

**Duquesne University, Pneumatology Award, 17 September 2010**

***Response to Robert Davies Hughes, III, Beloved Dust: Tides of the Spirit in the Christian Life (New York: Continuum, 2008)***

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I must begin by expressing my deep appreciation of Professor Hughes' book, which is a veritable tour-de-force. It rings true with the wisdom of years of pastoral experience, and is at the same time very contemporary in its application. Through reading it, I have learnt a great deal not only about spiritual life, which is the main concern of the book, but also about theology and traditions of spirituality. Hughes points out how spiritual theology has often been separated from the main body of theological discourse as subjective rather than objective, intuitive rather than rational, psychological rather than theological. I am wholeheartedly behind his attempt to reconnect these dichotomies.

As a theologian, rather than a pastor, I was drawn most to the deep theological reflection which undergirds Hughes' approach, and in particular I have been led to consider what Hughes describes as his 'bold theological claim': 'There is no inherent human spiritual capacity, only the materiality of human existence and the movements of the Holy Spirit within it' (p. 4). As a theologian of mission, I greatly appreciated the discussion of mission as love of neighbour and as justice (in chapters 21-24 and 26). Indeed, *Beloved Dust* is an essentially missional text because it grounds Christian spirituality 'in what is external, public, and social' rather than in an inner life (p. 328). So it is on these two topics – theology and mission – which I should like to comment a little more.

**1. Theology of Spirit and spirits**

As a Christian partly formed in a charismatic movement, I had naturally assumed what Hughes spends some time proving, that true spirituality is life lived in the Holy

Spirit. It is 'Spirit-uality'.<sup>1</sup> It initially came as a surprise to me therefore when I discovered 'spirituality' being widely used as a secular term with reference to the human spirit, or to express an alternative to traditional approaches to religion. I wish to affirm spirituality (with a small s) as a legitimate discipline and engage with it, as Hughes does, while also raising the question as to which of the many spirits informs any particular discourse of spirituality.

The way I see it, human beings have a spiritual capacity: we are not just beloved dust; we can know or discover that we are beloved. Hughes' assertion that 'There is no inherent human spiritual capacity' is laudably intended to avoid essentialism (p. 7) and expresses our utter dependence on the grace of God. But I cannot square it with the second creation story, in which God creates Adam from the dust of the earth and breathes life into him. By this tradition, human beings – all human beings – are distinguished from other creatures by the inspiration of the Spirit of God. As the image of God, perfected in Christ, I believe humanity has a God-given capacity for spiritual life. Karl Rahner's description of human beings as 'spirit in the world' is appropriate, I believe.<sup>2</sup> This view also provides firm theological ground for engaging with other spiritualities.

However, saying that human beings have spiritual capacity is not the same as saying that human beings are necessarily indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Sadly the human spiritual capacity is not always filled with the Spirit of Christ but with another spirit, or other spirits. As Hughes rightly insists, the human spirit is not the Spirit of God. Furthermore, there are many other spirits abroad in the world and, according to the gospel stories, human beings are often filled with, and guided by, all manner of spirits which are not the Spirit of Christ. Among the created spirits of this world are evil spirits of selfishness, greed, falsehood, and so on, which may be manifested in individuals, in ideologies, and in economic systems, political institutions and social organisations. Therefore, the gift of 'discernment of spirits' (included in the list in 1Cor 12:10) is particularly important. We are called to discern the spirit of any spirituality with which we engage according to whether it produces Christ-like fruit (Gal 5:22), whether it empowers in a way which builds up the community in love (1Cor 12-14), and whether it benefits the poor (Luke 4:18). If it does not, or if it

purports to be something it is not, we should not support it, and we may need to challenge it in the name of Christ.

I welcome Hughes' attempts to develop spiritual theology as an integral part of theology because this is the way both to affirm and protect truly Christian spirituality. It is also a way to honour and include the contributions women make to the church. As a woman theologian of the Holy Spirit, I sometimes get the feeling that respectable male theologians sense a double danger that I might fly off into some kind of heresy: first because pneumatology is associated with extremism, and second because women have an inherent tendency toward what men have called 'superstition'. Yet on the one hand, for women who have not benefitted from the theological formation available to their male counterparts, investigations in spirituality may be the way they find to enter theological discourse. And on the other hand, women who are highly theologically trained show a special appreciation of pneumatology. Women – Elizabeth A. Johnson, Catherine Mowry La Cugna, Anne Hunt, Celia Deane-Drummond – are among the leading theologians of the Holy Spirit and the Trinity at present. But male-dominated theology has sometimes shown disdain for that in which women excel, for spirituality and pneumatology. The demise of religion and the rise of spirituality in the West have paralleled processes of the privatisation of religion and the feminisation of its acceptable public face. Hughes's discussion of 'the rise and fall of spiritual theology' (pp. 10-36) recognises sexism as an issue (p. 11) but would benefit, I believe, from a stronger feminist analysis and consideration of historical links to the marginalisation and liberation of women in church and theology. The integration of spiritual theology with what is regarded as mainstream also involves the reconciliation of religion with spirituality, and of male with female expressions of faith.

While I appreciate the intent to redress a balance, I prefer not to consistently refer to the Spirit as 'she', as Hughes' does, while this pronoun is not used of other members of the Trinity (although I recognise that Hughes' choice of the word Fount for the Father is gender neutral). Furthermore, discussion about whether or not to 'giv[e] the Spirit her own theological locus' (p. 304) reminds me of male discussions about whether or not women, or in another context the natives, are equal to joining public life or holding authority in the institutional church. It is as if, as Kilian McDonnell writes, the Spirit had not reached maturity.<sup>3</sup> It seems obvious to me that if the Holy

Spirit is one of the persons of the Trinity, then pneumatology is worthy of study in its own right. If there is an equality of persons, theological study programmes ought to be constructed in such a way as to treat each person – Father, Son and Spirit – separately as well as together. Instead, we tend to find in the West, one semester of Christology followed by one of Trinity, and under the latter head it is assumed that we have dealt with Pneumatology. While in reality the social status of women remains below that of men, the consistent and exclusive use of the feminine pronoun for the Spirit undermines the equality of persons. It is also damaging to one of Hughes' key projects, which I very much endorse, that of showing that pneumatology and spiritual theology are not only relevant to mysticism on the one hand or popular religiosity on the other but to the Christian life in general, including the ordinary and mundane practice of faith, work, worship, intellectual life, and activities traditionally linked to masculine occupations and callings.

In particular, the intellectual conversion is not only facilitated by the Holy Spirit but also inherent in spiritual experience. The Holy Spirit is a source as well as the channel of illumination and inspiration. The spirit of Christ is also the mind of Christ (1Cor 1:10; 2:16), a relationship which is obvious in German, in which the word *Geist* can be used for both, but obscured in English, which has tended to separate spirit from intellect. In the book Hughes consistently associates Wisdom with the incarnated Word, and with Christ, but I would also like to stress the link of wisdom with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit-Sophia that Elizabeth Johnson elucidates:<sup>4</sup> the wisdom revealed in creation; the wisdom given to Mary, in which Jesus Christ grew; the wisdom which led to his proclamation of justice for the poor (Luke 4:18); the wisdom by which the way of salvation was the Cross; the wisdom which inspired and empowered the disciples; the wisdom which brought together Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female; and the wisdom that directs the Christian community in mission to the world.

## **2. The Spirit and mission**

Hughes sees spiritual theology as the practical outworking of pneumatology, whereas I have tended to see mission theology as that outworking. The Holy Spirit is sent (mission) into the world, from the creative activity of the Spirit at creation, to the

conception and later anointing of Jesus Christ, and to the empowering of the community at Pentecost. In fact, as I discovered, we are saying the same thing because Hughes ‘locates a theology of individual life in the Spirit in the context of the entire *missio Spiritus*’ (p. 7) and summarises his work as a reinterpretation of the spiritual life as ‘resonances in us of the Trinitarian structure of the Spirit’s mission’ (p. 386). This comes out even more strongly in the article by Hughes on eschatology, in which he points out the hopelessness of a theology without appreciation of the Spirit’s role in God’s world in the present time.<sup>5</sup> Therefore a holistic and spiritual understanding of mission coincides with a dynamic understanding of spiritual life as participation in the mission of the Spirit. Mission is a spiritual endeavour and spiritual life is missional since both are the human response to impulses produced by the mission of the Spirit in the whole creation. Mission is ‘finding out where the Holy Spirit is at work and joining in’.<sup>6</sup>

Hughes’ splendid work aside, sadly, spiritual theology does not often include consideration of the community’s mission. Without this it becomes inward-looking and self-serving. Conversely, however, it must be said that mission theology often lacks reflection on mission spirituality, tending instead toward activism and unethical methods. One of the most significant developments in mission thinking in the last one hundred years has been the rejection of an end-justifies-the-means approach and the emergence of mission spirituality, so that the process of mission is in the way of Christ and an expression of authentic discipleship.<sup>7</sup> Whichever way round, it is important that spiritual theology and mission theology are held together. As Margaret Williams put it in her history of the Society of the Sacred Heart, ‘inwardness’ is ‘for the outgoing’; it is not an end in itself but the fruit of, and sustenance for, missional engagement with the world.<sup>8</sup> Spiritual practices are not techniques for escaping into another world which can be bought, like a kind of drug-free trip or a mental package holiday. Such ‘spirituality’ is unconnected with everyday life, and may indeed lead us to neglect our worldly responsibilities. Spiritual retreats should be life-changing and mission inspiring. Indian Jesuit theologian Samuel Rayan puts this memorably: the Holy Spirit is a strong wind and a raging fire, not a breeze or a candle to lull the church to sleep.<sup>9</sup>

Hughes treats mission in its broadest sense as obedience to the second of the two great commandments: love of neighbour. This includes the ordinary practice of Christian life: faithfulness in worship, friendship, daily duty, good work, as well as creativity, and attention to wider issues of justice, peace and the integrity of creation. These are all part of the mission of the Spirit. One indispensable aspect of the Holy Spirit's mission which Hughes points out is the impetus toward transformative encounter with the other, and for inclusion in the same community of those previously seen as unclean or undesirable. Such openness and inclusiveness is one important way we recognise the Spirit of Christ. According to the Acts of the Apostles, the observation that the Holy Spirit came upon Gentiles in just the same way as on Jews in the original Pentecost showed that they were also saved, and could also bear the name Christian (Acts 15:7-11; cf. chap. 10). Baptism in the Spirit and in water made Gentiles full members of the community, although they were at first ignorant of the Jewish tradition. They, like Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, and like us, were 'untimely' born, and did not encounter Jesus Christ in the flesh but in the Spirit. But joining late, like the last labourers in the market place, does not mean lower status in the kingdom of God; God shows no partiality between Jews and Gentiles. Before God, tradition, birth and heritage are of no advantage – indeed they may even be a hindrance to true discipleship. The spiritual encounter does not eschew the physical and material but reconfigures and transforms the experience of it for Gentile and Jews alike. This is God's excess, to which Rodgers refers.<sup>10</sup> God's grace is all around us; the Spirit sustains and nurtures our human life.

Hughes rightly points out that this breaking down of the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles, the grafting of the wild stock on the cultivated stem, has serious potential for postcolonial theology (p. 303). First, a pneumatological approach can be a way round what Amos Yong refers to as 'the christological impasse'<sup>11</sup> in relations with people of other faiths and ideologies – and none. Far from confronting them with claims for the lordship of Christ and Christian uniqueness, a pneumatological approach suggests dialogue around the Spirit's work of healing and liberation (p. 305), celebration of the fruit of the Spirit in whatever cultural forms it is manifest (p. 305-6), and willingness to affirm the spiritual giftedness of others and recognise their missions. This is not to deny christological doctrines, but to recognise more than one entry point to Christian truth. The missions of Son and Spirit are complementary and,

except in the case of those who walked and talked with Jesus Christ, we experience God first by the Holy Spirit, who leads us to Jesus Christ, who then reveals the Father. This reversed order is ‘the Trinity of experience’, to which McDonnell refers. For the Christian, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, but the Holy Spirit does not belong to the church, and may be encountered in, and manifested by, those who do not name Christ. Discerning the Holy Spirit among the many spirits of this world is the first act of mission, so that we may know where the Spirit is at work and with whom to collaborate.

Second, a postcolonial approach also demands that we find a way of entering into conversation with other forms of Christianity indigenous to other regions of the world.<sup>12</sup> The postcolonial era is also the era of world Christianity, in which Christianity is seen to be globally widespread and locally rooted, and in which Western Christians are estimated to be a minority.<sup>13</sup> Eugene Rogers has shown beautifully how pneumatology is enriched by use of ‘resources outside the Modern West’.<sup>14</sup> I have gone even further east in my search for resources and, without also having to go back in time, have found contemporary Asian theological reflection, especially in India and Korea, immensely helpful in deepening understanding of the Holy Spirit.<sup>15</sup> My interaction with Asian theologians has revealed to me how Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit is both continuous and discontinuous with more worldly meanings of ‘spirit’. Korea and India have different translations for the word ‘spirit’ to bring to their reading of Scripture, and their theologians are able to appreciate nuances in the tradition that elude contemporary Western scholars, who live surrounded by materialist culture. In Asian contexts it seems impossible to divorce theology – or any aspect of life – from spirituality. From Indian theologians I have learnt to see the ecological dimensions of pneumatology, to appreciate the life-giving and reconciling power of the Spirit, and to sense that all Christian life is lived within the medium which the Spirit creates by his or her presence. From Korean theologians I have realised that the adjective ‘holy’ before the name of the Spirit is not an added extra to explain the nature of the Spirit but necessary to distinguish the *Holy* Spirit from all the other spirits of a plural worldview. The word ‘holy’ also indicates that the Spirit is not simply a greater or more powerful spirit than all the others, but that this Spirit is of a different kind than all the others. The power of the

Holy Spirit is the kind of power demonstrated by Jesus Christ: real, dynamic, life-giving power exercised through self-giving.

So I thank Professor Hughes wholeheartedly for this stimulating study, and for leading the way in reconnecting spirituality with theology, and with mission. I believe this will help theology to break out of the straitjacket imposed by narrow intellectual and academic categories, and encouraged by elitism and Western cultural superiority. It paves the way for a wider theological conversation at which all Christians are represented at the table, and gives a vision of the fullness which is yet to come in that tide of glory.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Vandana (Mataji), 'In Search of Being One with the One', in Tosh Arai & Wesley Ariarajah (eds), *Spirituality in Interfaith Dialogue* (Geneva: WCC, 1989), pp. 23-30, see p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Rahner, *Spirit in the World*, trans. William Dych (London & Sydney: Sheed & Ward, 1968; first published 1939)

<sup>3</sup> Kilian McDonnell, *The Other Hand of God: The Holy Spirit as the Universal Touch and Goal* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), pp. 81-90, p. 86.

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), pp. 124-49.

<sup>5</sup> Robert D. Hughes III, 'The Historic Ought-to Be and the Spirit of Hope', in Robert B. Slocum (ed.), *A Heart for the Future: Writings on Christian Hope* (New York: Church Publishing, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Kirsteen Kim, *Joining in with the Spirit: Connecting world church and local mission* (London: SCM-Epworth, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Theme 9 of the study process of the Edinburgh 2010 centenary project, which was entitled: 'Mission spirituality and authentic discipleship'. See Daryl Balia & Kirsteen Kim (eds), *Edinburgh 2010: Witnessing to Christ Today* (Oxford: Regnum, 2010), pp. 222-44.

<sup>8</sup> Margaret Williams, RSCJ, *The Society of the Sacred Heart: History of a Spirit 1800-1975* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1978), p. 301

<sup>9</sup> Samuel Rayan, *Come Holy Spirit* (Delhi: Media House, 1998), p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> Eugene F. Rodgers Jr., *After the Spirit: A Constructive Pneumatology from Resources outside the Modern West* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2005), pp. 99-104.

<sup>11</sup> Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003)

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), pp. 25-34.

<sup>13</sup> Sebastian Kim & Kirsteen Kim, *Christianity as a World Religion* (London: Continuum, 2008)

<sup>14</sup> Rodgers, *After the Spirit*.

<sup>15</sup> Kirsteen Kim, *The Holy Spirit in the World: A Global Conversation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007).