

**W**here is the Spirit of God at work in our lives, and how do we recognize the Spirit's activity in the world? While Christians in the West may stumble in trying to answer this question, believers elsewhere evidently have a strong sense of the Spirit's presence.

Eastern Orthodox Christians are intensely aware of the Spirit's activity every time they gather for worship and Eucharistic celebration. Before partaking of the elements, the Orthodox priest prays to the Spirit (the *epiclesis*) that it might descend on the

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worshiping community and transform the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. Here the Holy Spirit is constitutive of authentic worship and communion with Christ. Without the Spirit there can be no worship, and without the presence of the Spirit there can be no church.

Christians living in the global South likewise seem to have a heightened awareness of the Spirit's activity. They regularly participate in healings, visions, prophecies, and ecstatic utterances, and they link these

activities directly to the presence of the Spirit of God. Being filled with the Spirit is integral to what it means to be a faithful Christian.

Among North American Christians such experience and talk about the Spirit is often met with ambivalence. As Daniel Migliore has observed, the church in the West has tended to look "on the experience of and appeal to the Spirit as potentially subversive and in need of control."<sup>1</sup> At best, Western Christians view the Spirit's work not as a distinct action but as an activity identical with the work of Christ. Perhaps, in part, this is why Christians in the West have felt compelled to say in their recita-

tion of the Nicene Creed that the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father *and the Son*.”

To be sure, Christian history bears witness to spiritual excesses, which might explain why some Christians have pulled back from being overly “spiritual.” Down through the centuries, various groups, such as the second-century Montanists or the fourteenth-century “Free Spirits,” pushed the boundaries of Christian belief and experience to the point at which the church felt compelled—rightly or wrongly—to condemn these outliers. When sixteenth-century apocalyptically minded and “spirit-filled” Anabaptist radicals took control of the northwest German city of Münster, and also stormed a Frisian monastery near Bolsward, many Anabaptists who were promoting reform and renewal settled for a more christologically focused faith. With the exception of spiritualist groups in the seventeenth century, certain pietistic groups in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and various charismatics in the twentieth century, Mennonites generally have stayed clear of matters related to the Spirit. Along with other Western Christians they have felt an obligation to mention the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, or to include Holy Spirit language in certain baptismal formulae. Beyond these seasonal references, however, they have preferred to say little about the third person of the Trinity, preferring to remain “Jesus centered.”

Times may be changing. The rise of Pentecostalism, a heightened awareness of the role of the Spirit among Christians in the global South, and a renewed interest in the doctrine of the Trinity may be some of the factors contributing to an increased attentiveness to the Holy Spirit even in the Christian West. Recently, European theologians such as Jürgen Moltmann and Michael Welker have given significant attention to the study of pneumatology, linking the Spirit’s activities to liberation movements, including secular ones. Moving beyond abstract idealism and personalistic individualism, these authors and teachers of the church have highlighted the diverse and public dimensions of the Spirit’s work.

Amos Yong, a pioneering Pentecostal theologian from the United States, has also written on the Spirit’s public activity. In the approximately twenty books that he has written or edited in the last decade, he has linked the doctrine of the Spirit to such

wide-ranging topics as hospitality, a theology of disability, the relationship between science and religion, and the place of non-Christian religions. Yong is critical of teachings on the Holy Spirit that focus only on the individual or are content to stay within the confines of the church. He is interested in reflecting on the world-

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oriented dimensions of the Spirit, which leads him to develop a critique of political regimes of corruption and environmental neglect, as well as economic systems of exploitative capitalism, and the various social conventions that promote sexism, racism, and able-ism. Yong is convinced that a faithful teaching of the Spirit must include the social, economic, and ecological issues of our time.

How are we to understand the presence and work of the Holy Spirit? Is God's Spirit limited to the confines of the inner self, the parameters of the faithful church, or the

public square? Do we dare to imagine that the Spirit may be at work in all of creation? The elusive movements of the Holy Spirit are surely beyond our grasp, but my hope is that the contributions in this issue of *Vision* will challenge us to broaden our horizons and inspire us toward greater faithfulness.

## Note

<sup>1</sup> Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 224.

## About the editor

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