

The *Ruah* of Eloim: A Prolegomenon to a Salesian Theology of the Word¹

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Presented at the Salesian Scholars Seminar
Stella Niagara, NY October 2018

Nature and the Elements

St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622) had a great love for nature and creation. He saw creation essentially as a manifestation of the wonder, power and love of God.² Anyone who has ever visited Annecy with its lake and majestic mountains can readily understand the reason. It is one of the most beautiful places on the European continent.

With such magnificent scenery,

The expression

French translation of the *Treatise*

south which De Sales likes to equate to the Holy Spirit. In a letter to St. Jane de Chantal, he paraphrases this one verse of the *Canticles*:

Away with you north wind (*vent de bise*) and come O south wind and blow in my garden, and the perfumes will come forth in abundance. O my dear daughter, how I desire this gracious wind which brings the south wind of divine love, this Holy Spirit who gives us the grace to aspire to him and breathe for him.¹³

This idea appears several times in his writings.¹⁴

The wind also signified for De Sales the voice of God. Commenting in his first sermon on the manifestation of the Spirit at Pentecost, he observes that God made himself heard by the voice of a great wind that encouraged and comforted the hearts of the apostles.¹⁵ In a very characteristic fashion, he advises us not to look for God so much in the loud and violent wind, but in the gentle bre

wants to talk to us among the thorns and bushes as he did to Moses, and he speaks to us as

¹⁶

Pentecost helped the saint understand the relationship between the wind, fire and thunder:

on our own, we could give birth to these things only after this fire, this wind, this thunder, only after

that for him the Holy Spirit is the hot breath of love which has come to cast fire on earth in all hearts. In his first sermon written for the feast of Pentecost, he contrasts the waters of chaos fructified by the Holy Spirit at creation with the tongues of fire fructified by this

, after having made fertile the waters for the creation of the world, wanted to make this fire fertile to restore the

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In a very penetrating commentary in another sermon on the feast of Pentecost, the saint enlarges upon the significance of the breath of love appearing as tongues of fire:

The Holy Spirit very fittingly was sent under the form and symbol of tongues and is in her tongue. Everyone knows

Conclusion

For all its power and awesomeness, the *ruah* of Elohim, the breath, the wind of the Lord is essentially the creative, unifying power of love. The Spirit of the Lord that hovers over the chaos of creation brings order, goodness, peace and harmony within our own souls and then in our relations with others:

God is neither in the strong wind, nor in agitation, nor in these fires, but in the mild and tranquil wind that is almost imperceptible.²⁰

The Holy Spirit is love. He is found only in a place of concord. He flees all quarrelling and delights with simple and mild mannered souls. This is why he once appeared in the form of a dove.²¹

The Holy Spirit is the creator of unity. This was the essential point he made in his first sermon on Pentecost: I exhort you to friendship and to benevolence among yourselves, to peace with all. For if we have charity among us, we would have peace; we would have the

²² This is for De Sales the fundamental goal

truth for our saint was the inextricable r

breath of God. The Word is breathed by the breath of God. No breath, no spoken word.

This means that the word of God always comes with the breath or the sigh of divine love.

Every word of God is a word of love of kind, merciful, forgiving, and yes, even , whom

De Sales speaks of as Holy Love. ²³

²⁰ OEA, 12:166.

²¹ 7:181.

²² OEA, 7:20.

²³ OEA, 7:5.