puts her original visions to concrete use in creating an orthodox handbook for good Christian living; she wants to teach followers of Christ how to live in love. So while her visions are stunning, Hildegard's theology is always grounded—literally so in images of planting and growing, making the sensitive reader imagine her as an avid gardener.



**Figure 1:** Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), *Scivias*, plate 1: THE VISIONARY. Photo: Wikimedia Commons, [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hildegard\\_von\\_Bingen.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hildegard_von_Bingen.jpg). Public domain.

In her *Scivias* preface, Hildegard shares how the divine Voice commanded her to articulate what she had seen and heard in her visions, to help others come to know God:

I'm the living Light. I make the darkness day and have chosen you to see great wonders, though I've humbled you on earth. You're often depressed and timid, and you're very insecure. Because you're conscientious, you feel guilty, and chronic physical pain

has thoroughly scarred you. But the deep mysteries of God have saturated you, too, as has humility. So now you must give others an intelligible account of what you see with your inner eye and what you hear with your inner ear. Your testimony will help them. As a result, others will learn how to know their Creator. They'll no longer refuse to adore God.

Hildegard sees adoring God as the foundation of knowing and trusting the Holy Spirit for healing, forgiveness, and new life. She announces her theology's singing heart in *Scivias*:

Don't let yourself forget that God's grace rewards not only those who never slip, but also those who bend and fall. So sing! The song of rejoicing softens hard hearts. It makes tears of godly sorrow flow from them. Singing summons the Holy Spirit. Happy praises offered in simplicity and love lead the faithful to complete harmony, without discord. Don't stop singing.

In the miniature that accompanies the *Scivias* preface (figure 1), the Holy Spirit's five-tongued orange beam of divine Pentecostal inspiration pierces the roof, descending on Hildegard's head where she is sitting in her cell writing the visions she receives, stylus in hand and wax tablet balanced on her knee; pillars on her left and right represent the Old and New Covenants, and her loyal friend Volmar stands on her right, ready to help.<sup>12</sup>

In this preface, Hildegard voices her nervousness as she faces the task of writing her first book. In one of the most famous examples of "writer's block," she prays for further instructions:

That voice made me—a heartbroken, fragile creature—begin to write, though my hand was shaking and I was traumatized by more illnesses than I could even begin to name. As I started this task, I looked to the living Light, asking, "But what should I write down?" and that Brightness commanded, "Be simple. Be pure. Write down what you see and hear!"

Short for the Latin *Scito vias Domini*, "Know the Ways of the Lord," *Scivias* is organized into three books, reflecting the medieval notion of perfection in the Trinity. Book one has six visions covering creation, the Fall, and God's relationship with humanity and the world; book two has seven visions concentrating on the Savior and the process of redemption, describing salvation through Christ's incarnation and its presence in the contemporary world through the Church's sacraments; and book three has thirteen visions exploring the role of the Holy Spirit in salvation history.<sup>13</sup> As Elizabeth A. Dreyer points out, no reader finishes *Scivias* without experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit: "It is through persons like Hildegard that the Holy Spirit is brought down to earth."<sup>14</sup> In *Scivias*, God reminds us how this happens: "[I]f you love Me, I'll hug you to Me. I'll warm you with Holy-Spirit fire."





**Figure 2:** Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), *Book of Divine Works*, I.1: ON THE ORIGIN OF LIFE. Photo: Wikimedia Commons, [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hildegard\\_first\\_vision.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hildegard_first_vision.jpg). Public domain.

“Holy-Spirit fire” also informs Hildegard’s poetry, sung liturgically. In it, she praises the Holy Spirit’s life-sustaining strength and wisdom:

You soar, sustain, and stir,  
climb, dive, and sing  
Your way through this world,  
giving life to every beating  
heart.

You never end.

You keep circling, crossing over us

on three wings—

one speeds through heaven,

one holds the earth together with a kiss as light as dew,

and one whispers over, under, and through our lives.

We praise You, Wisdom!



**Figure 3:** Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), *Book of Divine Works*, I.1: ON THE ORIGIN OF LIFE, COMPANION IMAGE. Photo: Wikimedia Commons, <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hildegard-reading-and-writing.jpg>. Public domain.

This poem shows, as Newman states, that Hildegard sees God flowing through nature as the “living, fiery force that...breathes divine spirit into all creation.”<sup>15</sup> This “fiery force” appears in Hildegard’s cosmological text *Book of Divine Works* as a dazzling winged female figure, Caritas, whose iconography associates her specifically with the Holy Spirit. Caritas opens Hildegard’s book with this bold assertion:

I am the supreme and fiery force who kindled every living spark.... As I circled the whirling sphere with my upper wings (that is, with wisdom), I ordered it rightly. And I am the fiery life of the essence of God: I flame above the beauty of the fields; I shine in the waters; I burn in the sun, the moon, and the stars. And, with the airy wind, I quicken all things vitally by an unseen, all-sustaining life.... I am Life.... Mine is the blast of the resounding Word through which all

creation came to be, and I quickened all things with my breath.... I am Life, whole and undivided – not hewn from any stone, nor budded from branches, nor rooted in virile strength; but all that lives has its root in Me.<sup>16</sup>

As the female figure Caritas shows, Hildegard's experiences with the quickening and sustaining Holy Spirit convinced her that the feminine should not be excluded from the life of the Trinity.<sup>17</sup> In this text's accompanying miniature (figure 2), we see the full equity of the winged female Spirit of Love with the Father and the Son: "The figure of Love, surmounted by fatherly Goodness, carries the Lamb, symbolizing tenderness. Love has exerted itself and produced the creation, which it now protects with its encircling wings while trampling evil underfoot."<sup>18</sup> Based on Acts 17:28 – "in God we live and move and have our being" – this daring speech by Caritas shows that Hildegard saw "no buffer zone between Creator and creature"; instead, Newman explains, feminine metaphors of the Creatrix (such as Caritas) "place the accent on immanence" (while masculine imagery of the Creator "tends to stress God's transcendence").<sup>19</sup>

Thus, Hildegard's attitude towards nature is rooted in the feminine, as Newman notes: "Hildegard's keen sense of divine immanence led her to envisage the creative power not as a force propelling the world from without but as an ambience enfolding it and quickening it from within.... [She sensed the] affinity between Wisdom and the cosmos so strongly that she identified the two"; thus, Sapientia is also Creatrix.<sup>20</sup> Tellingly, from the bottom of the winged-Caritas miniature illumination, a blazing stream of divine inspiration flows through a tiny window and into a companion miniature below, where it touches the upturned face of Hildegard, holding stylus and wax tablet.<sup>21</sup>

We witness this divine immanence in another of Hildegard's liturgical hymns:

The Holy Spirit animates  
 all, moves  
 all, roots  
 all, forgives  
 all, cleanses  
 all, erases  
 all  
 our past mistakes and then  
 puts medicine on our wounds.  
 We praise this Spirit of incandescence  
 for awakening  
 and reawakening  
 all  
 creation.

The Holy Spirit who “animates all” and “forgives all” is responsible for the most well-known aspect of Hildegard’s theology – *viriditas*, that “feminine life principle of moist greenness, fertility, and lushness”<sup>22</sup> giving Hildegard’s vision of creation verdancy (Latin *viridis*). In *Scivias*, she describes the “greening” power of the Holy Spirit in the Incarnation, saying Christ was made incarnate “in the ardor of charity, miraculously and without the stain or weight of sin, through the Holy Spirit’s sweet greenness in the dawn of blessed virginity.”<sup>23</sup> In one hymn, she calls Mary “the greenest twig” on whom the sun of God’s Holy Spirit shone to produce the miraculous “flowering” of God’s divine-human Son, revealing that for Hildegard the “fiery but not arid” Holy Spirit is “life-giving, inundating and hydrating the soul, bringing greenness and fruitfulness,” as Anne Hunt articulates in *The Trinity: Insights from the Mystics*.<sup>24</sup>

This celestial *viriditas* is the “green” energy of agape love pulsing as God’s Spirit through the entire universe. Hildegard’s unique use of this Latin word makes it something of a neologism in her work. She perceives *viriditas* as first found in Eden’s green garden but also as the green of any twig we see in this present moment. The opposite of “greening” energy is spiritual desiccation, for in *Ordo virtutum* she says that sin made “[t]he original abundance of green...shrivel up.” Her concept of *viriditas* is ripe with meaning because she recognizes life’s interconnectedness, as she says in *Scivias*: “The soul circulates through the body like sap through a tree, maturing a person the way sap helps a tree turn green and grow flowers and fruit.”

This nurturing greenness of God’s Spirit flows through Hildegard’s music:

Spirit of fire,  
Paraclete, our Comforter,  
You’re the *Live* in *alive*,  
the *Be* in every creature’s *being*,  
the *Breathe* in every *breath* on earth. ...

Holy Life-Giver,  
Doctor of the desperate,  
Healer of everyone broken past hope,  
Medicine for all wounds,  
Fire of love,  
Joy of hearts,  
fragrant Strength,  
sparkling Fountain,  
in You we contemplate  
how God goes looking for those who are lost  
and reconciles those who are at odds with Him.  
Break our chains!



**Figure 4:** Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), *Scivias*, plate 11: THE BLUE CHRIST. Photo: Wikimedia Commons, [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Meister\\_des\\_Hildegardis-Codex\\_003\\_cuted.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Meister_des_Hildegardis-Codex_003_cuted.jpg). Public domain.

You bring people together.  
You curl clouds, whirl winds,  
send rain on rocks, sing in creeks,  
and turn the lush earth green.  
You teach those who listen,  
breathing joy and wisdom into them.

We praise You for these gifts,  
Light-giver,  
Sound of joy,  
Wonder of being alive,  
Hope of every person,  
and our strongest Good.

We can also learn much about Hildegard's understanding of the Holy Spirit from the second vision in *Scivias* book two, where we encounter the unforgettable "Man in Sapphire Blue: A Study in Compassion," as Matthew Fox names it; also called "True Trinity in True Unity," "The Blue Man," and "The Blue Christ," this beautiful illumination represents the Trinity, whom Hildegard says is "One light, three persons, one God."<sup>25</sup> To fully appreciate The Blue Christ (figure 4), we must know that in her writings Hildegard associates sky-blue with God's love and that sapphire, one of her favorite gems, is what we now call lapis lazuli, the very expensive precious stone crushed to form the blue pigment prized by artists.<sup>26</sup>

Anne Hunt describes this illumination well:

The figure is very simply dressed and has long hair. With neither beard nor veil, the figure is not obviously male or female. Its hands are raised in what would seem to be a gesture of prayer or blessing.... The figure is surrounded by two concentric halos of light, the inner one a bright fiery flame-like color, the outer one a brilliant shimmering silvery white. The same watery sapphire blue surrounds the outer circle and fills the exquisite border of the illumination. The composure of this central figure exudes a sense of humility, gentleness, compassion, and serenity. The illumination as a whole radiates an energy and vitality. The quivering lines in the circles of light heighten this effect.<sup>27</sup>

Hildegard recalls her Blue Christ vision in this way:

Then I saw a bright light, and in this light the figure of a man the color of sapphire, which was all blazing with a gentle glowing fire. And that bright light bathed the whole of the glowing fire, and the glowing fire bathed the bright light; and the bright light and the glowing fire poured over the whole human figure, so that the three were one light in one power of potential.<sup>28</sup>

Hildegard's use here of the bathing motif emphasizes the reciprocal nature of this flowing bright light and glowing fire pouring over the central human figure in *perichoresis*, the mutual indwelling of the three divine persons who is the heart of Christianity's relational nature.<sup>29</sup> Then Hildegard interprets her Blue Christ vision:

You see a bright light, which without any flaw of illusion, deficiency or deception designates the Father; and in this light the figure of a



**Figure 5:** Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), *Scivias*, plate 4: THE EGG OF THE UNIVERSE. PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS, [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Eibingen,\\_Benediktinerinnenabtei\\_Sankt\\_Hildegard\\_manuscripts#mediaviewer/File:Meister\\_des\\_Hildegardis-Codex\\_001.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Eibingen,_Benediktinerinnenabtei_Sankt_Hildegard_manuscripts#mediaviewer/File:Meister_des_Hildegardis-Codex_001.jpg). Public domain.

man the color of sapphire, which without any flaw of obstinacy, envy or iniquity designates the Son, Who was begotten of the Father in Divinity before time began, and then within time was incarnate in the world in Humanity; which is all blazing with a gentle glowing fire, which fire without any flaw of aridity, mortality or darkness designates the Holy Spirit, by Whom the Only-Begotten of God was

conceived in the flesh and born of the Virgin within time and poured the true light into the World.<sup>30</sup>

In other words, the compassionate, incarnate Son stands at the center of this image, hands open in prayer and blessing; around Christ is a fiery inner circle of flaming orange ever pulsing, cohering, and enlivening, which represents the Holy Spirit;<sup>31</sup> the shimmering outer rim of radiant silvery-white light represents God the Father; the aperture above Christ's head and thin white outline surrounding his body symbolize Christ's begottenness of the Father, and the illumination's womb-like quality reminds us that Christ is God the Father's child "Who washed and dried our wounds" and "exuded the sweetest balm."<sup>32</sup> Thus we see that Hildegard chooses orange for the blazing, glowing, non-arid, gentle "fire of the Holy Spirit" as binding and sustaining all life together; blue, color of water and sky, as the dominant hue in her image of the loving Word; and white light for the Father.<sup>33</sup>

The importance of the Holy Spirit in Hildegard's theology is even more evident in "The Egg of the Universe" (figure 5), the illumination for the third vision in *Scivias* book one, considered the most "astonishing" of her startling visions.<sup>34</sup> Hildegard visualizes the universe as a cosmic egg where God, humanity, and nature enjoy the interrelatedness of interdependency, and the egg's wholeness represents "the majesty and mystery of the all-powerful God, the hope of the faithful."<sup>35</sup> This miniature depicting the universe in the ur-form of the world egg, illuminated by stars and planets and refreshed by winds, has the human home at creation's center.<sup>36</sup> Hildegard's cosmic egg also resembles a nest, symbolizing God's Alpha-and-Omega nature, and when we recall how Abelard suggested that the Holy Spirit's divine goodness gives life to the world like a bird warms its egg,<sup>37</sup> we see that the miniature's outermost ovoid of shining fire signifies God's Spirit holding the cosmos together with all-embracing divine love, bathing the world in the celestial fire that incubates new life.<sup>38</sup> As Newman writes, "Nothing is more distinctively Hildegardian than this sense of universal life, of a world aflame with vitality."<sup>39</sup>

In everything Hildegard did, she followed Benedict's advice in his *Rule*: "Listen with the ears of your heart." We can be thankful that her twelfth-century prose, poems, hymns, and illuminations survived into our twenty-first century hearts, who need the renewing love of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

## NOTES

1 Joseph L. Baird and Radd K. Ehrman, translators, *Letters of Hildegard of Bingen*, Volume I (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 110 (Letter 40).

2 Barbara Newman, "Behind the Elevation of St. Hildegard," *History of Christianity* blog, American Society of Church History, [www.churchhistory.org/blogs/blog/behind-the-elevation-of-st-hildegard/](http://www.churchhistory.org/blogs/blog/behind-the-elevation-of-st-hildegard/) (accessed February 26, 2015).

3 Avis Clendenen, *Experiencing Hildegard: Jungian Perspectives* (Wilmette, IL: Chiron Publications, 2012), viii; 90.

4 Anne Hunt, *The Trinity: Insights from the Mystics* (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier, 2010), 31. See also Avis Clendenen, *Experiencing Hildegard*, 6, for an excellent description of the twelfth century's "prevalent misogyny."



5 Some material in this article is adapted from Carmen Acevedo Butcher, *St. Hildegard of Bingen, Doctor of the Church: A Spiritual Reader* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2013), in particular, several selections of Hildegard's quoted prose and hymns to the Holy Spirit, found translated in that volume; see xvi, 12, 52, 50, v, 26, 31, 36, 92, 5, 59, 35, 28, 18, 92, and 141. Thus, any unattributed quotations are understood to be from this source.

6 Quoted in Hunt, *The Trinity*, 34.

7 Heinrich Schipperges, *The World of Hildegard of Bingen: Her Life, Times and Visions*, translated by John Cumming (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 7.

8 Beverly Mayne Kienzle, "Constructing Heaven in Hildegard of Bingen's *Expositiones euangeliorum*," *Envisaging Heaven in the Middle Ages*, edited by Carolyn A. Muessig and Ad Putter (New York: Routledge, 2007), 34, 36. Popular, *Ordo virtutum* is often performed today.

9 Hunt, *The Trinity*, 45.

10 For both quotations here, see Benedict XVI, "Proclaiming Saint Hildegard of Bingen, professed nun of the Order of Saint Benedict, a Doctor of the Universal Church" (*The Vatican*, October 7, 2012), [www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/apost\\_letters/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_apl\\_20121007\\_ildegarda-bingen\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/apost_letters/documents/hf_ben-xvi_apl_20121007_ildegarda-bingen_en.html) (accessed February 26, 2015).

11 Hunt, *The Trinity*, 24.

12 See this illumination in Schipperges's *The World of Hildegard of Bingen*, plate 19, page 41; see it also on the cover of Bruce Hozeski, *Hildegard of Bingen's Scivias* (Santa Fe, NM: Bear & Co., 1986). To see all of the *Scivias* miniatures, visit the website of Benedictine Abbey of St. Hildegard (also called Eibingen Abbey) at [www.abtei-st-hildegard.de/?page\\_id=4721](http://www.abtei-st-hildegard.de/?page_id=4721) (accessed February 26, 2015). To see the Rupertsberg manuscript itself, see [www.abtei-st-hildegard.de/?p=554](http://www.abtei-st-hildegard.de/?p=554) (accessed February 26, 2015).

For a taste of Hildegard's music, see *A Feather on the Breath of God: Sequences and Hymns by Abbess Hildegard of Bingen*, with Gothic Voices, directed by Christopher Page (Hyperion DCA 66039, Compact disc, 1981) and Linn Maxwell, *Hildegard of Bingen and the Living Light* (Alto, MI: Alto Productions, 2012), [www.hildegardthemovie.com](http://www.hildegardthemovie.com) (accessed February 26, 2015).

13 Elizabeth A. Dreyer, *Passionate Spirituality: Hildegard of Bingen and Hadewijch of Brabant* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2005), 79.

14 Elizabeth A. Dreyer, *Holy Power, Holy Presence: Rediscovering Medieval Metaphors for the Holy Spirit* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2007), 83.

15 Barbara Newman, *God and the Goddesses: Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 88.

16 Newman, *God and Goddesses*, 88-89, combined with Barbara Newman *Sister of Wisdom: St. Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), 66, 69-70.

17 Clendenen, *Experiencing Hildegard*, 130.

18 Schipperges, *The World of Hildegard of Bingen*, Plate 33, 66.

19 Newman, *Sister of Wisdom*, 68; Newman, *God and Goddesses*, 138-139; Newman, *Sister of Wisdom*, 64-65.

20 Newman, *Sister of Wisdom*, 65, 64.

21 Schipperges, *The World of Hildegard of Bingen*, Plate 24, 50.

22 Clendenen, *Experiencing Hildegard*, 128.

23 William Harmless, S. J., *Mystics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 59-60, 74-75.

24 Hunt, *The Trinity*, 45.

25 Matthew Fox, *Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen* (Rochester, VT: Bear & Co., 2002), Plate 1, 33, 35, see also the cover of *Illuminations*; Schipperges, *The World of Hildegard of Bingen*, Plate 35, 72.

26 Hunt, *The Trinity*, 43, 38.

27 *Ibid.*, 38

28 *Ibid.*

29 *Ibid.*

30 *Ibid.*, 38-39.

31 *Ibid.*, 39.

32 *Ibid.*, 44.

33 Fox, *Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen*, 33.

34 Frances Beer, *Women and Mystical Experience in the Middle Ages*, Library of Medieval

Women (Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 1995), 43; see the cover for Hozeski, *Hildegard von Bingen's Mystical Visions*; Fox, *Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen*, Plate 4, 48ff.; and Schipperges, *The World of Hildegard of Bingen*, Plate 48, 49.

35 Nancy Fierro, *Hildegard of Bingen and Her Vision of the Feminine* (Lanham, MD: Sheed & Ward, 1994), 25; Beer, *Women and Mystical Experience in the Middle Ages* 45.

36 Hozeski, *Hildegard of Bingen's Mystical Visions*, xii; Schipperges, *The World of Hildegard of Bingen*, 97.

37 Constance Mews, "Religious Thinker: 'A Frail Human Being' on Fiery Life," *Voice of the Living Light: Hildegard of Bingen and Her World* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 59.

38 Hozeski, *Hildegard of Bingen's Scivias*, 26-36; Hozeski, *Hildegard of Bingen's Mystical Visions*, xii; Fox, *Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen*, 53.

39 Newman, *Sister of Wisdom*, 67.

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# A Rushing, Mighty Wind

BY DAVID W. MUSIC

A rushing, mighty wind roars through a crowded room,  
and tongues of fire upon their heads disperse the people's gloom.

God's Spirit blows the wind and lights the blood-red flame;  
a Pentecost of tongues explodes in praise of Jesus' name.

Three thousand souls that day in mind and heart were stirred;  
and these were added to the church as they believed the Word.

Lord, make our breath a wind and let our tongues be fire,  
and as at that first Pentecost your people's lives inspire.

# A Rushing, Mighty Wind

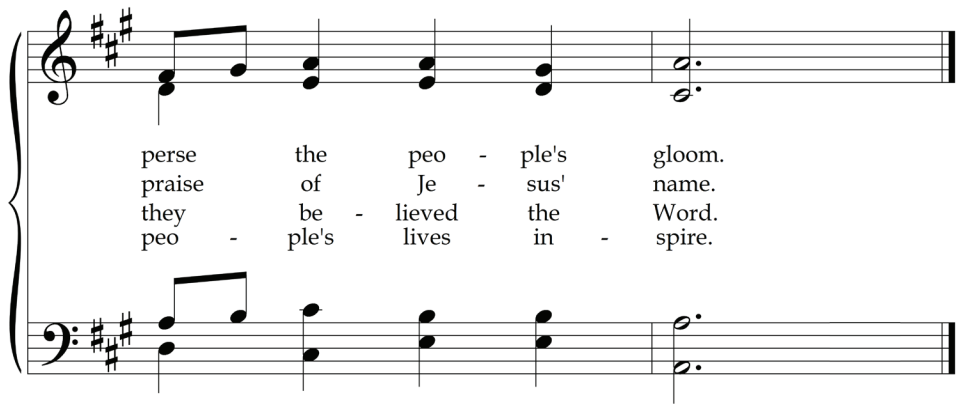
DAVIS W. MUSIC

WILLIAM HENRY WALTER

A rushing, mighty wind roars  
 God's Spirit blows the wind and  
 Three thousand souls that day in  
 Lord, make our breath a wind and

through a crowd - ed room, and  
 lights the blood - red flame; a  
 mind and heart were stirred; and  
 let our tongues be fire, and

tongues of fire up - on their heads dis -  
 Pen - te - cost of tongues ex - plodes in  
 these were add - ed to the church as  
 as at that first Pen - te - cost your



perse the peo - ple's gloom.  
praise of Je - sus' name.  
they be - lieved the Word.  
peo - ple's lives in - spire.

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*Tune: FESTAL SONG  
S.M.*

# Worship Service

BY DAVID W. MUSIC

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## WITH ONE VOICE

A Service of Worship for Pentecost Sunday

### *Prelude*

### *The Greeting: Romans 15:5-7 (ESV)*<sup>1</sup>

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

*(The people may greet one another in the name of Christ.)*

### *Congregational Response*<sup>2</sup>

### *Opening Statement*

On this Pentecost Sunday, we commemorate God's sending of the Holy Spirit upon his people and the beginning of the spread of the gospel throughout the world. As we read the scriptural accounts, sing, pray, and hear the proclamation of God's word, let us be reminded that we do not celebrate a one-time event, but the continual unfolding of the work of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is still at work in the world today, just as it was on that first Pentecost two thousand years ago.

For this reason, we unite our hearts, minds, and voices in glorifying the One who sent the Spirit that we might have eternal life.

---

## Hymn

“Love Divine, All Loves Excelling” (stanzas 1, 2, and 4)

Love divine, all loves excelling,  
joy of heaven to earth come down;  
fix in us thy humble dwelling;  
all thy faithful mercies crown.  
Jesus, thou art all compassion,  
pure, unbounded love thou art;  
visit us with thy salvation;  
enter every trembling heart.

Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit  
into every troubled breast!  
Let us all in thee inherit,  
let us find the promised rest.  
Take away our bent to sinning,  
Alpha and Omega be;  
End of faith, as its beginning,  
set our hearts at liberty.

Finish, then, thy new creation;  
pure and spotless let us be;  
let us see thy great salvation  
perfectly restored in thee:  
changed from glory into glory,  
till in heaven we take our place,  
till we cast our crowns before thee,  
lost in wonder, love, and praise.

*Charles Wesley (1747)*

*Suggested Tunes: BEECHER or HYFRYDOL*

## Prayer of Invocation

Father, through your Holy Spirit  
you create us and sustain us.  
Open our hearts and minds to your presence now  
as your Spirit moves among us.

Pour your divine love into our hearts  
that we may live in harmony with one another.  
Transform our minds  
that we may see your great salvation in one another.  
Draw from our mouths  
all of the glorious wonder, love, and praise  
that you desire and are due.

We pray in the name of Jesus,  
and through your Holy Spirit. Amen.



## THE CONFUSION OF LANGUAGES AT BABEL

*Scripture Reading:* Genesis 11:1-9 (ESV)

**(Reader 1) Now the whole earth had one language and the same words.**

(Reader 2) And as people migrated from the east,  
they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.

**And they said to one another,**

“Come, let us make bricks,  
**and burn them thoroughly.”**

And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar.

**Then they said,**

“Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens,  
**and let us make a name for ourselves,**  
**lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.”**

And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower,  
which the children of man had built.

And the LORD said,

(Both) *“Come, let us go down and there confuse their language,  
so that they may not understand one another’s speech.”*

**So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth,  
and they left off building the city.**

Therefore its name was called Babel,

because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth.

**And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth.**

### *Confession and Absolution*

Lord, we confess that, like the people of old, we have sought to make a name for ourselves by seeking to be god-like in our own eyes. We have gloried in the works of our hands and our minds rather than in your power, love, and mercy. Forgive us for our confusion as we silently confess our individual sins.



*(The people offer their silent prayers of confession.)*

Friends, hear the good news of the gospel: God says that “We do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. If Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.” (Romans 8:26, 10 ESV)

Be glad and rejoice, for God hears and answers your prayer!

**Thanks be to God!**

*(The congregation may sing the Gloria Patri, Doxology, or another appropriate chorus or hymn refrain of praise or thanksgiving.)*



## THE PROPHECY

*Scripture Reading: Joel 2:27-32 (ESV)*

(Reader 2) You shall know that I am the LORD your God and there is none else.

(Reader 1) **And my people shall never again be put to shame.**

And it shall come to pass afterward,

that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh;

**your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,**

**your old men shall dream dreams,**

**and your young men shall see visions.**

Even on the male and female servants

in those days I will pour out my Spirit.

**And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth,**

**blood and fire and columns of smoke.**

The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood,

before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.

**And it shall come to pass**

**that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.**

*(As soon as Reader 1 says the word “Lord,” the members of the choir begin to whisper “Lord” at various speeds, but not together, creating a hubbub by gradually increasing in volume and intensity, changing to “Alleluia” at the mid-point, then slowly fading away until there is silence. After a short period, the introduction to the following hymn should be played without announcement.)*

*Hymn*

“Spirit of God, Descend upon My Heart” (stanzas 1, 3, and 4)

Spirit of God, descend upon my heart;  
wean it from earth; through all its pulses move;  
stoop to my weakness, mighty as thou art,  
and make me love thee as I ought to love.

Teach me to feel that thou art always nigh;  
teach me the struggles of the soul to bear,  
to check the rising doubt, the rebel sigh;  
teach me the patience of unceasing prayer.

Teach me to love thee as thine angels love,  
one holy passion filling all my frame;  
the kindling of the heaven-descended Dove,  
my heart an altar, and thy love the flame.

*George Croly* (1854)

*Tune:* MORECAMBE

*(After the hymn the choir may sing a hymn or choral anthem emphasizing unity through the Holy Spirit.)*



## THE UNITY OF UNDERSTANDING AT PENTECOST

*SCRIPTURE READING:* Acts 2:1-15, 22-24, 37-41 (ESV)

(Reader 1) When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place.

(Reader 2) **And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.**

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven.

**And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language.**

And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language?"

**Parthians and Medes**

and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia,

**Judea and Cappadocia,**

Pontus and Asia,

**Phrygia and Pamphylia,**

Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene,

**and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes,**

Cretans and Arabians –

**we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God."**

And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another,

(Both) *"What does this mean?"*

**But others mocking said,**

*"They are filled with new wine."*

But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them:

**"Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day.**

**Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know – this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.**

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles,

*"Brothers, what shall we do?"*

And Peter said to them,

**"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."**

And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying,

**"Save yourselves from this crooked generation."**

So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

## Hymn

### “A Rushing, Mighty Wind”

A rushing, mighty wind roars through a crowded room,  
and tongues of fire upon their heads disperse the people’s gloom.

God’s Spirit blows the wind and lights the blood-red flame;  
a Pentecost of tongues explodes in praise of Jesus’ name.

Three thousand souls that day in mind and heart were stirred;  
and these were added to the church as they believed the Word.

Lord, make our breath a wind and let our tongues be fire,  
and as at that first Pentecost your people’s lives inspire.

*David W. Music* (2010)

*Tune:* FESTAL SONG

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(pp.67-69 of this volume)

## Sermon

*(The sermon should emphasize the unity of believers through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, preferably tying together the three scriptural passages for the day.)*

## Hymn

### “Christian Hearts, in Love United”

Christian hearts in love united:  
search to know God’s holy will.  
Let his love, in us ignited,  
more and more our spirits fill.  
Christ the head, and we his members—  
we reflect the light he is.  
Christ the master, we disciples—  
he is ours, and we are his.

Grant, Lord, that with your direction  
“Love each other” we comply.  
Help us live in true affection  
your love to exemplify.  
Let our mutual love be glowing  
brightly so that all may view  
that we, as on one stem growing,  
living branches are in you.

Come then, living church of Jesus,  
covenant with him anew.  
Unto him who conquered for us  
may we pledge our service true.  
May our lives reflect the brightness  
of God's love in Jesus shown.  
To the world we then bear witness:  
we belong to God alone.

*Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1723), translation composite*  
*Tune: O DU LIEBE MEINER LIEBE*

### *Offering*

### *Closing Sentence*

Go from this place as people who  
have prayed for the presence of the Holy Spirit,  
have experienced the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and  
depart to share the Good News through the power of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

### *Closing Song*

“Love Divine, All Loves Excelling” (stanza 4)

Finish, then, thy new creation;  
pure and spotless let us be;  
let us see thy great salvation  
perfectly restored in thee:  
changed from glory into glory,  
till in heaven we take our place,  
till we cast our crowns before thee,  
lost in wonder, love, and praise.

### **NOTES**

1 Scripture passages marked (ESV) are used by permission from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

2 Sing a congregational chorus, especially one that invokes the Holy Spirit, such as “Holy Spirit, Breathe on Me” (refrain only), “Spirit of the Living God,” or “There’s a Sweet, Sweet Spirit in This Place” at the conclusion of the welcome time.

For “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling,” you might substitute “Let Every Christian Pray” by Fred Pratt Green; for “Spirit of God, Descend Upon My Heart” – “Like the Murmur of the Dove’s Song” by Carl P. Daw, Jr.; for “Christian Hearts in Love United” – “They’ll Know We Are Christians By Our Love” by Peter Scholtes; for the last stanza of “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling” (at the end of the service) – the final stanza of “I’m Coming to Gather all Peoples of Earth” by Larry E. Schultz. The alternative hymns are in *Celebrating Grace Hymnal* (Macon, GA: Celebrating Grace, Inc., 2010).

The same two readers may be used for all scripture passages or different readers may be used for each passage. The greeting, opening statement, prayers, and closing statement may be read a single minister or lay person, or distributed among several worship leaders.

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# Revising Memories at Pentecost

BY WILLIAM D. SHIELL

**Pentecost Sunday often collides with Mother's Day, Graduation, or Memorial Day. This collision of calendars need not lead to conflict. Pentecost is an opportunity to revise our expectations for these recognitions through memories of a Church empowered in the present.**

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**P**entecost Sunday usually collides each year with Mother's Day, High School Graduation, or Memorial Day. In our worship services, the moms, graduates, and veterans come prepared for recognition, while the Spirit waits to be remembered. However, this collision of calendars need not lead to conflict. The celebration of Pentecost provides an opportunity to revise our expectations for these recognitions through memories of a Church empowered in the present. Peter's sermon in Acts 2:14-36 offers one model for how we might do this.

As Luke tells the story in Acts 2, the disciples of Jesus had gathered in Jerusalem fifty days after Passover to celebrate their beginning as Israelites. In their Jewish tradition, Pentecost (which is the Greek name for the Festival of Booths) was associated with the covenant God established with the people of Israel through Moses on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19-34). There God constituted a people, provided laws for them to thrive, and they worshiped God. During the festival, pilgrims remembered how their ancestors lived in wilderness booths dependent on God's provision. Their celebrations, however, were hampered by their speech. Despite their religious unity, their diverse languages and cultures divided them. In Jerusalem, the pilgrims sounded like people scattered after the Tower of Babel.

In an upstairs room, the Spirit intervened. Tongues of fire appeared over the heads of the disciples, and sounds like a violent wind filled the place. The casual observers thought the disciples were drunk; others heard them speaking the birth-languages that people spoke. Peter, however, interpreted these signs by preaching from memory. He did not transcribe prepared notes to regurgitate in perfectly voiced and measured tones. Luke 21:14-18 indicates that Jesus would give him a “mouth and wisdom” to speak. He would not need to worry beforehand about what to say or how to say it. Peter likely improvised his message by drawing on the collective memories of the day and the place, and Scripture.

To explain the significance of the day, Peter turned to the prophecy of Joel (Acts 2:16-21). Instead of reminiscing about times gone by, Peter said a new day of the Lord had dawned: sons and daughters could prophesy, men and women could preach, senior adults and young adults could see visions, and anyone who called on Jesus could be saved. A harvest festival designed to remind them of receiving God’s law was transformed into a day to empower them by the Spirit.

Peter changed the significance of the place. Instead of retracing their steps to Sinai, Peter saw the upstairs room and David’s tomb as the intersection of the Spirit’s power. David’s memorial site in Jerusalem was (and still is) a holy site for most Jews, promising them that a Messiah would come from David’s line. Drawing on Psalm 15, Peter said that David’s son had lived and died and risen again, and now was enthroned in heaven. He demonstrated that the risen Christ fulfilled their hopes for a Davidic king (Acts 2:29-35). Thus Peter blessed their memories of the place and filled them with new meaning.

When the people understood Peter, they began to see their moment and place in a new way. So, Peter called for their commitment: to repent their sins, believe now in the Lord Jesus Christ, and be empowered to go forward in the spirit of the risen Christ. Pentecost revised their memories of past events in order to empower them in the present.

The believers received a common gift that reshaped how they gathered together. Their fellow Jerusalemites from all over the world understood each other in their own language. The women, elderly, and young people preached and dreamed in ways that Joel imagined; they called for a commitment now, because the world was coming to an end much more quickly than they had ever anticipated. They saw one another as the witnesses commissioned by Jesus at his ascension (Acts 1:8), who now had the boldness to do what he had instructed them to do. They had found a power in the past that lit a fire in the present.



Preaching still has the power to revise memories of a place and commission people in the Spirit’s power today. And there is no better time to practice this power than during the months of May and June when Pentecost traditionally



falls. Whether we are remembering parents, graduates, or veterans, preachers stand in the space where they can use the memories of the past to empower the Spirit's work in the present.

How can Peter's sermon guide our preaching on Pentecost Sunday? In May and June we are tempted to make two mistakes. One is to surrender to the culture and let Hallmark rule the calendar. So, if it is Mother's Day, we preach a good Mother's Day sermon. The other mistake is to ignore what people are remembering during these days. For instance, we might skip over the school graduates, even though that rite of passage is just as important as anything else going on in their world. By clinging to the liturgical calendar, we miss an opportunity to demonstrate the Spirit's power in their lives

Rather than awkwardly stumble through the cultural 'holy-days,' or arrogantly sneer our way through the liturgical calendar, we might use the people's memories to invite a Pentecostal power in our midst. Mother's Day provides the opportunity to talk about the significance of mothers who have preached and prophesied to congregations over the years. Veterans who have turned their swords into ploughshares can testify to the Spirit's work of making peace. Graduates and families standing at the threshold of a new passage in life can recall the power of the Church to shape their character.

Pentecost is a Sunday to take what the calendar gives us and revise people's memories. Some of those memories are as painful as the Tower of Babel, and others are as powerful as Sinai. Some of those memories can empower new groups of people, like women and senior adults; others simply send the Church to do what we have always been authorized to do. Pentecost gives us the opportunity to go with people to the places they remember – their families, friends, schools, and communities – and incorporate these into worship by showing how the Spirit empowers us to transform those places. If Pentecost Sunday falls on Memorial Day, we might ask a veteran to share a testimony of God's alternative peace in the midst of perpetual war. When commissioning high school graduates, we might share stories of graduates who spent a gap year serving the poor. If it is Father's day, we might ask a family to share a story of serving on mission together.

I have either introduced or revised Pentecost in three congregations. Each one involved a lot of explanation, conversation, and commemoration. Invariably, it collided with someone else's expectations of those days. But instead of ignoring those requests, we can incorporate them. By doing so, I think we seize an opportunity to do what Peter did in Acts 2 – take people's memories and give them a present reality in the Spirit.



It is fascinating how places and memories become so intertwined. For instance, in Jerusalem today the traditional site of the upstairs room is located just around the corner from the traditional location of David's

tomb. You may hear Christian pilgrims singing in a Crusader's church that honors a place where Jesus shared a memorial supper and the disciples returned to receive the gift of the Spirit; and just a few yards away, you may hear faithful Jews praying at the site that commemorates the death of Israel's greatest king.

Of course, I understand that we do not really know where Peter preached and where David is buried. But in his sermon Peter invoked the memory of that tomb; visually and verbally, he blessed what the people were thinking, replaced their memories of David's death, Babel, Sinai, and Booths, and ignited a fire of Pentecost. So, the tourist in me can easily imagine Peter standing nearby and gesturing toward David's tomb as he says, "Brethren, I may say to you confidently of the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day" (Acts 2:29). It is a cool place to take pictures and sing a few songs.

But for the pastor in me, it is a sad place, too—a memorial to the peril of memory. It institutionalizes some of the heartbreaking events between later Christians and Jews, recalling them so powerfully that there is no possibility of a present reality, and small hope for a future that realizes our Pentecost dreams.

And so, to me that place in Jerusalem stands in vivid contrast to another place in Charleston, South Carolina, where memories now linger in a different way. I am thinking of the monument in that city to mark America's first Memorial Day celebration. The Charleston race course had been a Confederate prison where African-American slaves and soldiers died in putrid conditions during the Civil War. Following the liberation of the city, the locals—led by Christian missionaries, teachers, and children—transformed the racetrack-turned-prison-turned-graveyard into a memorial site to honor the dead. On May 1, 1865, they marched to that place, sang, shared a picnic, and planned a new future together in the present. By most accounts, it was one of the first official celebrations of Memorial Day. They took a horrendous event and revised their memories. They could not fix the past or forget about its horrors. They acknowledged the pain, but found new hope in God's promised future to inform their present. It is just the sort of thing the Apostle Peter might do.

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# Tracing the Spirit through Scripture

BY DALEN C. JACKSON

The four books reviewed here examine how the Holy Spirit is characterized in various biblical sources—the Old Testament, the Gospels, and Pauline letters—when viewed through the lenses of the traditions and questions that shape these modern interpreters.

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The Gospel of John points to the mysterious nature of the Holy Spirit: “The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). There is much we long to know about the Spirit and much value in learning to listen for the Spirit moving in our midst. Too often, though, our traditions have failed to be mindful of the role of the Spirit. The four books reviewed here examine how the Spirit is characterized in various biblical and historical canons, viewed through the lenses of the traditions and questions that have shaped these modern interpreters.

Christopher J. H. Wright addresses what he perceives to be the “widespread lack of awareness among many Christian people of the identity, presence, and impact of the Spirit in the Bible before Pentecost” (p. 9). In *Knowing the Holy Spirit through the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006, 159 pp., \$16.00) he presents a response that he originally delivered in a series of popular lectures. Wright is the author

of a number of books on Old Testament topics, including corresponding works on *Knowing Jesus through the Old Testament* (1992) and *Knowing God the Father through the Old Testament* (2007).

Wright treats five major themes: The Creating Spirit, The Empowering Spirit, The Prophetic Spirit, The Anointing Spirit, and The Coming Spirit. He draws from the opening chapters of Genesis as well as from the psalms, prophets, and other writings to illustrate the creative activity of the Spirit. He emphasizes God's hovering over and speaking into existence the entire universe – heavens, sea, and earth – through the Spirit. Also a part of God's creative activity are the sustaining and renewing functions of the Spirit, suggesting both that science is a gift from God and that we should share God's concern for sustaining the earth. In a final emphasis on creation, Wright turns to a focus on the Spirit as a gift of intimacy with God, God's withdrawal of the Spirit from rebellious humans, and its subsequent restoration through Christ.

In addressing the "empowering" Spirit, Wright focuses on characters in the Old Testament upon whom the Spirit is said to have come. These include Bezalel and Oholiab, who were inspired to artistic craftsmanship by the Spirit, the judges who were inspired to courageous and bold leadership – although sometimes out of control, King Saul, from whom the Spirit was later withdrawn, and Moses.

Over against prominent images of false prophecy in Scripture, Wright demonstrates the role of the "prophetic" Spirit in compelling God's prophets to speak the truth and giving them courage to stand for justice. He traces the work of the "anointing" Spirit in the stories of King Saul and King David, and then turns to Isaiah and especially the servant songs of that prophetic book to develop a vision of the coming Messiah, or anointed one. This vision encompasses the mission of God through Israel, through the "Servant," and ultimately through Christ and the Church.

Finally, Wright finds the "coming" Spirit in the eschatological vision of the Old Testament, which sets in the future the word of promise that draws people to repentance, forgiveness, and restoration. In all of these themes, Wright's vision is shaped by a desire to maintain a unified voice of Scripture in an evangelical tradition of interpretation.



Theologian Amos Yong brings his Pentecostal-evangelical roots to an investigation of the Holy Spirit as portrayed in Acts. In *Who Is the Holy Spirit? A Walk with the Apostles* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2011, xiv + 221 pp., \$16.99) Yong follows the prominent influence of the Spirit through the book of Acts, drawing moral and theological lessons from the narrative. Yong frequently goes back to the Gospel of Luke to demonstrate the continuity

between the life of Jesus and the lives of his followers in the early church, both empowered by the Spirit. Yong's purpose in exploring these biblical stories is to raise questions about "how to see the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, in our churches, and in our world today" (p. xiv).

Yong's conclusions generally reflect a mainline, scholarly tradition of interpretation. Nonetheless, he frequently charts a middle ground between this progressive tradition and the more conservative, Pentecostal tradition of his past and finds a thoughtful medium between various extreme stances. For example, he understands the Kingdom of God as something between a purely spiritual reality and a call to Christians to become revolutionaries out to overthrow earthly kingdoms (p. 11). He emphatically denies that the early community of Christians in Acts represents either Marxist communism or free-market capitalism (pp. 30-31). He often explores political, economic, and social dimensions of issues such as healing and Christian freedom, and especially of theological themes like repentance, salvation, and resurrection.

Among the progressive themes that he sounds are emphases on the Spirit's work in global and multicultural contexts and in peacemaking, as well as criticisms of patriarchalism, ableism, and other oppressive systems. A "Leader's Study Guide" containing small-group discussion questions at the end of the book offers a fairly rich supplement to each chapter by giving gentle provocation to thoughtful discussion.

Much of Yong's exegetical analysis of Acts reflects the kind of information one would expect to find in an introductory New Testament course – a distillation of broadly accepted scholarly insights. For the vast majority of churchgoers who will never take an academic course on the New Testament, Yong's treatment integrates this material in an accessible way with a challenging and lively reading of Acts.



Another work on the Holy Spirit comes from New Testament scholar Gordon D. Fee, whose heritage is also Pentecostal. In *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996, xv + 208 pp., \$16.99), Fee presents a careful examination of the Spirit in the writings of Paul. While his approach is methodical, his goal is ultimately pastoral, and the volume is intended to be an accessible guide for churches to nurture a life of the Spirit among its members. Fee is the author of numerous works on New Testament topics, including *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (1994), in which he compiled more than seven hundred pages of exegesis on this same topic.

Fee's approach is topical, as he explores the characterization of the Spirit throughout the corpus of the Pauline letters (which he defines

broadly). The Spirit fulfills the Old Testament promise of a new covenant by being the presence of God not only in individual believers, but even more importantly in the local church as a whole. Fee emphasizes the personhood of the Holy Spirit, as well as the relational nature of the Spirit within the Trinity – especially the vital role of the Spirit in bringing about salvation. This Trinitarian emphasis is crucial, Fee argues; while the mystery of the Trinity is not explained explicitly in Paul’s letters, Paul “*experienced God, and worked out that experience in a fundamentally trinitarian way*” (p. 38).

The Spirit also plays an important role in the eschatological vision of the early church by providing a guarantee of God’s future redemption and empowering Christians to live into that promise. Fee seeks to correct an individualistic emphasis on the role of the Spirit, and the consequent overly individualistic notions of salvation, by demonstrating the work of the Spirit in making a family of all those who come to faith, joined in one diverse body and gathered as God’s temple.

Fee develops a broad understanding of salvation, showing that the Spirit is involved in bringing persons to hear the gospel, in their experience of “receiving the Spirit,” and in enabling them to live the ethical lives to which God has called them. The Spirit bears fruit in the lives of Christians and empowers them in the ongoing struggle to resist worldly desires. The Spirit provides power in the midst of human weakness and suffering, and aids believers when they pray. The presence of the Spirit is vital in believers’ worship, including their singing. And the Spirit builds up the body of Christ by giving gifts to the individual members that are to be shared with all.

In all, Fee provides a scholarly but impassioned overview of the many important roles the Spirit plays in the life of individual Christians and even more importantly, the gathered church. He offers a mature perspective that calls for a balanced understanding of the Spirit, noting the weakness of focusing too exclusively on either the fruit or the gifts of the Spirit, on either the ethical life empowered by the Spirit or spirit-inspired worship. Most of all, he calls for Christians to return to Paul’s writings again and again for inspiration, to learn more of the fullness of God in the Holy Spirit alive in our communities of faith.



Anthony Thiselton’s *The Holy Spirit – In Biblical Teaching, through the Centuries, and Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2013, xii + 565 pp., \$46.00) provides a comprehensive treatment of the Holy Spirit, not just from the biblical evidence, but from the whole history of theological reflection in the classical Christian tradition. Thiselton, who has published

extensively over the years on topics of New Testament interpretation, develops this study in conversation with perspectives that have developed in Pentecostal movements and in charismatic “renewal” movements within mainline traditions. He contends that “the sheer size and growth of the Pentecostal churches on a global scale suggest that we urgently now need to aim at constructive mutual dialogue” (p. 328).

Thiselton begins with a summary of the evidence for the Holy Spirit in both testaments and the intertestamental Jewish literature. Next he briefly treats the writings of the Church Fathers and various theologians through the Reformation and early modern period. Then nearly half of the book charts the development of perspectives on the Holy Spirit in the theologies from the nineteenth century to today. While Thiselton addresses a vast range of issues related to the Holy Spirit in this massive survey, the focus often returns to particular issues raised by the Pentecostal traditions, such as whether the receiving of the Spirit constitutes a “second baptism” and how to interpret the gifts of the Spirit.

Still, the cumulative effect of this survey of so many theologians is the demonstration of mutual agreement across virtually all of the traditions on a number of important topics, such as the self-effacement of the Spirit in always pointing to Christ and the consistent role of the Spirit in prayer and prophecy. Thiselton offers a summary of “fundamental themes” that emerge in his study. These include insights concerning the personhood and transcendence of the Spirit, and the Spirit’s role within the Holy Trinity. He emphasizes the sharing of the Spirit as a common possession of the whole people of God, the holiness of the Spirit as an extension of God, and the danger of misattributing phenomena as effects of the Spirit. Finally, he reminds of the importance of worship that appropriately balances glorification of the Spirit and the other persons of the Trinity.

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**Developing his study of the Spirit in conversation with Pentecostal and mainline “renewal” movements, Thiselton contends “the sheer size and growth of the Pentecostal churches on a global scale suggest that we urgently now need to aim at constructive mutual dialogue.”**

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As a compendium of Christian reflections on the Trinity, this volume is an almost inexhaustible resource for any reader desiring to learn of the Spirit not only from Scripture, but also from the vast cloud of interpreters in the Church. The diversity Thiselton explores among these Christian

interpreters is valuable, and he presents their views with both clarity and a charitable grace. From Montanists and mystics to scholastics and reformers, Thiselton introduces us to passionate seekers of the experience of God's Spirit. And he does not leave their debates in the past, but introduces us to contemporary voices who take up the conversations and keep them vital in the context of global Christianity.

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# Who is the Holy Spirit?

BY BARBARA MUTCH

**With careful consideration given to Scripture, primary sources, historical interpretation, and personal experience, the four books reviewed here address the often polarizing doctrine of pneumatology and its meaning for life and faith.**

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**H**ow do we understand the person and work of the Holy Spirit? What meaning does this understanding have for the lives of believers personally and corporately? And where do we turn in order to acquire such an understanding? The four books reviewed here address the often polarizing doctrine of pneumatology and its meaning for life and faith.

Craig S. Keener, in his volume *Gift and Giver: The Holy Spirit for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001, 224 pp., \$24.00), turns to Scripture, primarily the New Testament, in search of the answers to these questions. Writing to what he refers to as the “larger body of Christ,” Keener sets a very practical agenda. He wants to help readers “better understand how the Spirit empowers Christians to live” (p. 11). His methodology undertakes a biblical examination of the Spirit’s role in Christian living, and then illustrates the argument with personal experience.

Keener organizes his work around the foundational question of how the Spirit can be recognized. He argues that learning to recognize God’s voice is necessary in order for believers to obey God and reflect God’s character; and “knowing God’s character in Scripture is the most important way to begin recognizing God’s voice” (p. 19). It is this growing ability for persons to reflect God’s character that Keener sees as the greatest work of the Holy Spirit. In response, he focuses the heart of his book on the work of the Spirit

in effecting moral transformation, examining what the New Testament teaches about the role of the fruit of the Spirit in the transformation process, and also the ways in which the Holy Spirit empowers believers for evangelism and ethical living. “The bottom line of the Spirit’s work in our lives is not power to perform miracles but a transformed heart that learns how to love” (p. 136), states Keener. Congruent with his emphasis on human transformation, Keener makes an interesting suggestion – that “baptism in the Spirit,” rather than referring only to what happens at the occasion of conversion, may more accurately refer to the entirety of the Spirit’s work in the lives of believers, including God’s empowerment for mission.

*Gift and Giver* presents the Holy Spirit as the One who empowers believers to live and defines believers as those who are charged with learning to recognize God’s voice and to depend on the Spirit who has been given. Through methodical study of the New Testament and personal illustrations, Keener crafts an accessible, practical book on the gift of the Holy Spirit who was given for the transformation of Christians.



Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen’s anthology, *Holy Spirit and Salvation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2010, 496 pp., \$45.00), is part of *The Sources of Christian Theology* series, whose aim is to provide resources for the study of major Christian doctrines. Each book in this series, which currently comprises four volumes, is edited by a scholar who selects extensive source materials that convey essential elements of theological formulation about each doctrine. The editor provides context and background to each of the selections, and includes a bibliography for further study. This volume turns to the “best Christian theological thinking” from the early church period to the present in order to understand the meaning of the Holy Spirit. Kärkkäinen presents an impressive collection of primary sources on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, briefly situating each within its historical time period and particular context, and then mostly lets them speak for themselves.

The book is organized into two parts. Part I, which surveys the history of the pneumatological traditions, presents a rich proliferation of views and experiences, images and metaphors of the Spirit from various sources. This section begins with the earliest efforts of the Apostolic Fathers to faithfully transmit the traditions of the Holy Spirit, and then traces understandings that developed through the wrestling of historic councils, the writings of Latin and Eastern Church Fathers, and the reflections of medievalists, mystics, and Scholastics. Next are selections from mainstream Reformers, highlighting the important role of pneumatology in their theological vision, and from the Post-Reformation renewal movements that were hallmarked by a deep interest in the spiritual life. Various nineteenth-century pneumatologies, expressed in the thinking of persons such as F. D. E. Schleiermacher and Abraham Kuyper, bring the first part to a close.

Part II, “Contemporary Theologies of the Spirit and Salvation,” is organized in two sections. The first represents key doctrinal beliefs about the Holy Spirit held by various traditions in the twentieth century, including the Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Anabaptist perspectives, and the Evangelical and Pentecostal/Charismatic traditions. This section also includes sources that are “contextually oriented,” meaning those expressed by feminist theologians, persons writing with particular concern for the environment, and out of the socio-political arena. The second half of Part II focuses on a wide variety of sources from the Global South, including writings introducing African Spirit Christology, Korean Minjung theology, and the Latin American Feast of the Espíritu Santo.

Rather than providing a single answer to the question of the identity and work of the Holy Spirit, Kärkkäinen offers a richly textured, kaleidoscope of images, symbols, metaphors, and stories of a member of the Godhead who can be encountered and understood through texts as diverse as Catherine of Siena’s *Table Waiter*, Bernard of Clairvaux’s *Kiss of God*, John of the Cross’s *South Wind that Wakens Love*, Thomas Goodwin’s *Builder of the Church*, and Karl Barth’s *Awakening Power*. The reader is richer for it.



*The Age of the Spirit: How the Ghost of an Ancient Controversy is Shaping the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014, 192 pp., \$19.99) is written by Phyllis Tickle with Jon M.

Sweeney. It is the third book of Tickle’s trilogy on Emergence Christianity, and the reader truly does feel as though they are stepping into a conversation already begun. The question of intended audience may have been addressed in a preceding volume, most likely those interested in the nature of the emergent / emerging church, but Tickle and Sweeney’s purpose in this slim volume is less clearly

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**Kärkkäinen offers a kaleidoscope of images and stories of the Spirit from texts as diverse as Catherine of Siena’s *Table Waiter*, Bernard of Clairvaux’s *Kiss of God*, John of the Cross’s *South Wind that Wakens Love*, Thomas Goodwin’s *Builder of the Church*, and Karl Barth’s *Awakening Power*.**

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stated than that of the three other books reviewed here. It appears they want to engage the question of the meaning of the Holy Spirit for the Church at this time. The methodology takes the form of an interpretive historical survey. The last two thousand years is organized into half-millennium increments, based on the theory that every five hundred years the Latinized world goes through a period of enormous upheaval. The Great Transformation

moved Rome from a kingdom to an empire; the Great Decline and Fall ushered in the Dark Ages; the Great Schism severed the Orthodox Christianity from the Western church; and the Great Reformation propelled, among other things, humanism, capitalism, and Protestant Christianity. Each of these periods of time, according to Tickle and Sweeney, have been marked by an overarching question of the locus of authority or, specifically, the issue of how believers should live.

By turning to history and a particular interpretation of it (in contrast to presenting primary sources as Kärkkäinen does in the previous volume reviewed), Tickle and Sweeney develop the argument that the Holy Spirit is central to the question of authority and ethics for the Church in this time. The thinking of Augustine and Basil on the nature of the Trinity, the expression of various councils and creeds, the nature of the relationships within the Trinity (specifically whether the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son, or from the Father alone), and the conception of twelfth-century Joachim of Fiore that all of human history is divided into three epochs each corresponding to a member of the Trinity, are among the resources from which the authors make their case. They conclude that the work of the Spirit is about movement and transformation, “and the most profound change theologically and conceptually in Christianity in our era has been the shift toward emphasis on God, the Holy Spirit” (p. 147). In place of past statements about the identity or work of the Holy Spirit and the implications for believers, Tickle and Sweeney create a sense of anticipation of what lies ahead in this Age of the Spirit. The book concludes with four helpful appendices describing major historical heresies, seven ecumenical councils, differences between Western and Eastern Christian practice, and a glossary of theological words that bear on the conversation presented.



Jack Levinson’s *Inspired: The Holy Spirit and the Mind of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2013, 246 pp., \$24.00) is clearly addressed to “students, theologians, scholars, and intellectually engaged pastors” (p. 9). It is intended as “a straightforward message for the church” (p. xii), particularly for “readers keen to develop and sustain vibrant contemporary spiritualities” (p. 2). Levinson seeks to draft an agenda for the future of pneumatology based on the premise that the Holy Spirit is most fully understood and experienced in the synergy of inspiration, virtue, and learning. In developing this agenda, Levinson builds around a central core of exegetical biblical study, to which he adds personal stories and significant practical application.

Levinson organizes *Inspired* into three lengthy chapters: “The Spirit and the Cultivation of Virtue,” “Putting Ecstasy in its Place,” and “The Spirit and the Interpretation of Scripture.” In the first chapter, Levinson

draws substantially on the teaching in the Jewish Bible or Old Testament that God gives the spirit-breath to all human beings at birth, and that it is this spirit given at birth that becomes the locus of virtue and learning for believers, who are continually being given the Spirit. In the second chapter, Levinson makes a biblical case for a strong connection between ecstasy and comprehension. Citing the Apostle Peter's pondering of his rooftop vision, the visions of Paul and Ananias, and the deliberations of the Jerusalem Council, Levinson claims that the relationship between study and the Spirit is the ultimate expression of inspiration throughout the book of Acts. In the third movement, he hones this argument more finely, claiming that the quintessential expression of the Holy Spirit in Israelite, Jewish, and Christian literature is the inspired interpretation of Scripture. Each of these substantial chapters concludes with specific, practical implications for Christian belief and practice, including how Christians acknowledge the Holy Spirit in those who are not Christians, how Christians pray, how churches can practice group discernment, and how Christians value the Old Testament. Levinson concludes his substantial work with an agenda for the Church, in which he states that "the principal task of the Holy Spirit for Christians is to illuminate the person of Jesus by setting his words and actions in the context of Israel's poetry, stories and prophecies" (p. 227).



Through a careful consideration of Scripture, primary sources, historical interpretation, and personal experience, the four books reviewed here present a dynamic picture of the Holy Spirit as the One who empowers believers to live, is described in diverse images, serves as the locus of authority for this age, and is experienced at the intersection of inspiration, virtue, and learning. Readers will be enriched intellectually and encouraged spiritually by time spent in their good company.



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