

PNEUMATOLOGY THROUGH
THE ARTS



NAMING
THE
SPIRIT

W. DAVID O. TAYLOR &
DANIEL TRAIN, eds.

FOREWORD BY AMOS YONG



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REMAINING WITH A NAME

THE IDENTITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE POSTURE OF THE ARTIST

Steven R. Guthrie

ON THE FIRST DAY OF CLASS; at parties and committee meetings; when entering a room or legal agreement; before the baptismal font; with one's betrothed at the altar in a wedding ceremony—in all these moments we declare our names or others declare them over us. Far from being a mere formality, in a remarkable way these syllables serve as the password by which we gain entrance to another's company. A name opens out onto further understanding, deeper knowledge, and greater intimacy. Conversely, a lost name is an obstacle to entrance as real as a lost key or a forgotten combination. We leave the party by another door, or at the very least avoid conversation, because we cannot remember the name of a friend who has just entered the room. We see the hurt on the face of a former student when we greet him by the wrong name. We experience a particularly poignant grief when a family member's dementia finally places our name beyond her reach.

What, we might ask then, is involved in learning the name of the Holy Spirit? Or, perhaps even more fundamentally: Is "Holy Spirit" a name? Thomas Aquinas begins his discussion of the Holy Spirit with just this question: "Next we have to consider the things that pertain to the person of the Holy Spirit, who is called not only the Holy Spirit, but also the Love of God, and the Gift of God. On the topic of the name 'Holy Spirit' there

are four questions. [The first of which is:] (1) Is the name ‘Holy Spirit’ a proper name of a divine person?”¹ The issue of what constitutes a proper name, Aquinas recognizes, is important with respect to the Holy Spirit. First, consider proper names in a more mundane context:

The Guthrie family has a pet cat.

The name of that cat is Gretl (sometimes referred to in more formal settings as “Gretl the cat”).

Pet is a common noun (originating, I have just learned, from a dialect in Scotland and northern England around the fifteenth century and meaning “tame animal”). *Cat* is likewise a common noun and (like all common nouns) a kind of name, in this case the name of the members of the species *Felis catus*. The common name *cat* of course, includes not only our family’s cat but all the estimated seven hundred million cats in the world, as well as all the countless cats that have been or are yet to be. *Cat* is both (and equally) an aging European shorthair living in a Brussels alleyway in 1847 and a three-year-old Abyssinian enjoying the penthouse apartment of a Korean billionaire in the year 2165. *Gretl*, on the other hand, as a proper name, points to *this particular cat*, to wit: “*Gretl the cat. A shy but affectionate black-and-white shorthaired tuxedo, who will turn five next month; chosen by Lucy Guthrie and paid for with the money she had saved herself; the runt of a litter of seven kittens named after the Von Trapp children; presently residing in Nashville, Tennessee.*” A proper name, then, specifies the individual who bears it and allows us to say something meaningful about the history and character of the bearer.

Is “Holy Spirit” a name in that sort of way, Aquinas wonders? Does it tell us something meaningful about the person and work of the Holy Spirit? Well, according to Aquinas, *yes and no*. Negatively, he explains, *God* (not only the third person) is Spirit, and *God* (not only the third person) is holy. Therefore, he concludes, “The expression ‘holy spirit’ is common to the whole Trinity.”² In that sense, Aquinas, like Augustine

¹Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Ia, question 36, answer 1. Translated by the English Dominican Friars, 2nd rev. ed. (Los Angeles: Viewforth Press, 2012), 168.

²Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Ia, question 36, reply to objection 1.

before him, decides that “Holy Spirit” cannot be considered the proper name of the third person of the Trinity. Instead (as we see in the quotation above), Aquinas focuses on two other names: “the Love of God” and “the Gift of God.”

But there also is a sense in which “Holy Spirit” *is* a proper name. Aquinas goes on to note: “If Holy Spirit is taken as one word” (rather than divided up into *Holy* and *Spirit*), it is the “expression in the usage of the Church . . . [that signifies] one of the three persons.”³ Not only that, but Aquinas recognizes a connection between the lexical meaning of *spirit* (*spiritus* in Latin) and the activity of the third person of the Trinity. He points out, “The name *spirit* in things corporeal seems to signify impulse and motion; for we call the breath and the wind by the term *spirit*.”⁴

This last observation is an acknowledgment of the semantic range of the word *spirit*. The biblical words that are most often translated “spirit” (*rûah* in Hebrew and *pneuma* in Greek) can also be translated “wind” or “breath.” The same is true of the Latin *spiritus*. Scripture does not treat these multiple meanings of *pneuma* and *rûah* as an etymological quirk but as significant. Jesus tells Nicodemus (Jn 3:5-8) that the movement and activity of the *Pneuma*/Spirit of God is like the movement and activity of the *pneuma*/wind. Psalm 104, similarly, traces a path from the *rûah*/breath that fills our lungs to the *Rûah*/Spirit that is sent forth from God: “When you take away [creatures’] breath [*rûah*], they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your spirit [*rûah*], they are created” (Ps 104:29-30 NRSVUE). In light of passages such as these, Etienne Vetö argues that Aquinas is more reticent than he need be about using *Spirit* as a proper name. We can learn a great deal, he says, by “remembering something as simple as the fact that the Scriptures do have a concrete name for the mysterious third person: *Ruah* and *Pneuma*.” “Of course,” he adds, “breath or wind is a metaphor, but it is the least inadequate one we have, and it is provided by the Scriptures.”⁵

³Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Ia, question 36, reply to objection 1.

⁴Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Ia, question 36, answer 1.

⁵Etienne Vetö, *The Breath of God: An Essay on the Holy Spirit in the Trinity* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019), xxiv, xxiii.

What, if anything, is at stake in all of this? A great deal.

First, Aquinas's discussion draws our attention to the fact that *spirit* is both a common and a proper name. This is an especially helpful reminder when as theologians we undertake conversations across disciplines. In Christian life and worship, "the Spirit" is the Holy Spirit: the third person of the Trinity, the empowering presence of God, who indwells Christians to remake them in the image of Jesus Christ, who aids us in our prayers, who is included in the name into which Christians are baptized. At the same time, the word *spirit* is regularly used in other ways—to designate some ineffable property of an individual or a group, for instance, or to speak of nonhuman sentient beings, such as angels or demons. Aquinas's query, then, encourages us to give careful attention to whether *spirit* is being used as a common or a proper name when people speak about *spiritual experiences* or *spirituality*.⁶ Not every cat is Gretl; nor is Gretl every cat.

Under this light, Aquinas reminds us that we look to both common and proper names for information about the bearer of that name. Knowing that Gretl is a *cat* clarifies the statement "Gretl cuddled up in bed with me last night" in really important ways. Yet, a common name can only tell you so much. With only *cat* to go on, you could not hope to pick out *Gretl* from the other felines at the local pet store. Both the common and the proper name are important. Again, this is helpful in undertaking an interdisciplinary reflection on the Holy Spirit. One mistake would be to translate every possible use of *spirit* as "Holy Spirit" without remainder. At the same time, however, it would be a mistake to neglect the wider connotations of *spirit*. That *spirit* can also mean "breath" or "wind" is important and helpful, as Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus highlights and as both Vetö and Aquinas recognize. Even more fundamentally, Aquinas's thoughtful attention to the question of naming reminds us that names are rich with meaning and worthy of careful reflection.

So, what are some ways in which the name "Holy Spirit" might be relevant to the study we are undertaking in this volume?

⁶"Since the name of spirit is given to different things, it is right to see what is that which is distinctively called the Holy Spirit. For many things are called spirits." Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 16.13.

PNEUMA: THE LIFE-GIVING BREATH OF GOD

Pneuma means “breath,” and, of course, one of the things we most readily associate with breath is life. This is the first thing that the Nicene Creed emphasizes when speaking of the Spirit: “We believe in the Holy Spirit, *the Lord, the giver of life.*” We encounter this intimate relation between life and God’s Spirit-Breath at the very beginning of the biblical story. Genesis 2 does not use the word *rûah*, but it does give us a compelling picture of the relation the Old Testament imagines between God’s breath and human life. “Then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being” (Gen 2:7 NRSV). In the creation account, human beings do not have life as an independent possession. Rather, they are dust, held in being moment by moment by the Breath of God. Apart from God’s *Breath* they “are dust, and to dust [they] shall return” (Gen 3:19 NRSV). Our life, not just its beginning but its continuation, is radically dependent on God’s Spirit.

If this is so, then it is ironic that the Holy Spirit often seems the most mysterious and elusive divine person. There is a sense, nevertheless, in which the Holy Spirit is the person of God who is closest to us. The words of a contemporary worship chorus articulate this intimate dependence: “It’s Your Breath in our lungs.”⁷ Here is God within us, whether we acknowledge God or not, each inhaled breath a renewed affirmation of the Spirit’s closeness to us and provision for us (Ps 139:7-10).

Nor is the Spirit the source of only *human* life. The writer of Psalm 104 believes that the Spirit-Breath of God sustains all the extraordinary diversity of life: the wild asses, the grass, the cattle, the cedars, storks, wild goats, coney, the moon, lions, human beings, creeping things, and even Leviathan (Ps 104:11, 14, 16-19, 21, 23, 25-26).

The Spirit is ubiquitous, in short. Within us and around us, preceding and following, the source and supply of all that is, the life of God, given to creation that it might live, sustaining all that breathes, by God’s own

⁷Jason Ingram, David Leonard, and Leslie Jordan, “Great Are You Lord,” Integrity’s Praise! Music, Little Way Creative, 2013.

divine Breath: all of this warns us away from associating the Spirit *only* with the rarified transports of so-called mystic or miraculous wonders.⁸ Indeed, because the Spirit is always and everywhere at work, giving life to creation, we may say that “in everything God is waiting for us.”⁹ This receptivity is in fact characteristic of much Pentecostal spirituality, particularly in the African American tradition. Estrela Alexander writes,

Acknowledging and engaging the presence of the Holy Spirit—is an integral part of Pentecostal living. The most mundane situations become ripe territory for the Holy Spirit’s intervention. . . . The invoking of the name of the Lord, of Jesus or of the Holy Ghost is more than just a verbal gesture or a slip of the tongue. It is a confession that God’s very presence and strength is required to get one through the struggle of the moment.¹⁰

Because all that lives from the Breath of God, we should expect to meet God in the everyday experiences of the world. This posture of careful attention, discernment, and alertness is the ground of the spiritual life; but it is likewise a posture that the arts in all their forms encourage and perhaps even require. German philosopher Josef Pieper makes the connection between art and contemplation explicit in his work *Only the Lover Sings*.

⁸Because the Spirit is the source of all life “it is . . . possible to experience God in, with and beneath each everyday experience of the world.” Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 34.

⁹Moltmann, *Spirit of Life*, 36. Theologian Michael Welker sounds an important note of caution at this point:

The “breathing,” the sending out of God’s Spirit, gives coherence, shape, and life. . . . The taking back of the *ruah* leads to death and decay. If the Spirit is held back by God, if God keeps to Godself, chaos must remain chaos. If it is recognized that the creative action of the Spirit is not self-evident, that the activity of the Spirit is not “automatic,” indeterminately “everywhere,” and with an arbitrarily specifiable constancy, we can begin to call into question the careless and thoughtless totalizations that have caused great difficulty for theology and piety. The abstract reference to the Spirit’s “ubiquity,” “universal causality,” and “universal effectiveness” can be corrected and replaced. The fact that God’s Spirit “has filled the world, and . . . holds all things together” (Wisdom of Solomon 1:7, cf. Isaiah 35:16) is not to be confused with abstract “ubiquity.” The Spirit is present in that which is held together and enlivened by God—but not for example, in that which is decaying to dust. God is present creating life and working righteousness. But through falseness and unrighteousness human beings can grieve and banish God’s Spirit. (Michael Welker, *God the Spirit* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994], 160-61.)

¹⁰Estrela Y. Alexander, “The Spirit of God: Christian Renewal in African American Pentecostalism,” in *Spirit of God: Christian Renewal in the Community of Faith*, ed. Jeffery W. Barbeau and Beth Felker Jones (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 133.

We seem, Pieper complains, less and less able to attend to the world with an attitude of receptivity, wonder, and contemplation. Though this is a spiritual malady, the “effective remedy” Pieper commends is “to be active oneself in artistic creation, producing shapes and forms for the eye to see.”

Nobody has to observe and study the visible mystery of a human face more than the one who sets out to sculpt it in a tangible medium. And this holds true not only for a manually formed image. The verbal “image” as well can thrive only when it springs from a higher level of visual perception. . . . Before you can express anything in tangible form, you first need eyes to see.¹¹

Of course, any artist would agree that careful attention is vitally important. One attends to the materials employed, to the character of line, color, sound, and movement. But a conception of the world as Spirit-breathed gives this attention a distinctive texture. Indeed, one might misread Pieper as simply encouraging the artist to focus her gaze on the inert object with even greater intensity, as if the artist were simply a person uniquely gifted at extracting meaning from lifeless matter. But this is not the vision of a world held in being by God’s Breath. In engaging the world, we engage what has been *given life*. This is not to suggest that we can gaze through each created object directly into the face of God, as if the material were nothing but a transparent pane opening onto the divine. No: the creation has been *given life*, which means it has its own being and character and identity. Yet it has been *given life*, which means that the artist always participates in dialogue. Our pneumatology grounds, demands, and makes sense of an engagement with art that is not only creative and attentive but responsive and receptive.

PNEUMA: THE WORD-BEARING BREATH OF GOD

The Nicene Creed highlights another way in which the Spirit is breath-like. “We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life . . . *who has spoken* by the prophets.” This line of the creed echoes the words of 2 Peter 1:21: “No prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by

¹¹Josef Pieper, *Only the Lover Sings: Art and Contemplation* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1990), 35-36.

the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (NRSV). It is also an acknowledgment that one of the fundamental functions of breath is to carry word. Likewise and equally, words are in the first instance borne by breath, a fact that is too easily missed in a modern Western culture that is largely textual rather than oral and aural.¹² Eighth-century theologian John of Damascus points out that the same breath that gives life gives speech. As such, the Spirit-Breath *belongs to* the Word. “The Word must also possess Spirit. . . . For there is an attraction and movement of air which is drawn in and poured forth that the body may be sustained. And it is this which in the moment of utterance becomes the articulate word.”¹³ Of course, the preeminent and paradigmatic instance of the bond between Spirit and Word is the incarnation. The child to be conceived in Mary, the angel tells Joseph, “is from the Holy Spirit” (Mt 1:21) When Mary asks the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” the angel responds, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you” (Lk 1:34-35 NRSV). Breath is the bearer of the Word: not only the words of instruction, teaching, and testimony but the eternal Word of God himself.

For many of the early church fathers, this intimate relation of Word and Breath was a picture of the necessary unity of mission between the eternal Son of God and the Holy Spirit. There could be no question, then, of pitting the Spirit against the Word, of creating a dichotomy between the experience and charisms of the Spirit and the historical specificity of the Word made flesh. How could the Word sound except by Breath? And does not Breath serve to carry forth the Word?¹⁴

The unity of Word and Breath is worth setting alongside Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus in John 3. There Jesus emphasizes that the activity

¹²“No speech is possible without breath. Breathing out is necessary to make sounds. Therefore the *ruah* is already present in God’s first breath. It resounds in the first word.” Geiko Muller-Fahrenholz, *God’s Spirit: Transforming a World in Crisis* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 13.

¹³John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, trans. S. D. F. Salmond, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, series 2, vol. 9, ed. Philip Schaff, <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf209/npnf209.iii.iv.i.vii.html>.

¹⁴“The patristic literature,” Sergius Bulgakov writes, “likened the Second hypostasis [that is, the Son] to the lips and the Third [the Holy Spirit] to the breath out of the lips, or the Second to the word and the Third to the air moving as the word sounds. . . . This dyadic union is *necessary* for the very realizability of the self-revelation.” Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 179.

of the Spirit is elusive and mysterious. This is, in fact, Jesus says, one way in which the activity of the Spirit is wind-like. We might ask, then: How are these two held together? Is the Spirit unknowable and beyond our grasp like the wind? Or like a teacher who brings us the word? In the biblical witness, the Spirit is both. The Spirit is, on the one hand, the knowledge-bringing, word-bearing Breath of God, and, on the other hand, the mysterious, invisible, and elusive Wind of God. This double identity (much like the self-effacing character of the Spirit) is not a problem but a gift. It points us toward a more richly nuanced understanding of the relationship between mystery and knowledge.¹⁵ The richness and complexity of the Spirit's work bars the way to a simplistic opposition of "mystery versus knowledge" or "experience versus word." If the Spirit is the giver of words and understanding, then "the spiritual" is not simply "the unknown," nor is that which is unknowable inherently spiritual. Likewise, while the Spirit is Teacher, the knowledge given by the Spirit is not absent of mystery. Spiritual wisdom is not knowledge we control or wield any more than we control or wield the wind.

All of this is helpful in any theological engagement with the arts. The theological exploration of art—employing words and concepts to engage aesthetic experience; bringing works of art to bear on theological categories—is not an attempt to mix oil and water. The activity of the Spirit teaches us that mystery, spontaneity, and creativity do not frustrate our aspirations to speech, knowledge, or understanding. Neither is it the case that our words and analyses should aim to dissolve the mystery of creativity into rational categories. Rather, the Spirit of Pentecost descends without warning and gives rise to speech; the resulting outburst of speech in turn gives rise to amazement (Acts 2:12) and awe (Acts 2:43).

The character of the Spirit's work demonstrates the potential of the sort of reflection undertaken on these pages. As much as any dimension of human experience, art and beauty testify that something can be both elusive and revelatory, both ineffable and generative of speech, both mysterious and knowledge bearing. The work of the Spirit is just so.

¹⁵For a fuller discussion, see Steven R. Guthrie, *Creator Spirit: The Holy Spirit and the Art of Becoming Human* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 12-21.

PNEUMA: THE DYNAMIC WIND OF GOD

Whether we are inhaling a life-giving breath or projecting a Word-bearing Breath, or feeling the wind push at our backs, *pneuma* means movement. Breath apart from movement is not breath, and wind apart from movement is not wind. This is highlighted by Aquinas: “The name *spirit* in things corporeal *seems to signify impulse and motion*.”¹⁶ Movement is not only characteristic of *pneuma*; it also unites the two activities highlighted above. By the Holy Spirit, the life that is in God comes to live in us; and by the Spirit, the knowledge and wisdom that is in God is made available to the prophets. By the Spirit, God the Father moves out beyond himself in the Son.¹⁷

Anyone who has ever been caught in a powerful wind, however, knows that in such a situation, it is not only the wind that moves. The wind also sets other things in motion. The Nicene Creed does not say that the Holy Spirit spoke *to* the prophets but rather spoke *through* the prophets. This is not the “through” of water pouring through an empty conduit, untouched by the vessel through which it passes. Rather, the Spirit’s movement sets the *prophets* in motion. The Spirit’s speech causes them to speak. The movement and dynamism of the Spirit’s work does not terminate in the outward movement from God to creature. The movement continues. We also can see this in another phrase of the creed: “We believe in the Holy Spirit . . . who together with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified.” We inhale the breath of the Spirit so that we may exhale the breath of worship. The first gift brings about a second. Physiologically, the intake of breath by necessity also gives the answering exhalation. The very structure of breath reflects the generosity of God and the generative character of creation. God’s intention is that we should be creatures who both inhale and exhale, who receive breath in order that we might then be givers of breath.¹⁸

¹⁶Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Ia, question 36, answer 1.

¹⁷The Holy Spirit “is the capacity of God to be ‘outside of himself’” (Vetö, *Breath of God*, 47, quoting H. Müllen).

¹⁸“God has already addressed man,” writes Jean Louis Chrétien, “has already spoken to him before man starts to speak, so that [humanity] will start to speak in his turn.” Jean-Louis Chrétien, *The Ark of Speech*, tr. Andrew Brown (New York: Routledge, 2004), 1 (emphasis added).

Again, all of this has enormous significance for the conversation between pneumatology and the arts. In sending forth his Life-Breath into creation, God the Father calls forth an answering breath from the creature. God gives not only breath, we might say, but *breathing*; God has not only sent forth his Word but has given creation its own distinctive voice. Creation, in other words, speaks because it has been addressed. Artistry is an enactment of this giving and receiving of breath. The created world receives God's breath of life. The answering exhalation carries not only God's breath but the voice of each creature. By its answering breath, the created world comes out to meet us. The response of the artist as she is met by stone, wood, air, or pigment is likewise testimony to the dynamic character of God's Holy Spirit. The listener, the viewer, the Christian, the theologian addressed by the created world and the artist's engagement with it, is likewise invited to respond.

At some level this dynamism can be discerned in all human endeavor and discourse, yet it is particularly evident in our engagement with art and beauty. Art foregrounds and depends on the respiratory character of a world given and held in life by God's Spirit. Artistry explicitly elicits our answering involvement. Significantly, Jean-Louis Chrétien explores the aesthetic experience in a book bearing the title *The Call and the Response* (*L'Appel et la Réponse*). "We speak," he writes, "only for having been called, called by what there is to say, and yet we learn and hear what there is to say only in speech itself. . . . The expanding diastole of beauty, in its radiant effusion, is also systole—its exodus is what allows our return."¹⁹

As this passage suggests, entering into this exchange—speaking about the voice that comes out to meet us—is itself a way of attending to, hearing, and understanding what has been said. The experience of art and beauty is a response to a call. And if God the Father gives his Spirit-Breath by way of his incarnate Word-Son that we might return it, enriched with our own voices, then engaging in this dialogue is one way of fulfilling our human vocation.

¹⁹Jean-Louis Chrétien, *The Call and the Response*, tr. Anne A. Davenport (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 1, 9.

PNEUMA: THE ENVELOPING ATMOSPHERE OF GOD

The biblical language of Spirit does not only speak of movement; it also speaks of the Spirit as the one who “comes to rest upon.” We should not, in other words, imagine the *Pneuma* as (only) a stiff wind that surges past us, scattering all the lawn furniture before rushing on. Rather, Jesus tells his disciples, “I will not leave you orphaned,” but “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, *to be with you forever. . . . He abides with you, and he will be in you*” (Jn 14:16-18 NRSV). Here, alongside dynamism and movement, is being-with, abiding. The Spirit *comes* to us in order to *dwell* with us.²⁰

What should we make of the apparent tension between the Holy Spirit as rushing wind and as resting, abiding presence? To some extent this tension is simply an acknowledgment that the Spirit of God will not remain within neatly drawn categories. The words of another contemporary praise chorus, however, may help us locate the “Spirit who rests upon” within the imagery of Breath and Wind:

Holy Spirit, You are welcome here.

Come flood this place and fill the atmosphere

Your Glory, God, is what our hearts long for

To be overcome by Your Presence, Lord²¹

The word *atmosphere* in this invitation to the Spirit is helpful, although it might be more appropriate to say that the Spirit not only *fills* but *is* the atmosphere we are invited to inhabit. Basil of Caesarea wonders at this mystery in a beautiful passage: “Although paradoxical, it is nevertheless true that Scripture frequently speaks of the Spirit in terms of *place*—a place *in* which people are made holy. . . . The Spirit is indeed the dwelling-place of the saints, and the saint is a suitable abode for the Spirit, since he or she has supplied God with a house, and is called a

²⁰Eugene Rogers suggests that the word *rest* is especially apt in describing the activity of the Holy Spirit. Rogers, *After the Spirit: A Constructive Pneumatology from Resources Outside the Modern West* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 61.

²¹“Holy Spirit,” by Katie Torwalt and Bryan Torwalt, 2011.

temple of God.”²² By the Spirit, Basil says, not only do we become God’s dwelling but God becomes ours, the place in which we are made holy.

God sends forth his Breath, and what does this Breath carry? Word, life, wisdom, the gifts of the Spirit—yes. But the gifts of the Holy Spirit, writes Didymus, “are nothing other than the substance of the Holy Spirit. . . . [They] come to human beings from the Holy Spirit. . . . He is the substance of the goods of God.”²³ Athanasius puts it forcefully: “When the Holy Spirit is given to us . . . God is in us.”²⁴ The Spirit is not only the bearer of the gifts of God. The Holy Spirit is also the presence of God with us and in us. Likewise, God has made us those who not only receive but, having received, necessarily send forth our breath. What is borne by this breath? Words, images, stories, ideas—yes. But likewise, by our breath, we may become present to one another. We create an atmosphere in which others may dwell. Human art and creativity are a particularly rich example of this mode of shared dwelling.

In his study of African American sacred quartets, Ray Allen ties this language of sharing and exchange to both musical performance and the presence of the Holy Spirit. Allen quotes Earl Ledbetter of the Wearyland Gospel Singers: “See, the lead singer always gets the Spirit first, because he’s the one leading the song. The background is just following him. But once we get into it, the background starts feeling good too. Once we start pushing him, he can really get out there and shout, do whatever he wants, he feels even better. We would push the feeling back up to him.”²⁵ The Holy Spirit and the musical energy inspired by the Spirit are passed back and forth between lead and background singers. The singers not only sing but make it possible for others to enter into the song. The congregation, in entering into the song, expands the space, making it possible for the singers to enter in more fully. The Reverend Vernella Kelly explains:

²²Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, tr. David Anderson (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2001), 62.

²³Didymus the Blind, *On the Holy Spirit*, in *Works on the Holy Spirit: Athanasius the Great and Didymus the Blind*, tr. Andrew Radde-Gallwitz and Lewis Ayers (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2022), 157.

²⁴Athanasius, *Letter to Serapion* 1.17.

²⁵Ray Allen, *Singing in the Spirit: African-American Sacred Quartets in New York City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 167.

If the congregation is pushing you and enjoying you, then that makes you enjoy more too. But if you are singing to a dead place, it looks like the Spirit doesn't come in and dwell in no dead place. . . . Any time you get support [from the congregation] it . . . makes the Spirit come in, when they're with you. . . . Then everybody is enjoying, when the Spirit is there.²⁶

Music, in this instance, is one particularly powerful way in which the character of the Holy Spirit's own life-as-shared-life is made actual in the world. It is one of the ways in which the Spirit, who gives life, reproduces in the creation the distinctive shape of that life: life as life together, life with, life as communion. There is a sense, then, in which a Christian pneumatology helps us to better account for the human experience of art and what we find meaningful about it. Artistic creation is one of the means by which human beings make themselves present to one another. So, we might say that when we dwell with one another in this way—when we extend ourselves through art or when we respond to the artist's invitation and enter into the atmosphere of the work—we are echoing something of the life of the Spirit. We are allowing breath to become shared dwelling.

THE FECUNDITY OF THE POETIC IMAGE

We have considered a few dimensions of the Spirit's work and person, all of which have been opened out and illuminated by a single image: *rûah*, *pneuma*. The richness of the name, and the further names to which it has given rise, is its own sort of validation of the kind of dialogue undertaken in this volume. It seems significant that biblical and theological discussions of the Spirit center on *names* and *images*. In considering the Spirit, we are inevitably in the realm of the first-personal and in the region of encounter. In observing a phenomenon, we may employ concepts; but in the moment of meeting, we say a name. Likewise, the church's reflection on the Holy Spirit moves inevitably toward imagery: breath, wind, stream, fire, oil, water, and spring. Pneumatology seems to situate us, as a matter of course, in the domain of the artist

²⁶Allen, *Singing in the Spirit*, 168.

and the poet. The reflection we have undertaken to this point testifies to the fecundity of attending to the image in all its named particularity. Further understanding emerges not from considering spirit as a pale noumenal abstraction but as we give sustained attention to *this* name and *this* image.

What is more, this poetic and imaginative dimension of Spirit language is not at odds with but rather is the source of further theological reflection. This is so in Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones, in Jesus' evening discourse with Nicodemus, and in the theological writings of Athanasius, John of Damascus, Aquinas, and contemporary writers. Each takes the imagery of *rûah-pneuma* not merely in a decorative or illustrative manner. Instead, they derive further insight from regarding this multifaceted image from various vantage points.

"The distinctive activity of art," Rowan Williams writes, "is a departure from what is delivered by the individual sensorium: the artist projects a sensorium that has not yet been said or seen or encountered and which is not determined by what has been said, seen or encountered." This, Williams acknowledges, is what happens in every communicative act. We speak or gesture and in so doing offer a novel sensorium that must be received and interpreted by our hearer. The hearer re-creates in perception what was created in production. But the artist

intensifies this routine process by proposing to the listener or viewer a common object that represents neither the raw givenness of the artist's individual world . . . nor the habitual shared construct of ordinary communication. We could say that the artist, by inviting some sort of recognition for what is produced in the artwork, pushes for the extension of the accepted boundaries of the common world.²⁷

In this volume, artistic activity—itself an act of responsiveness—generates a further act of response in the doing of theology "through the arts." This is intended as "an extension of the boundaries" of the sort Williams describes. In some ways, this is simply another way of articulating the first

²⁷Rowan Williams, *Understanding and Misunderstanding "Negative Theology"* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2021), 29-30.

activity we mentioned in connection with the Spirit: the giving of life. Life *expands* and *extends*.²⁸ (As I write this, I think of a friend expecting her first child. Each time I see her, it is evident that the life in her has brought about greater expansion.)

There is another sort of life-giving expansion in pneumatology. Names beget names. We delight to repeat the name of our beloved, so much so that we extend that delight into additional titles, nicknames, and terms of endearment. So, in the fullness of time, Gretl has gained the further appellations: “Sweet Kitty,” “Baby Girl,” “Loaf,” “Chonk,” “Chonk-Loaf,” and “Queen.” Over centuries of theological reflection, the Holy Spirit has likewise accumulated additional names, mostly drawn from Holy Scripture and never drifting afar from their theological rootage in Holy Scripture. In fact, it is a commonplace in many premodern studies of the Spirit to enumerate these titles.²⁹

I have said that the Spirit is both Breath and Wind, both mysterious and the giver of knowledge, both dynamic movement and abiding presence, both the one who dwells in us and the one in whom we dwell. Here, then, is one final paradox: the Spirit who is ineffable has also inspired myriad titles. The one who (at least according to some theologians) may not have a proper name is also the bearer of many names.

²⁸Words and images matter here. There is a mode of academic theologizing that attempts not to *extend* boundaries but to *transcend* them, that aims to be not so much *expansive* as *transgressive*. The distinction is of the greatest importance. There is all the difference in the world between cherishing and extending the life one has received, on the one hand, and attempting to unmake and overturn it, on the other. In the essay quoted above, Rowan Williams continues, “The artist whose goal is purely disruptive, who is not at some level inviting recognition, cannot be recognizably an artist; they will be reducing rather than expanding the shared world because they are not producing what can be seen . . . as a shared object, a common datum for sensing and thinking” (*Understanding and Misunderstanding*, 30-31).

²⁹Calvin offers one such list:

He is called the “*spirit of adoption*” because he is the witness to us of the free benevolence of God with which God the Father has embraced us. . . . He is called “*the guarantee and seal*” of our inheritance because from heaven he so gives life to us . . . as to assure us that our salvation is safe in God’s unfailing care. He is also called “*life*” because of righteousness. By his secret watering the Spirit makes us fruitful. . . . Accordingly he is frequently called “*water*.” . . . From the fact that he restores and nourishes unto vigor of life . . . he gets the names “*oil*” and “*anointing*.” . . . He enflames our hearts with the love of God [and so] . . . he is justly called “*fire*.” . . . He is described as the “*spring*” whence all heavenly riches flow forth to us; or as the “*hand of God*” by which he exercises his might (Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* III.1.3, tr. Ford Lewis Battles [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960], 540-41. Emphasis added.)

The essays in this volume explore these names and images. They are, in fact, an invitation to dwell on the name of the one who dwells with us. “Do not leave Jerusalem,” Jesus admonishes the disciples before his ascension, “but *wait* for the gift my Father promised” (Acts 1:4). In a similar way, our reflection on the verbal imagery of *Spirit* urges us to wait not only on the person of the Spirit but with *this* name and *the* image, listening and gazing attentively, that we might receive the gifts God has for us. In that sense, by engaging the arts we adopt the native tongue of pneumatology. As we inhabit the language of song and poetry and image, we take up the posture appropriate to those speaking of the Spirit: watching and listening in an attitude of attentiveness and awe, delight and love.



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