

# Encountering the Holy Spirit

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The Scottish Catholic composer, James Macmillan, dedicated his fifth symphony, *Le grand Inconnu* ('the great unknown'), to a sonic meditation on the Holy Spirit. Reflecting upon familiar scriptural designations, the three movements sound the Spirit as *Ruah*, Hebrew for wind/breath (Gen 1:2 and Ezek 27:9-14; cf. Acts 2:2, Jn 3:8, Jn 20:22, Lk 23:46); as *Zoe*, Greek for life/living, life-giving power (Jn 6:63, cf. Isa 11:2-4), and, by extension, living water (Jn 7:37-9 and Jn 4:14); and as *Igne*, Latin for fire (cf. Acts 2:3-4, also Lk 12:49).

In scriptural perspective, *Ruah* variously voices the wind/breath moving over the deep to bring creation forth and hold all things in being, the divine breath that draws the human heart to resonant desire for God, and the unpredictable, uncontainable charismatic force that inspires, impels, and will not be bounded. *Zoe* voices the promise and experienced reality of the sustaining, refreshing, revitalising, intimate presence of God within us; closer to each of us, as St Augustine said, than we are to ourselves. *Igne* voices something of the awe, wonder, and glory of God's presence-in-act, which makes our hearts burn within us (Lk 24:32) and which, as Catherine McAuley said of God's mercy, has been cast as a transfiguring fire on the earth. Amongst many other scripturally-rooted understandings of the Spirit, perhaps most significant is that of the Spirit as the Love of God (Rom 5:5, Gal 5:22, and 2 Tim 1:7).

Each of these is a dynamic image for the initiating-transforming reality of God's loving, life-giving action; for God as actually being the inexhaustible act of ever-living Love and all-loving Life. Always before us and beyond us, this reality is both more than we can ever fully experience and know in the present, and beyond our capacity ever to control. As complement to the more familiar dove of peace, the Iona community well-figures the Spirit as 'wild goose', evocative of scripture's soaring eagle under whose wings we are held and moved.

This is the loving, life-giving, initiating-transforming acting of God in which the life of Jesus – the incarnate, eternal Word of God – was conceived, born, and shaped throughout. It is in this power of the Spirit that Jesus grew to maturity and came to an understanding of his mission to proclaim and enact the Kingdom of God – God's loving reign and act – and to witness to the way of life-giving self-giving Love even to the point of it costing him his life. It is in this same power of the life-giving Spirit of Love without limit that the dead Jesus was raised to transformed life and the church as the communion of the Spirit was born.

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