MUSIC AND SPIRITUALITY

THEOLOGICAL APPROACHES, EMPIRICAL METHODS, AND CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

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3. Music, Breath, and Spirit

Michael O'Connor

In 1179, Hildegard of Bingen (ca. 1098–1179) was accused of contravening canon law by permitting the body of a man who had been excommunicated to be buried on her monastery's consecrated ground. The local ecclesiastical authorities, acting on behalf of the bishop of Mainz who was away in Rome, insisted that the body be disinterred. Hildegard refused. She asserted that the man had in fact been reconciled to the church before his death, his excommunication lifted. The authorities rejected this claim and instead placed the monastery under interdict: there would be no celebration of Mass, no reception of the Eucharist, and no singing of the Divine Office. The sisters' spiritual life must continue without the benefit of sacraments or singing. Eventually, witnesses were produced and the interdict was lifted. Hildegard died six months later. This 'last, bitter controversy' drew from Hildegard a remarkable letter to the Prelates of Mainz, in which she not only protests her innocence but reflects theologically on what it means for liturgical singing to be silenced.[1] It is this punishment, rather than the alleged offence, that takes up most of her attention: not only did absence make the heart grow fonder, it produced her most condensed and luminous theology of music. Prayer, worship, liturgy are more than words. For Hildegard, what had been taken away from her community was not merely an optional addition, but the essence of worship itself: the conjoining of heaven and earth. In the course of this theological reflection, she has much to say

1 The expression 'last, bitter controversy' is used as a chapter heading in *The Personal Correspondence of Hildegard of Bingen*, ed. by Joseph L. Baird (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 155–66. The 'Letter to the Prelates of Mainz' (Letter 72), is found on pp. 156–61.

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about the connection between singing and breathing, in which the link between respiration and spirituality is more than simply etymological.

More than 800 years later, public health measures enacted during the COVID-19 pandemic sent congregations home and gave rise to numerous experiments with remote and online worship. Christian communities were to conduct their spiritual lives without the benefit of sacraments or collective, in-person singing. And even when churches returned to in-person gatherings, congregational singing was silenced or heavily restricted. It is essential that we learn from what was implemented so suddenly, and with little preparation. However, this is not the only or even the most important musical consequence of the pandemic. 'We share the air' has for decades been the strapline for a campaign to raise awareness of allergies and sensitivities to scented products. COVID-19 adds a further layer of relevance to the slogan, helping to show both the positive and the negative dimensions of the interrelatedness of all things. One of the contested aspects of the pandemic was the way the virus transmits. The World Health Organization, among other public health bodies, was at first reluctant to declare the virus to be 'airborne'.[2] It is now incontestable that SARS-CoV-2 is an airborne pathogen—it hangs in the air like cigarette smoke (or incense) and spreads in crowded indoor spaces over distances far greater than two metres.[3] Like the experience endured by Hildegard and her sisters, pandemic safety measures and the ongoing experience of a respiratory virus should stimulate a renewed appreciation and understanding of sung worship.

In this chapter, I will approach these issues in the wider context of creation and incarnation, and, beyond that, I will be looking for a foundation in trinitarian theology that will offer a fruitful approach to breathing, music, and spirit. I will draw on a wide and diverse range of sources where attention has been paid to the respiratory dimension of theology, and in particular on the insights of medieval polymath Hildegard of Bingen who, as Margot Fassler has observed, 'is the only Doctor of the Roman Catholic Church from whom a large body of

2 Reasons for this are many but it seems that 'following the science' in pursuit of the common good was often waylaid by following the politics. This is nothing new—think tobacco, fossil fuels, and factory farming.

3 Trisha Greenhalgh et al., 'Ten Scientific Reasons in Support of Airborne Transmission of SARS-CoV-2', *The Lancet* 397.10285 (2021), 1603–05.

liturgical song survives'.[4] My focus will be on liturgical singing, with a recurring emphasis on the pairing of word with breath/respiration. This seems opportune in an investigation of music and spiritual realities, for three reasons: first, because respiration is commonly aligned with 'spirit' (in God and humans);[5] second, because of the important role of breathing in music-making; and third, because of the ways that COVID-19, a respiratory virus, has affected our consciousness about breathing and our relationship to the air.

From the point of view of scholars working on 'music and spiritual realities', the interdisciplinary field is ecumenical and pluralist. Every study has, at least implicitly, its own theological starting point and those starting points will be diverse and sometimes in tension (e.g., natural theology and Barthian neo-orthodoxy); it helps to make those starting points explicit, and open to critique and refinement. This paper offers a statement of one possible Roman Catholic approach. My methodological assumptions are largely pre-critical, following practices typical of patristic and medieval writers, enshrined not only in strictly theological works but also in liturgical texts and lectionaries and continued by hymn writers and poets.[6] The aim is not to give the 'official' account (there isn't one); rather, I am attempting a thought experiment on music and worship, open to questions of spirit and spirituality. And I intend this chapter to be ecumenically open: while it draws on Catholic theology and liturgical experience, I hope its insights will be of interest beyond a Catholic readership.

I. On Spirit and Spirits

Two formulations of spirit have tended to characterise Christian thought on the topic. A predominant model, which we may oversimplify by labelling 'Neoplatonic', sees all things in a great chain of being. At the

4 Margot Fassler, 'Angels and Ideas: Hildegard's Musical Hermeneutic as Found in *Scivias* and Reflected in *O splendidissima gemma*', in *Unversehrt und Unverletzt: Hildegards von Bingen Menschenbild und Kirchenverständnis Heute*, ed. by Rainer Berndt SJ and Maura Zátonyi OSB (Münster: Aschendorff, 2015), pp. 189–212, at 202.

5 See Chapter 12 by Richard E. McGregor in this volume.

6 For a forthright defence of such an approach, see David C. Steinmetz, 'The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis,' *Theology Today* 36 (1980), 27–38, reprinted in *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, ed. by Stephen E. Fowl (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 26–38.

top of the chain is God, pure spirit. Next, the pure spiritual creatures, the angels. The human soul is next, then the human body, followed by the rest of material creation, animal, vegetable, and mineral. There is a great divide between spirit and matter, with human beings occupying the pivotal place as embodied souls, the whole in microcosm. When we speak of spirit and spirituality, therefore, we are alluding to this upper realm of souls, angels, and God. The problem with this model is that it encourages us to focus on the line at the midpoint, separating matter from spirit. And it encourages us to imagine two categories of existence: God, angels, and souls in one category (spirits), and all others in another (matter). In this way, it relativises other distinctions (e.g., between God and creatures, between bodies of rational beings and all other bodies, between living and non-living beings). These are not minor issues.

There is an alternative: for the Christian (indeed, for any classical theist), the most important dividing line is not that between the human body and the human soul, but that between God and creatures. The ontological difference here could not be greater; all other distinctions pale by comparison. The differences between angel and human, tree and stone, are not as great as that between any of these and God. The most fundamental thing we can say about human beings is that they are creatures.[7] The ensuing distinction between human body and soul no longer appears to be so pivotal; and while this distinction is too important and too deeply embedded in Christian tradition to be discarded, what remains is a softer (non-Cartesian) dualism.[8] As a result, the terminology of spirit and spirituality is complicated, ambiguous, polyvalent.[9] Some of our talk about music and spiritual realities will be about human knowing, loving, imagining, feeling, hoping. Some of it

7 Frank Senn, *Embodied Liturgy: Lessons in Christian Ritual* (Augsburg, MN: Fortress, 2016), p. xi.

8 Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 191–216.

9 The Hebrew and Greek words normally translated as 'spirit' in biblical texts (*ruah* and *pneuma* respectively), are both also used for 'breath' and 'wind'—not to mention 'ghost'. (The same applies in the case of the Latin *spiritus*.) The tripping hazards extend to typography: for example, in Romans 1:4, the risen Jesus is said to be declared Son of God according to the 'the spirit of holiness/sanctification' (New Revised Standard Version; New American Bible Revised Edition, Douai–Rheims), or 'the Spirit of holiness' (King James Version, English Standard Version, Revised Standard Version, New International Version, Geneva). These typographical decisions have exegetical implications.

may be about theories of angelic music and the harmony of the spheres. Some of it may be about God. If both religious and non-religious people think of music as 'the most spiritual of the arts', then we have to ask: what are they thinking about? Are they looking for evidence (empirical or otherwise) of the same thing? It is a completely uncontroversial thing to say that 'music lifts my spirits', but more debatable to say that music is a 'vehicle for the Holy Spirit'. And while these claims may be compatible, they are not necessarily so; furthermore, while the former may be susceptible to direct empirical detection, the latter, in classical philosophical theology, is not.

Nevertheless, it may be impossible to achieve complete clarity and discretion, for several reasons. First, there may be a theological reason for the verbal slipperiness:

> ... *pneuma* means both the human spirit or the divine Spirit and the breath of either creaturely life or God, and indeed biblical theology tends to see the breath of life as indeed the breath or Spirit of God which is then also the source of human spirit.[10]

Second, with respect to the Son of God, he became a human being—a thinking, feeling, willing, loving animal—and, since the ascension, he is thoroughly at home in the divine sphere, filled with the Spirit, seated body and soul at the right hand of the Father (Acts 2:33).[11] And third, with respect to the church, the Second Vatican Council speaks of the Holy Spirit as the 'soul of the church', not implying a second incarnation, or a physical composition of divine and human, but rather aiming to capture the conviction that the same Spirit who is in Christ the head is also in the members which make up his body, the church.[12] In Christology and ecclesiology, divine and human 'spirit' are present and entangled and not always easy to distinguish. Furthermore, while the distinction between Creator and creatures holds for now, the

10 Robert Davis Hughes III, 'Catching the Divine Breath in the Paschal Mystery: An Essay on the (Im)passibility of God, in honor of Elizabeth Johnson', *Anglican Theological Review* 94.3 (2011), 527–39, at 535.

11 Thomas F. Torrance, 'The Mind of Christ in Worship: The Problem of Apollinarianism in the Liturgy', in Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation: Essays towards Evangelical and Catholic Unity in East and West* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1975), pp. 139–214.

12 Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit II: Lord and Giver of Life* (London: Chapman, 1983), p. 19.

mind-boggling Christian claim is that, if the divine plan of deification (divinisation, *theosis*) is accomplished (2 Pet 1:4; 2 Cor 3:18), then even that distinction may cease to be meaningful.

II. The Eternal Now

What we know about God is far less than what we do not know about God.[13] Trinitarian theology has, of necessity, drawn on a dazzling array of models, analogies, and metaphors to try to grasp the mystery of the three-in-one, recognising that these take us always (much) less than halfway to the ineffable truth. Some of these analogies are psychological (e.g., thinking of the three persons of the Trinity as analogous to human memory, understanding, will), some are social (e.g., thinking of the Trinity as a family or community). In this chapter, I employ the model of utterance: thinking of the three persons of the Trinity as analogous to the activity of uttering, specifically as utterer, word, and breath.[14] This has the advantage of biblical warrant: God utters; the second person is the Word; the third person is the Holy Breath.[15] Theology has given plenty of attention to the verbal side of this analogy, sometimes lapsing into a logocentrism that conceals the place of the Spirit; in this chapter, I will attempt to include a complementary stress on the respiratory side. Inevitably, the data here are less vivid and concrete when compared to the Word, at times both elusive and allusive.[16] Nevertheless, both are

13 Lateran IV, Canon 2: 'inter creatorem et creaturam non potest tanta similitudo notari, quin inter eos maior sit dissimilitudo notanda' [between creator and creature there can be noted no similarity so great that a greater dissimiliarity cannot be seen between them], in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. by Norman P. Tanner, 2 vols (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), I, pp. 232–33.

14 I will use 'utter' (rather than 'say' and 'speak') because it encompasses a variety of options (including saying, speaking, and singing), while also retaining a more immediate sense of vocal activity. See also Gerard Manley Hopkins in his poem 'Margaret Clitheroe':

> 'She caught the crying of those Three,
> The Immortals of the eternal ring,
> The Utterer, Utterèd, Uttering,
> And witness in her place would she'.

15 On the idea of 'Breath' as the proper name of the third person (as compared to 'Love' or 'Gift'), see Etienne Vetö, *The Breath of God. An Essay on the Holy Spirit in the Trinity* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2019), pp. 29–42.

16 On the 'fluidity' of (language about) the Spirit, see ibid., pp. 12–22.

needed: Christology is incomplete without pneumatology, and vice versa. Like a good singer, the theologian has to pay attention to both word and breath.

In Frederick Bauerschmidt's words, 'the God who is love is not a "thing" but an activity'.[17] In the eternal now of the Trinity, the unbegotten Father begets his Son, uttering his entire understanding of himself in his Word. For Rowan Williams, in this eternal now, 'God shares, God offers, himself in an eternal act that we can only think of as if it were a great primal utterance being poured out'.[18] This primal utterance is personal and consubstantial, the one who, according to the letter to the Hebrews, is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being (Heb 1:3). For Robert Jenson, this means that 'the breaking of silence is eternally constitutive of God's triune life'; in other words, God is a 'talkative God'[19]—and therefore, despite what the hymn says, there is no 'silence of eternity'.

As every singer knows, you cannot utter a word without breath. Developing this observation, Yves Congar writes: 'There is no Word without a Breath: the Word would stay put in the speaker's throat and reach no one'. Congar then presses the analogy beyond its own immediate logic: 'There is no Breath without a Word: the Breath would be without content and would communicate nothing'.[20] For animals, it is quite possible to breathe without uttering words—we breathe in and out all the time, whether or not we are speaking or singing; it is not a problem for us that many of our breaths have no semantic content. But Congar is only talking about the Trinity and he wants to highlight the uniqueness of divine utterance: God exhales his entire self in uttering his Word; there is no more to be uttered, nothing else to be breathed, because all is contained in this one act of utterance.

This utterance is not received without reply. In the eternal now of the Trinity, the Son responds with the single and complete Word of his

17 Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, *The Love That Is God: An Invitation to Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020), p. 14.

18 In the Foreword to Lucy Winkett, *Our Sound is Our Wound* (London: Continuum, 2010), p. ix.

19 Robert Jenson, 'Joining the Eternal Conversation: John's Prologue & the Language of Worship', *Touchstone Magazine*, November 2001, http://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=14-09-032-f

20 Cited in Vetö, *The Breath of God*, p. 50.

own self; all that he is, he returns to the Father. In the opening words of John's Prologue, the Word is said to be 'with God' (John 1:1). The Greek expression (*pros ton theon*) suggests not just being together with, but turned towards; it implies a face-to-face presence, a responsive movement. (One could say that the Son is 'antiphon' to the Father.) Here again, since a word cannot be uttered without breath, the returning self-utterance of the Word is borne to the Father on the divine Breath.[21]

This pattern in the eternal now—that the Word is uttered on the Breath by the Father and utters himself back to the Father, on the Breath—is the basis of all activity of the Trinity 'outside' of the Trinity, in time and history, in creation, redemption, and consummation. It provides the prototype of communication among creatures, including speech and song, as well as the *telos* of all authentic communication: eschatological participation in the communion of the Trinity. What follows is a selection of key moments from a trinitarian history of prayer and worship, highlighting the interaction of Word and Breath both in God's self-disclosure in creation and redemption (going out), and in the return path of prayer, worship, and thanksgiving (coming in).

III. In the Beginning

In the rhythmic incantation at the beginning of the book of Genesis, God is portrayed creating by his Word ('God said'). The New Testament picks up and develops this insight: all things were made through the Word ('All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being'; John 1:3). But the Word acted in concert with the Spirit, who 'hovered over the chaos' (Gen 1:2). Early Christian writers saw this complementarity foreshadowed in the Psalms: 'By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth' (Ps 33:6).[22] Made in the image and likeness of God (Gen

21 My approach here is indebted to Vetö, *The Breath of God*, and to Edward Kilmartin, *Christian Liturgy: Theology and Practice—I: Systematic Theology of Liturgy* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1988).

22 For a survey of patristic, medieval, and early modern interpretations of this verse, see Geoffrey Wainwright, 'Psalm 33 Interpreted of the Triune God', *Ex Auditu* 16 (2000), 101–20. See also chapter 6, 'Psalm 33', in Geoffrey Wainwright, *Embracing Purpose: Essays on God, the World, and the Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012), pp. 105–25.

1:27), human beings were likewise endowed with word and breath: God breathed life into Adam's nostrils, and gave him the responsibility of naming the creatures (Gen 2:7). The second-century Targum Onkelos paraphrases the biblical text to bring this out explicitly: 'And the Lord God created Adam from dust of the ground, and breathed upon his face the breath of lives, and it became in Adam a Discoursing Spirit'.[23]

Hildegard of Bingen is heir to this tradition of thought and she reads it all as inherently musical.[24] For Hildegard, the goal of creation is to render honour and glory to God. This is a spiritual and a musical task. It is led by the angels who are precisely called spirits because of their affinity with the Spirit of God. At the beginning, Adam sang with them; in his innocence, 'before his transgression, his voice blended fully with the voices of the angels in their praise of God'.[25] When Adam sinned, and fell from Spirit-filled musical harmony, a Spirit-filled musical remedy was provided: the prophets, inspired by the Spirit, were called to compose psalms and canticles and to make musical instruments, 'to enhance these songs of praise with melodic strains'. Note that for Hildegard, the music is integral, not accidental, to this divine therapy. The spiritual restoration would be accomplished by both 'the form and quality of the instruments, as well as through the meaning of the words which accompany them'. This was restorative music, prophetic music that was able to lead the faithful 'beyond the music of this exile and recall to mind that divine melody of praise which Adam, in company with the angels, enjoyed in God before his fall'.

Hildegard combines two kinds of music here: the singing of the voice and the plucking of stringed instruments (lyre and harp). The

23 *The Targums Onkelos and Jonathan Ben Uzziel*, trans. by J. W. Etheridge, 2 vols (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, 1862), I, p. 38.

24 See William T. Flynn '"The Soul is Symphonic": Meditation on Luke 15:25 and Hildegard of Bingen's Letter 23', in *Music and Theology: Essays in Honor of Robin A. Leaver*, ed. by Daniel Zager (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2007), pp. 1–8; William T. Flynn, 'Singing with the Angels: Hildegard of Bingen's Representations of Celestial Music', in *Conversations with Angels: Essays Towards a History of Spiritual Communication, 1100–1700*, ed. by Joad Raymond (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 203–29; Tova Leigh Choate, William T. Flynn, and Margot Fassler, 'Hearing the Heavenly Symphony: An Overview of Hildegard's Musical Oeuvre with Case Studies', in *A Companion to Hildegard of Bingen*, ed. by Beverly Kienzle, Debra L. Stoudt, and George Ferzoco (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 163–92.

25 'Letter to the Prelates of Mainz', in *Personal Correspondence of Hildegard of Bingen*, ed. Baird, p. 159. Quotations in the next paragraph are all from this page.

link between singing and breath is straightforward, and Hildegard supplements it by the image of the trumpet:

> Those who long to complete God's works ... can only sing the mysteries of God like a trumpet, which only returns a sound but does not function unassisted, for it is Another who breathes into it that it might give forth a sound.[26]

The sounds are Christ's, the disciple is the instrument on which Christ plays, through which his breath blows. For Hildegard, any ministry of the Word is founded on an openness to be a tube breathed through by God's Breath.

Hildegard ingeniously makes the same pneumatological claim for stringed instruments, drawing on the well-established metaphor of the Holy Spirit as the finger of God: 'People of zeal and wisdom [...] accompanied their singing with instruments played with the flexing of the fingers, recalling, in this way, Adam, who was formed by God's finger, which is the Holy Spirit'.[27] A plucked string evokes the in-breathing of the Holy Spirit at creation, the giving of breath that makes possible all human speech, singing, praise, and prayer. Thus, not only in their songs but also in the music of lyre and harp, the Holy Spirit has indeed, as the Nicene Creed asserts, 'spoken through the prophets'. In all this, the creator Spirit does not exist and operate in a vacuum. Rather, the Spirit hovers over chaos and is breathed into clay. For liturgical theologian Louis-Marie Chauvet: 'What is most spiritual always takes place in the most corporeal'.[28] And by 'corporeal' Chauvet does not just mean our flesh and blood, but also our communities and societies, cultures and rituals, histories and traditions, and the institutions to which we belong—and that includes our musicking.

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26 'A Fellow Visionary' [= Correspondence with Elizabeth of Schönau], in *Personal Correspondence of Hildegard of Bingen*, ed. Baird, pp. 104–05.

27 Ibid. In the Sequence for Pentecost, *Veni Creator Spiritus*, the Spirit is the finger of God's right hand ('digitus paternae dexterae'). This metaphor evidently lies behind Michelangelo's famous depiction of the creation of Adam, where the in-breathing of the Spirit is represented by the out-stretched finger of God's right hand. This metaphor seems to derive from a creative reception of two gospel texts: Luke 11:20, 'But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you', and Matthew 12:28, 'But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you'.

28 Louis-Marie Chauvet, *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), p. xii. The original subtitle is: *Parole de Dieu au risque du corps.*

IV. In the Fullness of Time

In the fullness of time, God's Word was born of a woman, uttered into the ebb and flow of creation. God had now 'spoken to us by a Son' (Heb 1:1–2). This Word is the unique and complete revelation of the Father, his first, only and last Word. In the powerful expression of John of the Cross:

> In giving us his Son, his only Word (for he possesses no other), he spoke everything to us at once in this sole Word—and he has no more to say ... because what he spoke before to the prophets in parts, he has now spoken all at once by giving us the All Who is His Son.[29]

Luke's account of the annunciation may be read in this light. The Holy Spirit brings about the advent of the Word into history, overshadowing the Virgin Mary at the dawn of the New Creation as it had hovered over the face of the waters at the first creation. In the angel Gabriel's words: 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God' (Luke 1:35). Although it is the Spirit who comes upon Mary, she does not conceive and give birth to the Holy Spirit; the Breath in her brings forth the Word made flesh. As Chauvet puts it, 'the Spirit appears as the agent of God's embodiment: it gives a body to the Word'.[30]

Hildegard paraphrases and expands on the angel's greeting in a most striking meditation on the incarnation, making it explicitly musical. In the antiphon 'Ave generosa', Hildegard rejoices that heavenly music, which is the Son, is enclosed in Mary's womb, sounding forth from her flesh:

> Your womb truly held joy,
> when all the celestial symphony
> sounded from you,
> for you, Virgin, bore the Son of God,
> when your purity became luminous in God.
> Your flesh held joy,
> like grass upon which dew falls,

29 John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, II, p. 22, cited in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2019), §65.

30 Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, p. 166.

pouring its life-green into it,
even as it happened in you,
O Mother of all joy.[31]

Through the workings of the Spirit, Christ becomes the 'song that puts heaven and earth into harmony'.[32] Mary's conception is likened to the dew falling on the grass and giving it life and vitality (Hildegard's famous 'viriditas' [greenness]). Again, Hildegard's allusion to the working of the Holy Spirit draws on a well-established biblically-inspired metaphor: among other texts, the dew on Gideon's fleece (Judg 6:36–40) was taken by Irenaeus, Origen, Chrysostom, and others to prefigure the descent of the Holy Spirit at the annunciation.[33]

Here we should pause and take stock of the way our analogy has been stretched. Because the Word has been made flesh, the 'utterance' of the Word takes the form of a pregnancy and a childbirth. The Word is not simply letters to be read off a page, a textual assertion about the love of God, but an incarnate, embodied revelation of the love of God. The Word became body language. Jesus revealed the Kingdom of God in his teaching and preaching, but also when he took children in his arms, when he touched and healed those who were sick, when he looked on the rich young man with love, when he looked on Peter his betrayer, when he allowed the woman to anoint his feet, when he laid down his life for his friends, and when he breathed on his disciples after his resurrection. The Word is not only 'what we have heard', but is also 'what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands' (1 John 1:1). The Second Vatican Council, in its decree on divine revelation, underlines the presence of non-verbal communication, of body language, in the Word made flesh. This culminates in the paschal mystery of his death and resurrection:

31 'Venter enim tuus gaudium habuit, / cum omnis celestis symphonia / de te sonuit, / quia, Virgo, Filium Dei portasti, / ubi castitas tua in Deo claruit. / Viscera tua gaudium habuerunt, / sicut gramen, super quod ros cadit, / cum ei viriditatem infudit, / ut et in te factum est, / o Mater omnis gaudii'. Text and translation from Barbara Newman, *Symphonia: A Critical Edition of the Symphonia Armonie Celestium Revelationum*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 122–25.

32 Christina Labriola, 'Recalling the Original Harmony of Paradise', in *Music, Theology, and Justice*, ed. by Michael O'Connor, Hyun-Ah Kim, and Christina Labriola (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), 163–79, at 168.

33 Paul Ladouceur, 'Old Testament Prefigurations of the Mother of God', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 50.1–2 (2006), 5–57, see 23–26 for the dew on Gideon's fleece.

> Jesus perfected revelation by fulfilling it through his whole work of making himself present and manifesting himself: through his words and deeds, his signs and wonders, but especially through his death and glorious resurrection from the dead and final sending of the Spirit of truth.[34]

Jesus is the icon of the invisible God (Col 1:15), not only making the invisible God visible, but also making the intangible God tangible, the inaudible God audible. This is the height and depth of the one Word that is uttered on the breath of the Spirit, accomplished through the agency of the Spirit, breathing the Word into time and space, history and culture, a baby born of Mary.

At the same time as he embodied God's word to the world, Jesus gathered to himself an ecclesial body, so that he might, as the first-born of many, return to the Father a chorus of prayer, praise, thanksgiving. He is the way, the mediator through, with, and in whom, creation comes before the Father. He had come from God and was returning to God (John 13:3, *pros ton theon* again), but he did not return empty; the Word accomplishes 'all that it was meant to do'.[35] A glimpse of this is shown in this prayer in Luke:

> Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will'. (Lk 10:21)

As in all the instances where the gospels relate the words of Jesus in prayer (the words of the Word), he does not pray to the Spirit but always to the Father. He rejoices in the Spirit and addresses the Father. This is not an additional activity, tacked onto his person, but something that describes his ontology as Word antiphonal to the uttering Father: Jesus

34 Second Vatican Council, 'Dei Verbum', 18 November 1965, 1, §4, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html

35 'For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it' (Is 55:10–11).

is prayer in person, he is 'sheer prayer'.[36] This is the dramatic playing out in history of his eternal relationship to the Father in the Spirit. And it holds true when joy gives way to sorrow. Compare these two texts:

> In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. (Heb 5:7)
>
> ... how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God! (Heb 9:14)

Even in the hour of his agony, when his prayer was not rejoicing but anguish, his antiphonal return to the Father, was offered 'through the eternal Spirit'. In death, he 'gave a loud cry and breathed his last' (Mark 15:37), he 'bowed his head and gave up his Spirit' (John 19:30).

V. In These Last Days

From the first monks in the Syrian Desert to the megachurch congregations of today, Christians believe that they encounter Christ when they come together to worship: 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them' (Mt 18:20). The Second Vatican Council employs this text when talking of different modes of the presence of Christ in the liturgy. It affirms that he is present in the Eucharist and other sacraments, in the person of the minister, in the proclaimed word, and in the gathered assembly—specifically when it 'prays and sings'.[37] Christ faces in two directions at once: he is the

36 Jesus 'is not first of all an individual person who then prays to the Father, his prayer to the Father is what constitutes him as who he is. He is not just one who prays, not even one who prays best, he is sheer prayer' (Herbert McCabe, *God Matters* (London: Chapman, 1987), p. 220).

37 'To accomplish so great a work Christ is always present in his church, especially in liturgical celebrations. He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass both in the person of his minister, "the same now offering, through the ministry of priests, who formerly offered himself on the cross" [Council of Trent], and most of all in the eucharistic species. By his power he is present in the sacraments so that when anybody baptises it is really Christ himself who baptises. He is present in his word since it is he himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in church. Lastly, he is present when the church prays and sings, for he has promised "where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them" (Mt 18:20)' (Second Vatican Council, 'Sacrosanctum Concilium', 4 December 1963,

Word coming from the Father (as proclamation and gift) and he is the Word returning to the Father (as prayer and song). The Council stressed that Christ's presence is not an abstract presence but is made manifest through sensible signs:

> In the liturgy the sanctification of women and men is given expression in symbols perceptible by the senses [*signa sensibilia*] and is carried out in ways appropriate to each of them. In it, complete and definitive public worship is performed by the mystical body of Jesus Christ, that is, by the Head and his members.

It is clear here that the sensible signs are not restricted to the canonical sacraments but comprise the whole environment of ritual worship. In this context, liturgical singing, carried out according to its own musical integrity, is drawn into the movement of worship and sanctification.

All of this is the sign of the presence of the Spirit of Pentecost in the Christian community. There is a pattern here. The Spirit dwells within the baptised (and confirmed) and they become not other Spirits, but other Christs and members of his body; the Spirit 'inspires' (breathes into) the apostolic writers and their words become the Word of God; the Spirit comes upon the bread and wine, and they become the body and blood of Christ.[38] The Holy Breath gives a body to the Word. Paul is explicit: 'No one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit' (1 Cor 12:3). As at the annunciation when Mary received the Spirit and bore the Word, so on the brink of Pentecost, Mary waited in prayer with the disciples for the Spirit that would make them into the Body of Christ. Willie Jennings notes the parallels, but highlights the difference: as the 'agent of embodiment', the Spirit forms not a single body for the Word but an ecclesial body, a fellowship, a community:

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§7, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html). See also United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Roman Missal* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2011), 'General Introduction', §27.

38 The image of the dew appears here, falling on the bread and wine this time to transform them into the eucharistic presence of Christ: 'Make holy, therefore, these gifts, we pray, by sending down your Spirit upon them like the dewfall, so that they may become for us the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ' (Eucharistic Prayer II, in *Roman Missal,* 'Order of Mass', §101).

> This moment echoes Mary's intimate moment. The Holy Spirit again overshadows. However this similar holy action creates something different, something startling. The Spirit creates joining. The followers of Jesus are now being connected in a way that joins them to people in the most intimate space—of voice, memory, sound, body, land, and place.[39]

Jennings specifically highlights the sonorous capacity of that body, united in voice and sound. Hildegard spells out the musical parallels and the difference:

> Consider too that just as the body of Jesus Christ was born of the purity of the Virgin Mary through the operation of the Holy Spirit so too the canticle of praise, reflecting celestial harmony, is rooted in the Church through the Holy Spirit. … Whence, in metaphor, the prophetic spirit commands us to praise God with clashing cymbals and cymbals of jubilation, as well as other musical instruments which men of wisdom and zeal have invented, because all arts pertaining to things useful and necessary for mankind have been created by the breath that God sent into man's body. For this reason it is proper that God be praised in all things.[40]

Conclusion

Through a trinitarian theology of liturgical singing, this chapter provides a thought experiment, a paradigm for the study of music and spirit, adaptable to a variety of other (non-liturgical, non-religious) contexts. There are three outcomes that are worth underlining: first, for many Christians, it is a conviction of faith that they experience the divine in worship. Since, in this approach, the Spirit 'epiphanizes in flesh and blood',[41] we should expect to find spiritual realities not beyond the material or physical, but through, with, and in them. If music is the 'most spiritual of the arts' this cannot mean that it is the 'least physical of the arts'. Second, while this approach does not rule out extraordinary or liminal experiences of music and spiritual realities, it expects that a singing, praying assembly is 'routinely' in spiritual communion with God. Every Sunday, people sing to the Lord, and expect to encounter

39 Willie Jennings, *Acts* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2017), p. 28.
40 *Personal Correspondence of Hildegard of Bingen*, ed. Baird, pp. 160–61.
41 Geoffrey Preston, Faces of the Church: Meditations on a Mystery and its Images (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), p. 281.

Christ, to hear the Word of God, to breathe in the Holy Breath of God. Through the practice of liturgical singing, a sensible sign that participates in the trinitarian work of worship and sanctification, the Spirit makes the body of Christ breathe. Taken together, these two points raise the question of how this spiritual presence is known. Alongside empirical studies on the potential spiritual effects of music, we might fruitfully consider the cluster of traditional methods of spiritual discernment developed in monastic and Ignatian circles. Third, this approach argues against drawing a strong line separating bodily respiration and corporate spirituality. On the negative side, this is implicated in our responses to COVID-19: the ongoing presence of an airborne pathogen makes worship services potential super-spreader events (likewise choral and wind-band concerts, karaoke nights, opera, etc.). The exchange of breath that facilitates sharing the Word is compromised by a new and evolving airborne pathogen that has proved fatal to millions, has reduced life expectancy around the world, and is increasingly seen to cause long-term disability—we will be seeing consequences for choristers and congregations who cannot sing as well as before, and church members, of all ages, increasingly asking to join worship online because they are not well enough to get to church. If worship is to be life-giving, then churches must be places where the air can be trusted. On the positive side, COVID-19 has reminded us in a new way of an old truth: that all things are connected and interdependent, that the material and the spiritual intermingle in ways that often lie outside of our attention. Worship spaces, where we share the Holy Breath, can be spaces where such respiratory interaction promotes *viriditas*.