Opinion
Letters to the Editor

by NCR Staff

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We can experience the Holy Spirit by becoming attuned to the Spirit's movement in our experiences, says Franciscan Fr. Daniel P. Horan. We just might find that she defies our preconceived notions of God. And in the first column of Horan's Holy Spirit series, he writes about "Holy Spirit atheism," which he says has real and practical consequences. Below are letters to the editor from NCR readers responding to this series. The letters have been edited for length and clarity.

I cannot identify the Holy Spirit as it is in the Creed — Lord. That makes all three members of the Trinity male. I want a different word. I think of the Spirit as a feminine expression of the energy of the Father and the Son.

DIANN SHERWIN
Dagsboro, Delaware



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In the Gloria, the Spirit gets only a short phrase. The entire rest of the prayer is in praise of the Father and the Son. This seems typical of the church approach to the Holy Spirit and I find myself wanting to expand the glory of the Holy Spirit there.

I experience the Holy Spirit as a presence in my breath. She breathes in me. Sometimes in prayer the presence becomes very strong. Other times it is in the background.

A friend used a gazing ball in her yard as an image of the Holy Spirit. No less accurate, I thought, than an image of a bearded old man for the first person of the Trinity, who as a spirit has no gender identity, but who chooses to image self as both male and female.

We need images, but we also need to be aware that the image is not the infinite holy divine mystery that is beyond finite understanding.

My last thought on the Holy Spirit is a haiku from my occasional scribblings:

> She is a wild thing
> Ride the wind with her, hold on
> She cannot be tamed

SUE CROOK
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

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I look forward to this much needed series. I hope that one subject Horan will address is the Holy Spirit's activity outside of the Catholic Church and outside of the Christian religion. It seems to me that when it comes to the great issues of today and centuries past the Holy Spirit appears to be more operative outside of the church than within her. The church is often the last to be enlightened. This makes little theological sense to me and, as a black non-heterosexual person, raises grave doubts for me both as a Catholic and as a Christian.

JEFFREY JONES
Hamburg, New York

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Fr. Daniel Horan's recent article was a refreshing read, coming as it does after three years of the pandemic and an ever-increasing focus on the Eucharist.

Some of us Catholics are ill, elderly, disabled, immunocompromised, or without transportation, etc., and cannot partake of the Eucharist on a regular basis despite our desire to do so. The extreme focus on the Eucharistic aspect of God has, from my perspective, a marginalizing effect on those who are not physically able to be present in the church and active in the church community.

During long months of isolation at home, I have been grateful for the Holy Spirit and the knowledge that God is always with me.

MAUREEN BEMKO
Edinboro, Pennsylvania

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I agree with Fr. Daniel Horan that appreciation of the Holy Spirit's place in the life of the church is so insufficient that we believers continue failing to realize that life to the full. I applaud his plan to examine the reasons for this and to suggest corrective measures. As he does this in the pages of NCR, I will be comparing his insights with some I have learned in my study and prayer.

To begin, we are not lacking in descriptions of the Spirit's work in building the church. The Gospels and apostolic letters are filled with efforts to communicate that reality to believers who had not yet experienced it to the full. To take the example he cited, we have before us more than any old bird: rather a constantly driving, soaring dynamic that draws everyone in to dream and reach impossibly high.

A more mature realization in words of the ways in which the Spirit is present would focus first and foremost on our life as church. It would build on the selection of readings proclaimed on Trinity Sunday,
throughout which we are drawn to the triune God as revealed to God's people in history. Such an approach could take the form of a personal scripture-based "litany of trust" such as this or a similar wording:

> "You send your Spirit to confirm our faith.
> In this same Spirit we pray and work as one.
> You speak through our compassion and our boldness.
> You urge us to sustain the earth you gave us.
> You give us hope for our own resurrection, and life with you forever."

PAUL SCHLACHTER
Miami, Florida

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The article on the Holy Spirit got my attention. The Holy Spirit as amorphous seems to me a good reason to emphasize the feminine qualities of this person of the Trinity.

I learned the Holy Spirit was the forgotten God back in Catholic high school in the late 1950s. I would pray before exams and was sure it helped. Sophia, holy wisdom, the breath of God — all very feminine.

One reason we avoid pinning down an image is that the Spirit "blows where it will" and is not easily obedient to authority or discipline. I have benefitted greatly from the charismatic movement and knowing both priests and lay people who have the gift of healing. I love the unexpected and paranormal things that can happen.

While Catholicism has a tradition of intellectual saints and scholars, there is always the balance of the affective/irrational happening in apparitions of Jesus and Mother

Mary to move us along. People who want to be super-rational can be illogical and allow miracles in the presence of mama.

PAMELA PARRISH
Keene, New Hampshire

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When I saw that Fr. Daniel Horan was preparing a five-part series on the Holy Spirit, I was touched.

The promise of five articles concerning the who, what and why of the Holy Spirit jolted me into another realization of the life of the Holy Spirit within my own being. Celebrating 40 years as a missionary priest, it was only about five years ago that I discovered a deeper relationship with God.

Some 40 years ago, I realized a presence of the Holy Spirit in my surroundings as I touched bases with the charismatic movement. Perhaps it wasn't an accident that the learnings originating from that experience, a memory remained with me. A memory of the Paraclete.

(Fr.) JOSEPH P. LA MAR, MM
Maryknoll, New York

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Kudos to NCR and Fr. Daniel Horan for his articles on the Holy Spirit. While I appreciate and agree with his use of the feminine pronoun, it also occurred to me that one could imagine the Holy Spirit as the only non-binary member of the Trinity!

Whatever one's image, the reality of the Spirit in our lives deserves much more attention and reflection and I am grateful to Horan for contributing to that.

JIM PURCELL, NCR board member
Los Gatos, California