

## The Personhood of the Holy Spirit and Why It Matters

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Borrowing imagery from a children’s story, Finnish theologian Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen points out that today, the Holy Spirit is no longer “the Cinderella of the Trinity,” being left alone at home while her two sisters go to the ball. “Nowadays, it will not do to speak about the Holy Spirit as the *theos agraptos*—the God about whom no one writes—as did Gregory of Nazianzus in the fourth century.”<sup>1</sup> There is a revolution going on regarding the Holy Spirit. This revolution is experiential, ecumenical, as well as academic.<sup>2</sup> Scholars today search for greater clarity on a topic that has always remained elusive: Just who is the Holy Spirit?

The search is timely, and especially so for Christians whose understanding of last-day events place today’s world on the brink of a great deception by Christ’s archenemy.<sup>3</sup> What we understand regarding the nature of the Holy Spirit will influence our response to His work in our lives. This article will review basic biblical and theological arguments

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<sup>1</sup> Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 16.

<sup>2</sup> See Elizabeth A. Dreyer, “Resources for a Renewed Life in the Spirit and Pneumatology: Medial Mystics and Saints,” in *Advent of the Spirit: Orientations in Pneumatology, Conference Papers from a Symposium at Marquette University, 17–19 April 1998* (unpublished), 1.

<sup>3</sup> I speak here of a biblical worldview based on Bible prophecies found in the books of Daniel and Revelation that point to climactic end-time events before the return of Christ which include an increased activity of the Holy Spirit in the world as well as correspondingly increased deceptions by Satan regarding such activity. As an example of such a worldview, see Norman R. Gulley, *Christ Is Coming! A Christ-centered Approach to Last-day Events* (Hagerstown: Review & Herald, 1998), 127–158, 476–506.

for the personhood of the Holy Spirit and the implications for Christian experience today.

### The Study of the Person of the Spirit

Seventy years ago Samuel Chadwick contended that “the last great book on the Spirit was written in 1674.”<sup>4</sup> John Owen’s work was a tour de force on the subject, but much more has surfaced on the subject in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup> From small beginnings in Kansas City and Los Angeles—giving life to Classical Pentecostalism—to the Charismatic Renewal among Catholic and mainline Protestant churches, to today’s Third Wave that includes large numbers of Evangelicals, the “silent” theology of the Spirit of yesteryear has turned into a veritable post-modern Tower of Babel. But not everything written or said about the Spirit these days contains truth. Contemporary approaches to pneumatology vary a great deal.<sup>6</sup> And much serious work on the Spirit bypasses His nature, focusing instead on His function and work.<sup>7</sup> It is not surprising then, that our very

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<sup>4</sup> *The Way to Pentecost* (Berne: Light and Hope, 1937), 5. Chadwick was referring to Puritan John Owen’s works on the Holy Spirit, particularly his first one: *Pneumatologia: Or, A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit: Wherein an Account of His Name, Nature, Personality, Dispensation, Operations, & Effects . . .* (London: J. Darby, 1674). Abraham Kuyper considered Owen’s works on the Holy Spirit “still unsurpassed”; *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Henri De Vries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), ix–xi.

<sup>5</sup> Watson E. Mills had listed and analyzed 3998 works published by 1993. See his *A Bibliography of the Nature and Role of the Holy Spirit in Twentieth-Century Writings* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1993). Esther Dech Schandorff has included and systematized scores of works on the Holy Spirit for several centuries in *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit: A Bibliography Showing Its Chronological Development*, 2 vols. (Lanham: Scarecrow, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> According to Kärkkäinen, 20–22, while Jürgen Moltmann [*Spirit of Life* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001)] follows fairly traditional patterns, providing extensive interaction with the way the Spirit has been conceived in the history of theology, Miroslav Volf [*Work in the Spirit* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2001)] relates the discussion to political realities and work. While Elizabeth Johnson [*She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminine Theological Discourse* (New York: Herder & Herder, 2002)] seeks a distinctively feminine perspective in the doctrine of the Spirit, Joseph Comblin [*The Holy Spirit and Liberation* (New York: Orbis, 1989)] sees the work of the Spirit as part of liberation theology. And while Michael Welker [*God the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1994)] treats the study of the Spirit as truly biblical theology, Clark Pinnock [*Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996)] tries to construct a full-scale systematic theology from a pneumatological point of view.

<sup>7</sup> Typical of theological treatments is Arthur W. Pink’s work, purporting a brief, yet comprehensive view of the doctrine: he devotes only six pages to the person and deity of

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own 2005 edition of *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* covers the person of the Spirit, the question of His divinity, and His relationship with the Godhead in only two pages, while more than twice that many are spent on His mission alone.<sup>8</sup>

If understanding the person of the Spirit is so critical for our times, why is it so difficult to accomplish?<sup>9</sup> Obviously, one reason is that comparatively little is explained in the Scriptures. Much is assumed, but little is explained. And even though the New Testament mentions the Spirit tenfold more often than the Old Testament, it remains concerned with ethics and not with nature.<sup>10</sup> True, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is “one of the most elusive themes in the Bible or in theology,”<sup>11</sup> but should we not seek to understand what *is* revealed for the sake of our instruction, as Paul suggests to the Romans (Rom 15:4)? Surely, we must do so with great reverence and humility, yet with determination, for “the dispensation in which we are now living is to be . . . the dispensation of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>12</sup>

For many Christians, the Father is seen as fairly impersonal and transcendent and the Son as far removed in history, while the Spirit “is the

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the Spirit, but he writes 159 pages on the various functions and ministries of the Spirit. *The Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970).

<sup>8</sup> *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Silver Spring: Ministerial Association of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005), 70–76.

<sup>9</sup> Millard J. Erickson proposes five reasons for this: 1) There is less “explicit revelation in the Bible” regarding the Holy Spirit than about the Father or the Son. 2) There is no systematic discussion about Him, the only extensive treatment being John 14–16, which, of course, deals more with His work and the timing of His coming than with His nature or His personality. 3) There is a lack of concrete imagery about the Spirit, making it harder to conceptualize. A further misfortune is the fact that generations who only had access to the King James Version’s terminology of the Holy Spirit as the Holy Ghost grew up conceiving of the Spirit “as something inside a white sheet.” 4) There is a subconscious Arianism that sees the Father and the Son in one plane but the Holy Spirit in a lower, subservient plane because of His function. 5) The avoidance by some because of the excessive emphasis on the Holy Spirit by charismatic Christians. *Christian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 863, 864.

<sup>10</sup> Henry Barclay Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 286.

<sup>11</sup> Seán P. Kealy, “Holy Spirit,” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 601.

<sup>12</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Washington: Review & Herald, 1923), 511.

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point at which the Trinity becomes personal to the believer.”<sup>13</sup> Since that is so critical, study we must, while not forgetting an important warning penned by Ellen White at a time when popular interest in the Spirit was growing rapidly, 1911:

It is not essential for us to be able to define just what the Holy Spirit is . . . The nature of the Holy Spirit is a mystery. Men cannot explain it, because the Lord has not revealed it to them . . . Regarding such mysteries, which are too deep for human understanding, silence is golden.<sup>14</sup>

In order to deal biblically and theologically with the person of the Spirit, we should briefly consider its historical development.

**Brief Historical Background**

Theologians and church leaders have wrestled for centuries over the nature and work of the Holy Spirit. The Trinity was the first doctrine dealt with in Christian history after the apostles passed on from the scene of their labors. However, there is evidence to suggest that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit was not *fully* treated until the 12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>15</sup> By the late second century there developed a growing emphasis on the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Tertullian of Carthage called the Spirit *God*, stressing that there is one substance that the Spirit and the Son hold jointly with the Father.<sup>16</sup> However, much confusion remained, with many struggling to even include the Holy Spirit as a member of the Godhead. Paul of Samosata, for instance, believed that the Holy Spirit was basically the grace of God poured upon the apostles. Irenaeus thought that the Spirit was an attribute of God, such as divine Wisdom. Origen, on the other hand, went far afield from an ontological Trinity, affirming that the Holy Spirit was “brought into existence through the Word, the chief in rank of

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<sup>13</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 862.

<sup>14</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1911), 51–52.

<sup>15</sup> See James Orr, *The Progress of Dogma* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, repr. 1952), 22–30. Orr suggests that even though the chronological order of major doctrines followed a traditional systematic order— so that the first one was the doctrine of God and the last one the doctrine of the last things; that was not so with the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Cited in Erickson, 864.

<sup>16</sup> Tertullian, *Adversus Praxeam* 2, 3, 8. His propensity to construct formulas of faith led him to coin the word “trinity.”

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all the beings originated by the Father through Christ.”<sup>17</sup> Not much has changed, as these early views are still held by a number of faith groups today.

It was the Cappadocian Fathers in the fifth century who fortified the notion of the Holy Spirit as a person.<sup>18</sup> Basil the Great became known as the “theologian of the Holy Spirit,” thanks mostly to a desire to establish the tri-unity of God against attempts at tritheism—three Gods—or at “binity,” the idea that the Father and the Son were God but the Holy Spirit was a step below them. He wrote the first serious treatise on the person of the Holy Spirit, appropriately entitled *On the Holy Spirit*, and this greatly influenced the revision of the Nicene Creed.<sup>19</sup> The First Council of Nicea, convened by Emperor Constantine in AD 325, proclaimed in that creed, “We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, . . . begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father.” But even though a small paragraph and a much more substantial paragraph are dedicated to the Father and the Son, the creed ended with the cryptic: “And [we believe] in the Holy Ghost.” Nothing more was said about the Spirit. Why? Because Arianism remained a major threat to the church. Arius had managed to convince a great many people that Jesus was a special creation of God, but not God Himself. This concept had experienced a revival not only among many church leaders, but also among secular leaders with power. Decades after the original creed, Arian theology survived, thanks, in part, to Emperor Constantine, whom some consider to have “lived as a pagan and died as an Arian.”<sup>20</sup> The strongest voice for what became the orthodox view belonged to Athanasius and the Cappadocians, who steadfastly wrote and taught and preached on the full divinity of the Son as well as the Spirit until the Nicene creed was revised in AD 381 at the First Council of Constantinople. The Council not only expanded on the Father and the Son, but added a full and significant paragraph on the Spirit, who now

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<sup>17</sup> See J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 118; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2.30.9; Origen, *Commentary on John* 2.10.75. Cited in Erickson, 865.

<sup>18</sup> See Gary D. Badcock, “Doctrine of the Holy Spirit,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 304.

<sup>19</sup> Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999), 177.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

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“proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets.”<sup>21</sup>

Even though during the Middle Ages the Spirit was fully accepted as equal with God, confusion continued. The trouble reflected past controversies over Christology regarding the exact *origin* of the Spirit: Was He from God the Father or from the Son or from both? All was quiet in the West until the Eastern Church discovered the now famous *filioque* clause in 1014.<sup>22</sup> To the Nicene Creed had been added the word *filioque*—Latin for “and the Son”—now stating that the Holy Spirit proceeded “from the Father *and the Son*.” The Eastern Church, already miffed at the preeminence of Rome in the Church Catholic, and fully holding to the concept that the Father alone was the sole fountain, root, and cause of deity, would not stand for such “treason.” The *filioque* controversy became the greatest theological disagreement in the history of the Christian church, leading to the permanent rift between the Eastern and the Western Church: the Great Schism of 1054.

The Protestant Reformation produced no major changes in the orthodox, chiefly Augustinian<sup>23</sup> doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Calvin’s contribution was in the area of revelation, positing that the inward witness of the Spirit is the ultimate basis for our confidence in the divine nature of the Bible. In other words, the *applied* work of the Spirit follows the Spirit’s *written* work, the Bible.

Over time, the Holy Spirit as a person became more accepted in the churches, leading some to wonder just how it is that the Spirit works in the lives of sinners. Wesley, for instance, introduced the idea of a person’s instantaneous sanctification by the Holy Spirit.<sup>24</sup>

Despite Wesley, the church’s interest in the Holy Spirit went through a period of decline in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Protestant scholasticism,

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<sup>21</sup> See a word comparison of both creeds in Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 57.

<sup>22</sup> According to Badcock (305), although the addition was finally discovered and made something about in 1014, the action had taken place nearly 500 years before, at the Third Council of Toledo, Spain, in AD 589, at a gathering of only Latin ecclesiastics. Williston Walker asserts that Charlemagne had also approved of the *filioque* addition. Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1970), 189, 164.

<sup>23</sup> See Badcock, 304. Luther’s formulations were quite similar to those of Augustine.

<sup>24</sup> Though it was followers like John Fletcher who expanded the concept of instantaneous sanctification by using the term “baptism of the Spirit,” later to become an expression of major contention that continues to this day between Christians of the Reformed tradition and those stemming from the Pietistic and Holiness Movement traditions.

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with its “rechte Lehre” (correct doctrine), produced “a more mechanical view of the role of Scriptures,” and “as a result the witness of the Spirit tended to be bypassed.” The Word alone, without the Spirit, was regarded as the basis of authority. In addition, rationalism, naturalism, and even deism became major accepted philosophical standards, which meant that since the Holy Spirit cannot be proven from an examination of nature, the doctrine was rather neglected. Eventually, Schleiermacher’s brand of Romanticism insisted that religion was not really a matter of beliefs (doctrines) or behavior (ethics), but of feelings. So, the Holy Spirit was redefined as “the vital unity of the Christian fellowship as a moral personality.”<sup>25</sup>

Other religious movements, however, did pay close attention to the Spirit, but largely to the *work* of the Holy Spirit.<sup>26</sup> American revivalism, for instance, stressed conversion and an immediacy of experience. This, coupled with the Holiness Movement rooted in Methodism, and the Keswick Conventions born from Calvinist traditions,<sup>27</sup> along with a rapidly changing America, gave way to the official rise of Pentecostalism in 1901/1906, Neo-Pentecostalism in the 1960s, and the Third Wave in the 1980s accepting sign gifts as normative for evangelical Christians. Now the doctrine of the Spirit became the concern of individual and corporate *praxis*, or experience, rather than *dogma*, or theology.

#### **Fundamental Questions Regarding the Person of the Holy Spirit**

In 1906 Ellen White wrote that “The Holy Spirit has a personality, else He could not bear witness to our spirits and with our spirits that we are the children of God. He must also be a divine person, else He could not search out the secrets which lie hidden in the mind of God.”<sup>28</sup> The statement alludes to three fundamental questions that must be answered to begin to understand the Holy Spirit and the implications of His personhood: 1) Is the Holy Spirit God? 2) Is the Holy Spirit a person in the Godhead? 3) What is the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Godhead? Though much of the biblical evidence may be familiar to the reader, it nevertheless bears repeating for the sake of our proposal.

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<sup>25</sup> Erickson, 868–871.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 871–872.

<sup>27</sup> See Melvin E. Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Lanham: Scarecrow, 1986).

<sup>28</sup> Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington: Review & Herald, 1946), 617.

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**Is the Holy Spirit God?** We must admit that the direct Scriptural evidence on this question is scant. This, no doubt, is one key reason why so many sincere believers throughout the history of the Christian church have not been convinced of the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Even though Paul's doctrine of the Holy Spirit may be more central in the New Testament than his doctrine of justification by faith,<sup>29</sup> "the deity of the Father is simply assumed . . . that of the Son is affirmed and argued, while that of the Holy Spirit must be inferred from various indirect statements found in Scripture."<sup>30</sup>

However, God has left enough evidence for us to understand basic truths. The clearest of these may be the statement by Peter in Acts 5 where he asks deceiving Ananias why he had lied "to the Holy Spirit" regarding the sale of his land, and then declares, "You have not lied to men, but to God" (Acts 5:3, 4).<sup>31</sup> For Peter, "lying to the Holy Spirit" and "lying to God" were interchangeable expressions, his point being that Ananias was not *merely* lying to the apostles of the nascent New Testament church, but to God Himself. This is all the more significant in view of the fact that Luke wrote his account from the point of view of the mighty acts of the Spirit,<sup>32</sup> as "the promise" of the Father (Luke 24:49) had finally been realized. This critical event in the life of New Israel mirrored that of the old. The day of Pentecost was known among the Jews as "the day of the giving of the Law," in reference to when the Law of God, written with the finger of God—or Spirit of God, according to Jesus (compare Matt 12:28 with Luke 11:20)—was given at Mount Sinai. It was only days later that some in Israel, in spite of experiencing mighty signs and wonders by the covenant God who had shown His superiority over the gods of Egypt, brazenly chose to follow gods of their own making in the form of two golden calves. In AD 31, on the Day of Pentecost, the "finger" or Spirit of God descended with mighty signs and wonders

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<sup>29</sup> S. Neill and N. T. Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861–1986* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988), 203.

<sup>30</sup> Erickson, 873.

<sup>31</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural references are from the New American Standard Bible.

<sup>32</sup> See George Sweeting and Donald W. Sweeting, *The Acts of God: Reflections from the Book of Acts* (Chicago: Moody, 1986). For an application of this concept, see my "A Biblical Paradigm for Ministerial Training" (DMin Dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1997), 164–167. For a helpful theology on the book of Acts, see I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson, eds., *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).



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upon the waiting believers to begin writing God’s law upon their hearts (Acts 2). But just like their predecessors, some, like Ananias and Saphira, chose to make a pretense of following God while their allegiance remained with Mammon. Their fate was the same as that of the 3,000 that fell in the wilderness that day (Acts 5:3–11; Exod 32:21–28). Why such harsh punishment? Because just as the affront 1,500 years before was shamelessly made before Almighty God, the same happened with the rebellious couple before the same mighty God as before: God the Holy Spirit.

Another example of interchangeable expressions is given by Paul in 1 Cor 3 and 6. In chapter 3:16, 17, he writes, “Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” Three chapters later, he uses almost identical language: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you?” (1 Cor 6:19). The temple of God or the temple of the Holy Spirit—God and Holy Spirit are used interchangeably by Paul. “The Holy Spirit is not a mere spirit,” said Martin Luther, “a creature, for example, or something apart from God and yet given to men by Him, or merely the work of God which He performs in our hearts—but that He is a Spirit who Himself is God in essence.”<sup>33</sup>

Jesus also used the word God and Holy Spirit interchangeably. During the night encounter with Nicodemus, Christ made reference to how possible it was to be born *again*—a common reference to salvation—by the Spirit, even if the secret disciple considered it impossible, saying: “How can these things be?” (John 3:5–9). Later in His ministry, when another group of disciples gathered to inquire how it could be that people not expected to be saved could be saved, Jesus responded: “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matt 19:23–26). Clearly, for Jesus it was God who made salvation possible, even as it was the Spirit who made men born again. This is because the Holy Spirit is the one with the ability to bring about conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8–11).

In the Book of Hebrews we find the only biblical reference to “the eternal Spirit” (Heb 9:14), whereas in the Book of Deuteronomy we find the only biblical reference to “the eternal God” (Deut 33:27). We know that only God is eternal. We also know that only God can raise the dead

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<sup>33</sup> Martin Luther, “Sermon On John 15:26, 27” in *Luther’s Works*, 24:297, cited in Arnold Valentin Wallenkampf, *New by the Spirit* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1978), 14.

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to life. “Truly, truly I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear shall live . . . all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice” (John 5:25, 28). On what basis can Christ call the dead to life? He explains in the following verse: “Just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself” (v. 26). A few years later, Paul echoed Jesus’ words when he wrote, in Romans 8:11: “But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, *He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit* who indwells you” (emphasis supplied). The same Spirit who raised Jesus will raise you and me from the dead because, like God, He too has life in Himself.

In the discourse given on the night of His betrayal, Christ announced the coming of the *parakletos*, often translated in English as *Comforter* or *Helper* (John 14:16, 17). Linguistically, this alludes to the “parallel” status the person introduced has with the One introducing Him.<sup>34</sup> This is why Christ referred to the Holy Spirit as “another” Comforter, Him being the first the disciples knew. The point to be made here is that Christ would “ask [*pray* in the King James Version] the Father” for the Spirit. Just a few minutes earlier Christ had referred to Himself and His Father as equals (vv. 9, 10). If the Comforter is equal—or parallel—to the Son, and the Son is equal—or one—with the Father, the Comforter, or Holy Spirit, is equal with the Father.

The Holy Spirit possesses attributes only belonging to God. He is omnipresent, making the Psalmist exclaim: “Where can I go from Thy Spirit? Or where can I flee from Thy presence?” (Ps 139:7). The Holy Spirit is omniscient, for Paul says, “the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God,” for “the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God” (1 Cor 2:10, 11). And the Holy Spirit is omnipotent, since He distributes gifts “to each one individually *just as He wills*” (1 Cor 12:11, emphasis supplied).

Finally, a number of statements in Scripture mention all three members of the Godhead, making them equal in nature and rank, though not in function. The well known baptismal formula that was part of the Great Commission states that Christ’s followers must baptize new disciples “in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19). The

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<sup>34</sup> The promise that another (Greek *allos*, one of the same kind) Comforter would come means one like Christ would come. Like Christ, the Spirit will be a “Comforter” (KJV), “Helper” (NKJV, NASB), “Advocate” (NEB), and “Counselor” (NIV, RSV).

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formula highlights a *single* name, not three different ones, making one and all of them of the same substance (*hupostasis*) as the others. The apostolic blessing of 2 Corinthians 13:14 reveals the same triune God: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.” And the spiritual gifts discourse makes the same point by speaking of “varieties of gifts but the same *Spirit*,” “varieties of ministries, and the same *Lord*,” and “varieties of effects, but the same *God*” (1 Cor 12:4–6, emphasis supplied). In Peter’s greeting, we find the triune Godhead linked together as before, yet giving hints of their various functions: “Peter, . . . to those who reside as aliens, scattered . . . , who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood” (1 Pet 1:1, 2).

#### Is the Holy Spirit a Person?

The personhood of the Holy Spirit was something with which early Adventist pioneers struggled.<sup>35</sup> Along with anti-Trinitarian views, some thought of the Holy Spirit as less than a person. Long time church editor and General Conference Secretary Uriah Smith, for example, as late as 1891, described the Holy Spirit as “that divine, mysterious emanation through which they [the Father and the Son] carry forward their great and infinite work.” A year earlier, he had pictured the Spirit to be a “divine influence” and not a “person like the Father and the Son.”<sup>36</sup> The lack of clarity in the Adventist Church regarding the person of the Holy Spirit was the result of a lack of a truly Trinitarian understanding of God. Even Ellen White, quoting the King James Version, kept referring to the Holy

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<sup>35</sup> This is attested by fairly recent scholarship revealing early Adventism’s anti-trinitarian views. See Erwin R. Gane, “The Arian or Anti-Trinitarian Views Presented in Seventh-day Adventist Literature and the Ellen G. White Answer” (M.A. thesis, Andrews University, 1963); Russell Holt, “The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination: Its Rejection and Acceptance” (Term Paper, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, 1969); Merlin Burt, “Demise of Semi-Arianism and Anti-Trinitarianism in Adventist Theology, 1888–1957” (term paper, Andrews University, 1996); and Woodrow Whidden, Jerry Moon, and John W. Reeve, *The Trinity: Understanding God’s Love, His Plan of Salvation, and Christian Relationships* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2002), 190–220.

<sup>36</sup> General Conference Bulletin, 146, 1891; *Review & Herald*, October 24, 1890, 664, cited in George R. Knight, *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs* (Hagerstown: Review & Herald, 2000), 18. Uriah Smith also called the Spirit “the divine afflatus [impulse] and medium” of the Father and the Son. *Looking Unto Jesus* (Battle Creek: Review and Herald, 1897), 10.

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Spirit as an “it” in her writings. However, all that changed by 1898. A new understanding of the nature of Christ and the person of the Spirit made her clearly state that “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underrived,” and the personal pronoun “He” was used in reference to the Holy Spirit, who was said to be “the Third Person of the Godhead.”<sup>37</sup> The publication of *The Desire of Ages* propelled a paradigm shift that surprised many and shocked some. Well known is the story of young M. L. Andreasen, who was so skeptical of the changes that he sought to ascertain whether or not this was her own writing. In 1902, after visiting with Ellen White in her Elmshaven home and seeing the manuscript, he was convinced that it was so.<sup>38</sup>

Today, the Seventh-day Adventists’ official statement of beliefs clearly states that “the Bible reveals that the Holy Spirit is a person, not an impersonal force.”<sup>39</sup> This is standard Christian doctrine. But Christian theological tradition has never been a good enough reason for Seventh-day Adventists to settle on biblical teachings. What, then, is the Bible evidence for the personhood of the Spirit?

At times, people have viewed the Holy Spirit as an “it,” in part, because the neuter gender for Spirit, both in the original Greek—*pneuma*—and in English, have contributed to this concept. An example is Romans 8:16, where the KJV translates the text: “The Spirit *itself* . . .” (emphasis added).<sup>40</sup> Since pronouns are to agree with their antecedents in person, number, and gender, you would expect the neuter pronoun to be used to represent the Holy Spirit. However, when John the Beloved recorded the words of Jesus, he used the masculine pronoun *ekeinos*—he—when referring to the Holy Spirit. “When the Helper comes . . . that is the Spirit of truth . . . He will bear witness of Me” (John 15:26). “When He, the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). “And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever” (John 14:16). Either John made a consistent grammatical error or he purposely called the Holy Spirit a “he.” Since no similar error is made in the rest of John’s gospel, we conclude he did it to

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<sup>37</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1898, 1940), 530, 669–671.

<sup>38</sup> The story was relayed by Andreasen at a 1948 chapel address given at Loma Linda, California, and quoted by Russell Holt, 20. Also cited in Whidden, 197.

<sup>39</sup> “God the Holy Spirit,” in *Beliefs*, 70.

<sup>40</sup> For the sake of clarity, modern translations have replaced the neuter pronoun with the masculine personal pronoun.

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make a point: Jesus referred to a Person and not a thing.<sup>41</sup> Not much should be made of John's use of the *masculine* personal pronoun; his point was not a specific gender but personality.<sup>42</sup>

The Bible also identifies in the Holy Spirit a number of attributes characteristic only of persons. For instance, the Holy Spirit *wills*. In Acts 16 we find Paul and his companions "forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia; and when they had come to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them" (Acts 16:7, 8). In 1 Corinthians 12 we are told, after several gifts of the Spirit are mentioned, that "the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills" (1 Cor 12:7–11). Also, the Holy Spirit is said to have a *mind*. Paul reminds us that "he who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is." Such mind is used by the Spirit to intercede on our behalf: "for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes . . . with groanings too deep for words" (Rom 8:27, 26). As only persons can, the Spirit *gives instruction* as well. Paul writes to Timothy: "The Spirit explicitly says that in the latter days some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Tim 4:1). Nehemiah reminisced how God had given Israel His "good Spirit to instruct them" (Neh 9:20). And Jesus promised His disciples that when facing danger or stress because of Him: "the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say" (Luke 12:12). A further characteristic is the fact that the Holy Spirit is capable of *feelings*. Paul counsels the Ephesians to make sure not to "grieve the Holy Spirit of God" (Eph 4:30); and Isaiah recalls how Israel had so stubbornly "rebelled and grieved [God's] Holy Spirit" that the Spirit then "turned Himself to become their enemy" (Isa 63:10). And the Spirit has *influence*. Paul assures us that "no one can say 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 12:3).<sup>43</sup> Jesus promised that "when [the Spirit] comes, [He] will convict the world concerning

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<sup>41</sup> A similar reference is found in Eph 1:14, where Paul uses the word *hos*—who—in a clause modifying the Holy Spirit.

<sup>42</sup> According to Jerome, the fact that the Hebrew *ruah* (spirit) is mainly feminine, the Greek *pneuma* (spirit) is neuter, and the Latin *spiritus* is masculine shows that God has no gender at all. See Kealy, 601.

<sup>43</sup> Gordon Fee makes an important point when he highlights that what Paul says about the Spirit as an agency of God's activity parallels "what he says in scores of places about Christ, whose agency can only be personal. By implication, the Spirit's agency can hardly be less personal than that of Christ." *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), 26.

sin, and righteousness, and judgment” (John 16:8). Finally, only persons can *love*, and all three members of the Godhead do (see John 3:16 and 13:1). Paul appeals to the Romans: “Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit [to pray for me]” (Rom 15:30). And he had already told them, in Romans 5, that “hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts *through the Holy Spirit*” (Rom 5:5, emphasis supplied).

### **What is the Relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Godhead?**

Seventh-day Adventists assert that “from eternity, God the Holy Spirit lived within the Godhead as the third member. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are equally self-existent. Though each is equal, *an economy of function* operates within the Trinity (emphasis supplied).”<sup>44</sup> Now we turn to this *economy of function* and the role of the Spirit as the *third* member of the Godhead. However, we must keep in mind that there is less explicit revelation in the Bible regarding the Holy Spirit than regarding the Father and the Son. This is never easy to understand. Though it is true that in the New Testament the Spirit is regarded chiefly in relation to the Church and the Christian life, the question of the Spirit’s relation to God can find answers in Scripture.<sup>45</sup>

Whereas the Christological controversies in the early centuries of the Christian era were the result of the dual nature of Christ, the resistance to accepting the Spirit as a person and as fully God stems from His *role* in the Trinity, this “economy of function.” Is this in Scripture? Though the Bible does not provide a systematic discussion about the Holy Spirit, the closest treatment can be found in Christ’s Passover night dialogue in the Upper Room. There we find striking statements that reveal what appears to be a voluntarily subservient role of the Spirit to the rest of the Trinity.

When Jesus announces the coming of the promised Comforter, He says, “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper . . . the Spirit of truth” (John 14:16, 17). Though we clearly see evidence that the Spirit has and exercises His will, we find in this text that it all depends on the two other members of the Trinity: the Son’s request and the Father’s provision. Through the Spirit, Christ indwells His disciples (v. 20): “In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.” Then Christ adds that He will disclose Himself to them then (v. 21). In fact, the promise is that both Father and Son will come to make

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<sup>44</sup> “God the Holy Spirit” in *Beliefs*, 71.

<sup>45</sup> See Sweete, 288, regarding a veiled skepticism on this point.

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Their abode with them (v. 23), and even though no explicit mention is made about the Spirit being the Third *Guest* in their hearts, it is the Spirit who will aid the disciples in comprehending what He has just said. We find here a clearly subordinate role in the person of the Holy Spirit, even though He is *another parakletos*, another like the Son. This in no way should be understood to mean the Spirit is somehow a *lesser* God than Christ or the Father. This appears to be the Spirit's *role and function* in the Godhead, not His *status or rank*. In chapter 15, again we find the Spirit's subordinate role: "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me" (John 15:26).<sup>46</sup> Finally, in chapter 16 we may find the most clear statements regarding this triune relationship:

But when He, the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He shall glorify Me; for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said, that He takes of Mine, and will disclose it to you. (John 16:13–15)

Just as the Son reveals the Father's love and character, and just as the Son chooses not to take His own initiative but yields such prerogative to the Father (see John 5:30; 6:38), so does the Spirit in relationship to the Son. The danger here is to harbor a subconscious Arianism that sees the Father and the Son in one plane but the Holy Spirit in a lower, subservient plane because of His function in the plan of salvation, just as Arius' followers read statements in the Bible pointing to Christ's subserviency to the Father and concluded He could not be fully divine. In fact, in this functional economy, it appears as if the Father is the source, the Son the mediator, and the Spirit the one who applies what God designs to do.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> This text gives credibility to the *filioque* clause inserted in the Nicene Creed, since the Spirit is sent by the Son, and yet also proceeds from the Father.

<sup>47</sup> See "The Godhead" in *Beliefs*, 30. On the other hand, another aberration would be to consider the Spirit the Lord Himself, as some read 2 Cor 3:17–18: "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (emphasis supplied). Fee is helpful here. "Paul is using a well-known form of Jewish interpretation, in which the interpreter picks out one word from a biblical citation and gives 'its true meaning' for a new context. Thus 'the Lord is the Spirit' interprets 'the Lord' just mentioned in v.16, which is an allusion to Exodus 34:34. The 'Lord' to whom we turn, Paul says, has to do with the Spirit. That is,

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The concept of a plural union within the Godhead that is interactive and mutually submissive is seen even in the passage Jews for generations have used to voice their monotheism: the Shema. Deuteronomy 6:4: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!” The word translated “one” is the Hebrew *ʾehād*. Though it means “one,” it means “one among others, the emphasis being on a particular one.” According to Otto Christensen, “the possibility of there being others in this ‘oneness’ is inherent in the word *ʾehād*.” Moses could have used the word *yahîd* to indicate “one” as in “one alone.” But *ʾehād* “oneness” results “from the unity of numerous persons.”<sup>48</sup> The same word is used to describe the *submissive union* between the first pair: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become *one* flesh” (Gen 2:24). A match made in heaven is the union of two distinct persons who, loving one another supremely, choose to become *ʾehād*—one.

This concept, as simple as it is, is nevertheless revolutionary, in part because sin has managed to make “*yahîds*” out of all of us—lonely units. However, God had other ideas from the beginning. In every family with more than one child in the home, it becomes obvious to the adults that each young sibling has significantly different philosophical, stylistic, and general ways of approaching life and issues. Even if much of their shared experience is the same, parents soon notice that these two, or three, or four young persons are definitely *not* alike, though living under the same roof, eating the same food, and originating from the same parents. If one considers the injunction God gives to mankind through Adam and Eve to “be fruitful and multiply, and *fill* the earth” (Gen 1:28, emphasis supplied), simple mathematics leads to the conclusion that it would take at least *three* children per couple to do so, one in addition to the two it would take to replace themselves. How appropriate, considering the Trinity. The command in verse 28 comes right after we are told that God said “Let *us* make man in *our* image, according to *our* likeness,”<sup>49</sup> and then corroborated it with: “And God created man in *His* own image, in the image of God *He* created him; male and female *He* created

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‘the Lord’ is now to be understood in terms of the Spirit’s activity among us . . . ,” 32. Louis Berkhof pointed out that the identification of the Christ (the Lord) with the Spirit in this text is “not with respect to personality, but as to manner of working.” *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939, 1941), 97.

<sup>48</sup> See Otto H. Christensen, *Getting Acquainted with God* (Washington: Review & Herald, 1970), 69.

<sup>49</sup> Known as the plural cohortative.



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them” (Gen 1:26, 27, emphasis supplied). From plurality to singularity and back to plurality again: male and female. This idea is also true in marriage. What do two people find attractive about one another so as to get married? One key attraction is how *unlike* each other they may be: opposites attract.

Why is this in society? Because it mirrors, in a small and pale way, what it means to live and to love and to be. God as a solitary one, a *yahîd*, would not reflect these values as clearly as God can being a union of three persons. And so He wishes for us to experience the same. Since “God is love” (1 John 4:8), and love cannot become a practical reality unless it can be shared with others, God then is Three as One. Bruce Metzger is helpful here. I quote him with minor editing:

The Unitarian professes to agree with the statement that “God is love.” But these words, “God is love,” have no real meaning unless God is at least two Persons. Love is something that one *person* has for another *person*. If God were a single person, then before the universe was made, he was *not* love. For, if love be of the essence of God, he must always love, and, being eternal, he must have possessed an eternal object of love. Furthermore, perfect love is possible only between equals. Just as a man cannot satisfy or realize his powers of love by loving the lower animals, so God cannot satisfy or realize his love by [merely] loving man or any creature. Being infinite, he must have eternally possessed an infinite object of his love, some *alter ego*, or, to use the language of traditional Christian theology, a consubstantial, co-eternal, and co-equal [Other].<sup>50</sup>

The Godhead, then, is a society. Not a group of Gods but a union of three Persons who practice and express perfect love in perfect humility. And why three? Perhaps because with three “there is a dimension of openness and extension not necessarily found in a relationship between two persons,” which could be more closed in nature.<sup>51</sup>

There is a divine humility in all this that becomes the more astonishing the more one ponders it. Since God then is a God who is in relationship within Himself first, it follows that He would seek to create in order for others to experience the same. However, the intrinsic presupposition

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<sup>50</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, *The Jehovah’s Witnesses and Jesus Christ* (Princeton: Theological Book Agency [reprint from the April 1953 *Theology Today*]), 83.

<sup>51</sup> Christensen, 59. Cited in Whidden, 115. I am indebted to Whidden, Moon, and Reeve for the gist of these thoughts.

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to self-sacrificing love is freedom of exercise, including the freedom to withhold it. Every new creation in the universe becomes a risk, for creatures can choose to keep their capacity to love to themselves instead of sharing their love with God and others, thus turning love into sin. The fact that God has known this all along and still risked it, that He would rather set out to have a love relationship with His creation than withhold creation for fear creatures would make a wrong use of their freedom, is a demonstration of His deep love. John the Beloved understood this when he said, “There is no fear in love,” and “We love, because He first loved us” (1 John 4:18, 19). Oh, what remarkable condescension! To love and risk it all instead of keeping it within the perfect safety of the Trinity.<sup>52</sup>

**Why A Biblical View of the Person of the Spirit Matters**

Why does it matter to understand the Holy Spirit as a person in the Godhead? Our earlier treatment of the story of Ananias and Saphira in Acts 5 gives us a clue: If we don’t understand or refuse to understand that the Holy Spirit is a person in the Godhead, we will tend to treat Him as an “it” and incur our own destruction.

This is why the unpardonable sin is the one committed against the Holy Spirit (Matt 12:31, 32). For us, the point of contact with God is through the Holy Spirit—“where can I go from your Spirit?” says David, “where can I flee from your presence?” (Ps 139:7). The point of most immediate contact is not through the Father, and not even through Jesus. Whereas Christ is the sinner’s intercessor as our High Priest in heaven (Heb 7:17–8:2), the Spirit is our intercessor as *parakletos*—one like Him—on earth (Rom 8:26–27), in our midst. It is only through the ministry of the Holy Spirit that we can access the efficacy of *Christ’s* intercessory ministry. Without Him it would be impossible to even understand or accept Christ as our Savior and Lord. If we treat the Holy Spirit as an “it,” a mere emanation or influence devoid of personality and will, we find it especially easy to ignore Him, to lend deaf ears to His voice and invitation to leave self behind and abandon it to the hands of a God with whom all things are possible. Like the Pharisees of old, we are likely to reject the very One our hearts longed for and the Spirit reveals, the greatest object of our gratitude: Jesus Christ our Savior. We can understand the Son’s despair on the banks of the Mount of Olives that Sunday at

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<sup>52</sup> I am indebted to Norman Gulley for this insight from a soon-to-be-published manuscript chapter in his systematic theology, “The Trinity in Scripture and the Early Patristic Period,” 10.

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dusk when, looking to the temple, He knew that the time of probation for the leaders in Jerusalem that night would come to a close.<sup>53</sup> They had rejected Christ the Messiah by rejecting the wooing of the Spirit to their hearts. With a double vocative, expressive of deepest emotion, Christ cries: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is left to you desolate!” (Matt 23:37, 38).

A second reason it is important for us to understand that God the Spirit is a person is because if we treat Him like a “feeling” or a mere “power” meant to warm our hearts when we sense the need for it, we will become unbelievers. In Revelation 16 we are introduced to the false trinity, an allegiance made up of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet (Rev 16:13–14), with this last entity being the equivalent of the Third Person of the Trinity.<sup>54</sup> Just as a prophet *speaks* for God, specifically for the Holy Spirit—for “men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Pet 1:21)—the false prophet pretends to do the same. But whereas the Holy Spirit speaks through the Word of God, the false prophet does so by signs and the use of the supernatural. The Spirit of God is not a “cosmic vending machine, responding mechanically with power or blessing if only we insert enough coins of faith.”<sup>55</sup> Those who will trust God only when able to see signs and wonders do not trust a Person but a “power” or a “sensation.” They do not walk by faith, for faith only “comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ” (Rom 10:17). Faith does not come by miracles. Therefore, those who treat the Holy Spirit as a “power” to be called upon at will—instead of a Person to respond to by yielding our wills—will be deceived, perceiving a god of their own making rather than the God of the Bible. And a god of our making will in the end lead us to disappointment and unbelief for having been deceived. This is the apocalyptic picture of “the kings of the earth” (Rev 18:9) and “the nations” turning against the former object of their affections.

A third reason why it matters that we think of the Spirit as a Person in the Godhead is because a consideration of His utter humility, a trademark of his Person, will lead us to surrender and service. The Bible says,

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<sup>53</sup> See Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1898, 1940), 578.

<sup>54</sup> See, for example, C. Mervyn Maxwell, *God Cares: The Message of Revelation*, vol. 2 (Boise: Pacific Press, 1985), 444.

<sup>55</sup> Donald T. Williams, *The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1994), 10.

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“No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Luke 10:21, 22). Much more is said in the Bible about God the Father and God the Son than about God the Holy Spirit. Though the Holy Spirit is mentioned 88 times in the Old Testament,<sup>56</sup> and 325 times in the New Testament,<sup>57</sup> this amount is dwarfed by the thousands of references to the other members of the Trinity. But it was the Spirit that inspired these biblical writers (2 Pet 1:21), and yet He did so in typical divine humility. The Holy Spirit says very little about *Himself*.

That’s the way love is as revealed in the Person of the Spirit: He focuses on the Father and His relationship with the Son more than on His own relationship with the Son or the Father. The Son was in the Father and the Father in Him, and the same can be said of His relationship with the Holy Spirit, and that of the Holy Spirit with the Father.<sup>58</sup> That the Spirit communicates so freely about the Father and the Son is an insight into the selfless love that exists in the Trinity, and in particular, the way the Spirit glorifies the Father and the Son. The Spirit voluntarily adopts a lower position of service because of His love for the Son and His desire to see Him glorified, in spite of the fact that He is the Person in the Godhead whose time of activity and preeminence is now.<sup>59</sup> Donald Williams has pointed out that the reason for this is because “there is no conflict between submission and equality.”<sup>60</sup>

The Christian God—three in one—is completely different from the gods in the Olympic pantheon or the Nordic tales. The gods with “the small g” engaged in constant warfare one with another. They each had an individual will and plan and clearly were *not* of one purpose. They each had their pride and their “turf” to protect.<sup>61</sup> Such gods remind us of the

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<sup>56</sup> See W. H. Griffith Thomas, *The Holy Spirit of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 9. The mentions are found in about half of the Old Testament books.

<sup>57</sup> See William Edward Bleedenwolf, *A Help to the Study of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1936), 17. All but three of the New Testament books mention the Holy Spirit, with over 50 references in the Book of Acts alone.

<sup>58</sup> Gulley, 12.

<sup>59</sup> This same type of subordination is seen in the Son (1 Cor 11:3; 15:28; John 14:28). Moule makes the point that this voluntary submission is not to be interpreted as “God’s aide de camp.” This is why the orthodox Trinitarian formula settled on the specific term *homoousios*—of the same essence—instead of *homoiousios*—of similar essence—to indicate that no member of the Trinity was in any way a demigod. C. F. D. Moule, *The Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 45.

<sup>60</sup> Williams, 13.

<sup>61</sup> Wallenkampf, 13.

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conflict and pride that existed among the disciples of Jesus before Calvary and Pentecost. However, when the Spirit is allowed to work among those who wrangle (Luke 22:24) and push for the preeminence (Mark 10:35–41) and are suspicious of one another (John 21:20–22), a holy submissiveness takes over their hearts which allows them to become of “one accord” (Acts 1:14; 2:1). The group then mirrors the Trinity in this respect. In fact, absolute humility may be the most distinct characteristic of the Triune God. How else could God handle His omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, and other attributes only the God of the Universe can have? Jesus voiced this truth when He said: “Learn of Me, for I am *meek* and *humble* in heart” (Matt 11:29, emphasis supplied).<sup>62</sup> Humble *in heart*, that is, a matter of choice and will. God can do anything, but He chooses to restrain Himself because He is *love*. The Bible also identifies Moses as “very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth” (Num 12:3). No wonder the people of Israel looked to Moses, basically, as if he were God! Contemplation of the deep humility demonstrated for eternity by the Third Person of the Godhead puts our pride and pettiness in the dust.

A fourth reason why it matters that God the Spirit be a person is because only persons can choose to cooperate with one another, and we are invited to cooperate with the Spirit as He leads Christ’s Church. When the Early Church, led by the Spirit, faced their first major theological controversy (Acts 15:1–29), the Church—“leading men among the brethren” (v.22)—convened at Jerusalem to deal with the matter. After the matter was decided, it is interesting to see how they described the decision: “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit *and to us* . . .” (v. 28, emphasis supplied). Such close association and cooperation can be achieved solely through trusting personal interaction. When Paul and his missionary associates wished to preach in Asia and twice were prevented from doing so by the Spirit, they ended up in Macedonia instead, “concluding that God [notice, the Spirit here is called *God*] had called [them] to preach [there]” (Acts 16:6–10). Such open interaction can be achieved only between persons who love and respect one another. The Spirit is much more than an impression in Paul’s mind. He is his constant Guide. When the glorified Jesus in Revelation addresses the churches in Asia through the Holy Spirit, he admonishes seven times to pay attention to “what the Spirit says to the churches” (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). The warnings and counsels by the Spirit to the churches presuppose an established

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<sup>62</sup> This is the only time Christ identifies Himself with adjectives.

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relationship. One can only have such relationships with persons. To recognize the voice of the Spirit means believers have spent enough time listening to such a voice. He is not a heavenly ghost—the Spirit speaks so we can listen.

**Conclusion**

At a time when the greatest growth explosion in Christianity is among charismatics,<sup>63</sup> a greater clarity regarding the person of the Spirit is warranted. It matters that we understand God the Spirit as a personal Being who knows and loves and has a clear idea of how God’s children ought to understand reality. It is through the Spirit that we can know God as He truly is.

This intimate relationship between God the Spirit and His people is seen in the last appeal in Revelation: “And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost” (Rev 22:17). We note first what it does *not* say. It doesn’t say “the Spirit and the church” or “the Spirit and the remnant of her seed.” It says, “the Spirit and the bride.” The picture is of a wedding. The attention is to be on the Heavenly Groom. His bride, you and me, thanks to the work of the Spirit in our hearts, and the Heavenly Best Man—the Spirit—those who love the Groom most, cry out in unison: “Come to feast on the riches of Christ!” “Come, come, come!” And so it will echo for eternity future as it has for thousands of years now, the clarion call of the Spirit on behalf of the Son, for the sake of His own.

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<sup>63</sup> Some experts estimate 500 million adherents today, including between 80 and 90% of all Christians in the Third World. See Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Development World Wide* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997).