Introduction

Descent of the Dove: Knowing and Loving in Spirit and Truth.

Pusey House Theological Conference

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This book gathers together the papers which were given at a theological conference at Pusey House, Oxford – "Descent of the Dove: Knowing and Loving in Spirit and Truth". The conference took place between 4 and 6 July 2022, two years after the date initially planned. While this was a significant challenge for the organisers and speakers, and no doubt for those who were getting ready to attend, it was still one of the more minor inconveniences of the strange Covid-19 period. Whether it was relief that we were finally able to gather together, or the gladness that this occasioned, or some other super-added gift of grace, the "Descent of the Dove" conference seemed to be adorned in a special way by the overflowing joy and generosity of the Holy Spirit who was the focus and destination, and no doubt the prime mover and guide, of our time together.

This 2022 conference was the third of a series following "A Transforming Vision: Knowing and Loving the Triune God" (2016), and "Totus Christus: Knowing and Loving the Son of Man" (2018). The papers from these conferences were published by SCM Press: *A*

Transforming Vision (2018) and *Christ Unabridged* (2020). We are very grateful indeed to James Clarke & Co. for publishing the collected papers of the 2022 conference.

Pusey House was founded in 1884 to be 'a house of sacred learning', a place where theological study and engagement with the intellectual life of the University of Oxford is encouraged alongside worship and prayer and in the context of a rich community life. Drawing on the tradition of renewal and *ressourcement* inspired by the Oxford Movement, we seek to build a community where thoughtful and robust faith is nourished by beauty-inspired worship, promoting serious engagement with contemporary trends and ideas, and forming disciples in Christ for service in the Church and in the world. Uniting the life of the mind with the life of prayer – keeping thought about God and God's world together with the movement of the heart toward God – is integral to the charism of the House, a dynamic unity which inspires our consideration of serious theological, anthropological, legal, and cultural topics.

Planning and looking forward to "Descent of the Dove", our goal was to consider the person and work of the Holy Spirit, and the inevitable transformation which any knowledge of, faith in, or encounter with, the Holy Spirit both invites and enables. We hoped that the conference would serve not only the furnishing of our minds, but also the transforming of our lives and communities by the indwelling and work of the Holy Spirit. It is our hope that this book may further these goals, and serve the same Spirit, who blows where he wills and accomplishes ends which exceed all our asking and imagining. As an expression of the conviction that we were seeking not the kind of knowledge which we could claim for ourselves according to human gifts and strength alone, we looked and prayed for the Spirit's descent in the worshipping life of the Church; the conference unfolded within the normal pattern of worship which sustains and guides our living and working together at Pusey House.

The conference was also inspired by Charles Williams' 1939 book *Descent of the Dove: A Short History of the Holy Spirit in the Church*. For Williams, the history of the Christian Church is 'An operation of the Holy Ghost towards Christ, under the conditions of our humanity'. Williams' work is not a conventional kind of history, but a speculative reflection on the appearance of God the Holy Spirit in and through that history, manifest especially in the body of Christ, and in the lives and aspirations and ideas of all the members of that body. He

is especially insightful in showing how the Spirit knits together those in apparent opposition, and how the loving and wise purposes of God over-rule, or appear through, different forms of human frailty and confusion. The themes and principles which Williams articulates run like golden threads through the papers presented here.

This chapters that follow organize the papers in a pattern which is loosely chronological as well as thematic. To get a sense of the great themes of the conference, you could turn to the final chapter, 'Living into Communion', where Rowan Williams reflects on the papers and themes which emerged at the conference, beginning with 'the place of experience in Christian theology'. He considers how speakers addressed the way in which the Spirit is known and looked for in liturgical and other practices, how the Spirit can be said to shape the way we think about ourselves and the world, and how the Spirit guides our experience of communion with God and with one another in desolation. Williams reflects on what speakers had to say about 'the nature of life in the Spirit', and draws together their different approaches to 'the immanent and eternal Trinity'. Finally, he addresses 'sanctification and eschatology'. In these comments he refers to papers by Karen Kilby, Bede Professor of Catholic Theology at Durham University, and by Judith Wolfe, Professor of Philosophical Theology at the University of St Andrews, each of whom made important contributions to the conference but whose work is not included in this book. Williams' analysis and reflections could serve as an introduction as well as a conclusion to this collection.

The first section draws together papers which consider directly, in an exegetical and theological fashion, how the Holy Spirit is known and manifest in the Bible. In the first chapter Wright argues that 'the early Christians thought of *both* Jesus *and* the spirit in terms of *YHWH*'s return to Zion, the complex event through which the present Temple was denounced and the new Temple both built and inhabited'. Jack Levison describes Wright's analysis as 'cinematic in scope, panoramic in perspective'. It is this wide-angle view that makes it helpful to put this chapter, with a more New Testament focus, before the two chapters on the Old Testament. Wright reads both Old and New Testament texts as Christian Scripture. We are able to recognize the high pneumatology of the Old Covenant with aid of the New Testament and specifically through the double lens of Galatians 4 and Romans 8. Wright argues that St Paul 'tells the story of Jesus and the Spirit precisely as the new Exodus story'. In this new Exodus story,

'the Holy Spirit takes the role… of the glorious divine presence in the wilderness Tabernacle'. Wright argues that we see here a Christian world where 'the full divinity of the holy spirit' is taken for granted.

In "The Human Spirit and the Spirit of God in the Psalms" Susan Gillingham offers a close reading of the Psalms, showing the different ways that *ruach* is used. She argues that in only four Psalms does this 'distinctive Hebrew word for "spirit"' refer to the 'spirit of God'. On fourteen other occasions in the Psalms *ruach* describes the 'human spirit', while 'the most common translation of *ruach* is "wind" or "breath" (human and divine)'. This leads her to describe Christian readings which find the Holy Spirit everywhere in the Psalms, or 'the person and work of Jesus Christ within the psalms', as 'unashamedly eisegetical'. She concludes: 'it is unlikely that the psalmist understood the spirit of God as an individual distinctive persona in the Godhead'. She also argues that if we seek, nonetheless, to welcome such readings 'as offering us second layers of important theological meaning to the text', then we must also be prepared to face the 'challenging hermeneutical implications' which that approach entails.

Jack Levison, in his paper "The Holy Spirit Before Christianity", shows one approach to these hermeneutical challenges and implications raised by Gillingham. He does not, in the first instance, read the Psalms through a Christian lens, but he argues rather that the people of Israel before the birth of Jesus and the formation of the New Testament were already developing the high pneumatology which Wright identified. According to Levison, 'the origin of pneumatology begins early in Israelite literature and lore, in two Israelite traditions that fused to generate a pneumatology in which the Spirit of God would be understood to be, not so much a power, as a person'. While he does not suggest that this was formulated in specifically Trinitarian terms, he does argue that Haggai 2:4-5 and Isaiah 63:7-14 especially show that there are sources in the Old Testament which present the Spirit as a person. When Haggai described God's Spirit standing among the people, 'My spirit stands among you', and Isaiah characterized the Spirit as 'the angel' of God's presence, 'the Spirit of the LORD' who gave his people rest, they 'introduced the Holy Spirit into the traditions of the exodus'. Reading the Exodus with Haggai and Isaiah means that the God who was present, 'through a cadre of divine agents – pillars, an angel, clouds, and God's presence, or *pānim*', can be recognized or seen to be God the Spirit.

The next section in this collection invites us to consider the work and person of the Holy Spirit in the context of what Marcus Plested calls 'the broader symphony of the Fathers of both East and West'. John McGuckin not only offers a thorough examination of the pneumatology of St Athanasius, but he invites us to share in the excitement and the drama inspired by the great Alexandrian's articulation of 'an entirely new anthropology, a completely new *theandric* philosophy'. Athanasius' description of the 'reconstitution of humanity' by the personal and transformative indwelling of the Holy Spirit burst 'like a supernova onto the antique world'. According to McGuckin: 'In each of his works, the theologian consistently shows how salvation worked out on the grand scale by Christ's incarnation and victory over death has to be appropriated on the individual scale by the purification of mind and soul brought about by the indwelling of the Spirit of God.' Athanasius was not only a champion of the full divinity of the Son of God, but also of the Godhead of the Holy Spirit: 'If the Holy Spirit were a creature we would have no participation in God in him.' For Athanasius, the doctrine of the Trinity is 'God's own-bridge building' between eternity and history, and between the divine persons and the personal presence of God in the human family.

In his paper "Acquiring the Wings of the Spirit", Marcus Plested explores the 'Experiential Pneumatology', the experience of God the Holy Spirit, which he finds in the writings traditionally ascribed to St Macarius the Great of Egypt, the disciple of St Anthony. Against the backdrop of what Plested describes as a widely acknowledged and 'relative deficiency in the Western Christian apprehension and appreciation of the distinct personhood and ministry of the Holy Spirit', he examines the importance of the spiritual experience: 'Experience – duly tempered by scripture, tradition, and the judgment of the Church – has long been recognised as a normative theological category in the Christian East in a way it has only very rarely been in the Christian West.' Because the Holy Spirit 'only speaks once in direct recorded speech' in the Bible (Acts 13:2), it is necessary to recognize and know the Spirit in another register, 'through direct personal experience, or at least through trusting and listening to those who have had such experience'. According to Gregory of Nazianzus, perhaps the greatest theologian of the Christian east, the Holy Spirit is revealed 'above all through lived experience in the Church – through worship, prayer, and direct mystical experience'. Plested invites us to find a theological account of this experience in the Macarian writings:

'Macarius' master-theme is precisely the quest for the perfecting and deifying experience of the Holy Spirit presented as a goal open to, and indeed expected of, *all* Christians.'

In "The Voice of the Holy Spirit", Carol Harrison reflects on 'the ways in which the Holy Spirit is encountered and known in much the same way as Jesus' voice addressing Mary in the garden'. She invites us to consider both the importance of a certain kind of speaking and hearing, and the way in which that speaking and hearing '*in* the Spirit' serves to unite 'those who speak and those who hear'. She contemplates both the elusive character of the experience of the Spirit described by Marcus Plested, and the encounter with the Spirit which was described more dogmatically in John McGuckin's account of Athanasius. Harrison suggests both why a dogmatic presentation is important, but also why dogma cannot do justice to the encounter with 'the overflowing benevolence and love of the Holy Spirit'.

As the letter and the Spirit are distinguished by St Paul and by the early Christian writers, so does Harrison distinguish the mere fact of sound from the mood or tone in which it is uttered. It is this tone which gives expression to 'the non-verbal voice which expresses the inexpressible', a voice and tone which is fundamentally 'the voice of love'. Speaking and hearing in this way effects a kind of mutual in-dwelling. The love which has been 'poured out in our hearts' is God the Holy Spirit through whom 'the whole triad dwells in us'. Harrison summarizes her argument in a way that conveys an encounter which is both elusive and powerfully unitive: 'The bond which unites teacher and pupil, speaker and hearer so closely that they intermingle with each other, dwell in one other, and become one in speaking and listening, is again the voice of love, the Holy Spirit. And once again, it is not so much the precise wording of the text, or carefully chosen expressions, as the particular tone of voice – the voice of love –which conveys the truth and unites people in it.' This voice cannot be captured or forced by dogmatic formulae even if those formulations gesture toward to God who is and speaks in love. Our 'praying and singing *in* and *through* the Holy Spirit' transforms and illuminates both the speaker and the hearer more than our attempts, however important and necessary, to describe that love, 'as when the risen Christ simply says "Mary", and Mary responds, "Rabbouni"; or when the lover says to the beloved, "I love you"'.

Richard Conrad's consideration of the tradition which described the Holy Spirit as the Love 'between' the Father and the Son takes

us from the second section of this book, on the patristic witness to the person and work of the Spirit, to the third section which shows something of the unfurling of pneumatological speculation and experience in the western Church. Conrad begins by examining the procession of the Spirit in both biblical and theological sources before considering those who describe the Spirit as 'God's Covenant-Love-in-Person'. His insightful and careful analysis of St Augustine and his 'mental model' of the Trinity leads him to argue that referring to the Holy Spirit as the 'bond of love' can be misleading: 'the Spirit is *not* the love *between* Father and Son in the sense of enabling this love'. Scholastic authorities including Lombard, Bonaventure and Aquinas resisted any idea of the Spirit as 'an intermediary' rather than a distinct person. Conrad presents the complex tensions with which they wrestled. He distinguishes, for example, the Love which is God in terms of 'Essential Love', 'Notional Love' (describing how the Father and the Son unite in love), and 'Personal Love'. The overflowing Love of God is manifest both in Christ's sacrifice and in his two-directional love – love toward the Father and love toward 'each and every person'. Conrad unites analytical precision and adoring love in his account, concluding by inviting us to 'speak of the Spirit enfolding, in love and joy, Father and Son who give us the Spirit who proceeds from their love, that He may enfold us'.

The seventeenth-century Portuguese Dominican John Poinsot, called John of St Thomas, developed and systematised the ideas of Thomas Aquinas into what Robin Ward describes as 'a rich and spiritually inspiring doctrine, confident in the truth that "All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God"'. Aquinas had already distinguished the gifts of the Holy Spirit from the virtues, 'because whereas the virtues, even the infused ones, operate in a human mode, the Gifts operate in a superhuman one'. Ward argues that for John of St Thomas, the gifts of the Spirit constitute a bridge between 'moral and mystical theology': 'the illuminations of the Holy Spirit make for an illumination and experience of divine things that stirs the soul to act virtuously in a way which is beyond the capacities of the virtues'. John of St Thomas offers a helpful and compelling image to describe the difference between 'human zeal and industry' and 'the rule and measure of the Holy Ghost', saying that this difference is like the difference between 'the laborious rowing of oarsmen and its being moved by sails filled with a strong breeze'. Ward offers this account as a corrective to arguments that characterises 'the Latin tradition as

artificial and deficient in its doctrine of the operations of the Holy Spirit', an argument presented earlier by Marcus Plested. Rather, Ward argues that the Thomistic account of the gifts of the Spirit which John of St Thomas articulates give a theological grounding to the experiential or affective awareness and agency of the Holy Spirit. According to John's account, the interplay and inter-penetration of the Gifts and the virtues offers a 'connatural experience of them and a taste of divine things which is acquired through charity', a kind of Wisdom which is both the foundation of theological science, but which is also 'known in affection' and 'in accord with an interior taste and experience'.

David Curry frames his discussion of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the sermons of Lancelot Andrewes by the 'two inter-related metaphysical concepts' which shape Charles Williams' *Descent of the Dove*: 'the Doctrine of Co-inherence and the Dialectic of *Kataphatic* and *Apophatic* theology, the Way of Affirmation and the Way of Negation'. Curry argues that Williams' double affirmation corresponds to Andrewes' insistence that 'the mystery of the incarnation' and 'the mystery of our inspiration' belong together as works of the same Spirit. Andrewes describes both the mutual indwelling of God in humanity, and the mutual indwelling or *perichoris* of the persons of the Trinity, as 'a kind of circling'. This concept corresponds to Charles Williams' principle of co-inherence. The Spirit comes down from heaven and blows into the Church, and in another circle or circuit returns into heaven carrying those 'whose sails it hath filled with that wind'. The great affirmation of this circling co-inherence is that we are made 'partakers of the divine nature' through the bridge of what Williams called 'the holy and glorious flesh'.

Andrewes characterizes the co-inherence which makes the human person a partaker of the divine nature as a 'royal exchange': 'He clothed with our flesh, and we invested with His Spirit'. Curry argues that Andrewes, like Williams, holds this great affirmation of participation in God in a necessary tension with the great negation, the insistence on the radical discontinuity between God and all that is created, including even the humanity which comes to partake of the divine nature. The promise of co-inherence, that humanity is taken into the great circuit from and into God, requires the way of negation alongside the way of affirmation. This idea is explicit in Williams and implicit in Andrewes. In Curry's words, 'Andrewes' sermons are a constant movement around and into the mystery of God without collapsing God into

our humanity and world, on the one hand, and without negating or destroying humanity as created, on the other hand'. Curry helpfully and skilfully enables us to see these connections in a way that illuminates each author and cast light on themes presented elsewhere in this collection.

In his "The Dove Descending", Malcom Guite invites us to ponder the work of the Holy Spirit in creation and in the human person through the poetry of George Herbert, John Milton, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and T. S. Eliot. Inspired by George MacDonald's invitation to construct 'an auricular chapel' which 'resonates' with the echoes of poets singing antiphonally 'across the ages to one another', Guite considers how the poems of Milton, Hopkins, and Eliot respond to, amplify, and modify the originating 'call' of Herbert. Herbert's poem 'Whitsunday' invites prayer to the Holy Spirit: 'Listen sweet Dove unto my song, / And spread thy golden wings in me'. Guite consider how Herbert seeks 'to woo' the Dove who he encounters in Scripture to come within, to become 'the wings of the winged heart', to become 'fruitful' and 'to 'hatch something in us'. Milton responds to Herbert's chant, evoking the dove-like Spirit 'brooding on the vast Abyss', and, like Herbert, inviting this Spirt to come within, to illumine 'what in me is dark'. Like Herbert, he moves from the dove in Scripture, what is 'out there and back then' to the 'in here and right now'. Without this prayer for a personal indwelling, argues Guite, 'The Spirit is not doing what the Spirit should do, which is coming upon the Church in and through us.'

Turning to Hopkins, and to his poem "God's Grandeur", Guite hears an echo of both Milton and Herbert in Hopkins' description of the Spirit who, 'over the bent world / Broods with warm breast and ah! bright wings'. While the 'brooding' evokes Milton, Guite finds in Hopkin's poem echoes of Herbert: 'his [Hopkins'] "bright wings" and his sense of the warm nurturing, the hatching, the making new, the refreshing, have surely come from Herbert'. The poem promises not only the generative work of the Holy Spirit in the human person, but also the renewal of the whole creation.

T. S. Eliot offers the final response in Guite's presentation, suggesting how these different poems have a kind of simultaneity which helps to construct the auricular chapel for the person who hears the call and response. There is a call and response between the poems, and a call and response between the reader of the poems and the brooding and generative Spirit, the Spirit who is both 'out there' and 'in me'. In Guite's