

## THE HOLY SPIRIT AND A HOLY SPIRIT: SOME OBSERVATIONS AND A PROPOSAL<sup>1</sup>

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### I. Introduction

Since the New Testament is a document about God (John 1.1) and Christians' experiences of God (1 Cor 14.25) it is thought to be a theological document. The term "theology," if not properly qualified, can indicate a broad sweep of "talking about God" that ranges over many centuries (e.g., Alexandrian theology, Cappadocian theology, Protestant theology, Evangelical theology). Does identifying the New Testament as a theological document, however, give us any liberty to read Christian theology of later generations as belonging to the era of the earliest Christians?

This question raises one of the perennial problems in historical-critical and theological readings of biblical texts. For instance, Andreas Köstenberger speaks of John's "trinitarianism" even though he admits that "we must not import fourth-century discussions into our exegesis of biblical texts."<sup>2</sup> Trinitarianism, however, is a fourth-century discussion.<sup>3</sup> The proposal made in this article is that "the Holy Spirit" is an imposition of a later theological system or confessional grid onto the biblical text.<sup>4</sup>

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1 Thanks go to Dr. Stephen King of Delta State University who took time out of his busy schedule to proofread this article.

2 Andreas J. Köstenberger and Scott R. Swain, *Father, Son, and Spirit: The Trinity and John's Gospel* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 21.

3 The fourth century was the most pivotal century for the development of the doctrine of the deity of the Holy Spirit and of the completion of Trinitarian doctrine. See R. P. C. Hanson, "The Doctrine of the Trinity Achieved in 381," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 36 (1983): 41-57. Hans Küng states that "it is certain that we can speak of a dogma of the Trinity only after the Second Ecumenical Council in Constantinople" (*Christianity: Essence, History, and Future* [trans. John Bowden; New York: Continuum, 2004], 187).

4 On this point see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "What Is Theological Interpretation of the Bible?" in *Theological Interpretation of the New Testament* (ed. Vanhoozer et al.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2005), 13-22. New Testament theologians rightly attempt to interpret the biblical text within its historical milieu, but sometimes authors do so with an eye toward later theological developments of subsequent centuries. For instance, Udo Schnelle states that "Paul does not advocate a trinitarian *doctrine* as later fixed in ontological categories and expressed in the concept of persons. Nonetheless, there are expressions and images that show beginning reflection on how Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are related" (*Theology of the New Testament* [trans. M. Eugene Boring; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2007], p. 274). Is this relationship adequately explained by fourth-century fathers?

The problem: Is “the Holy Spirit” of Trinitarian thinking, proposed by the fourth-century fathers Athanasius of Alexandria, the Cappadocians, and Didymus the Blind, the same “holy spirit” expressed by first-century writers of the text of the Greek New Testament? I will argue that the grammatical, lexical, and cultural matrices of first-century NT texts concerning “holy spirit” are much more nuanced than what fourth-century readings of “spirit” and “the spirit” will allow. For instance, the anarthrous πνεῦμα ἅγιον “a holy spirit” is almost always collapsed into the category of “the Holy Spirit” in English versions (and by Athanasius).

I will propose that the New Testament provides evidence for “a spirit world” populated with a multiplicity of holy spirits. The evidence for this argument is as follows: the anarthrous “a holy spirit”; the anaphoric use of the articular “the spirit” to mean “a spirit”; the generic singular “the spirit of God” as an inclusive rubric for many spirits of God; and the plural “spirits” in the context of divinity. This evidence requires us to reevaluate the doctrine of “the Holy Spirit” as an appropriate reading of “holy spirit” in the New Testament. Now let us review the legacy of the fourth century on “holy spirit” and its impact on modern English versions.

## II. Athanasius of Alexandria, Didymus the Blind, the Greek article, and capitalization of π: Fourth-century overtures to a contemporary Christian theology of the Holy Spirit and its effects on English translations

Fourth-century Christian theology has shaped the way that we understand τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον in the Greek New Testament as “the Holy Spirit,” the third person of the Trinity.<sup>5</sup> The definite article has strongly influenced this meaning. For instance, Nigel Turner once stated, “Whenever the Holy Spirit has the definite article the reference is to the third person of the Trinity (expressed either as *to Pneuma to Hagion* or as *to Hagion Pneuma*).”<sup>6</sup>

The importance of the article for this reference can be traced back to the fourth-century church father Athanasius of Alexandria who insisted that “unless the article (ἄρθρος) is present . . . it cannot refer to the Holy Spirit.”<sup>7</sup> This was followed by Didymus the Blind who stated that “Paul designates the Holy Spirit with the article (*cum articulo*) to authenticate it, as it were, in order that it [the

5 For the 380 C.E. Roman edict that made “the Holy Spirit” equal to the Father and Son in “holy Trinity,” see *Theodosian Code* 16.1.2 in P. R. Coleman-Norton, *Roman State and Christian Church: A Collection of Legal Documents to A.D. 535* (3 vols.; London: Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, 1966), 1:354. The fourth-century Cappadocian father Gregory of Nazianzus (329-389) is the first to explicitly call the Holy Spirit “God.” See his *Orations* 31.10, *NPNF<sup>2</sup> 7:321* (= *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 2 [14 vols.; ed. Philip Schaff; 1890-1900; repr. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994]). This helped affirm the deity of the Holy Spirit at the Council of Constantinople in 381. For the development of the deity of the Holy Spirit see Michael A. G. Haykin, *The Spirit of God: The Exegesis of 1 & 2 Corinthians in the Pneumatomachian Controversy of the Fourth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1994). Dated but still somewhat useful is Henry Barclay Swete, *On the Early History of the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit: With Especial Reference to the Controversies of the Fourth Century* (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, and Co., 1873).

6 Nigel Turner, *Grammatical Insights into the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1966), 19.

7 *Ep. Serap.* 1.4 (*The Letters of Saint Athanasius Concerning the Holy Spirit* [trans. C. R. B. Shapland; London: Epworth, 1951], 69-70). *PG* 26:537A (= *Patrologia graeca* [ed. J.-P. Migne; 162 vols.; Paris, 1857-1886]).

Spirit] be independent and single”; and “when spirit stands . . . without the article, it concerns not the Holy Spirit.”<sup>8</sup> The article with “spirit” is also said by Didymus to *singularitatis significator* “mark its [the Spirit’s] particularity.”<sup>9</sup>

Athanasius also contributed to the notion that the capitalization of Greek π in πνεῦμα is an indication for the separateness of the Holy Spirit: “Is there any passage in the divine Scripture where the Holy Spirit is found . . . with the article [μετὰ τοῦ ἄρθρου] so that he is called not simply ‘a spirit’ [πνεῦμα] but ‘the Spirit’ [τὸ Πνεῦμα]?”<sup>10</sup> The distinction between π and Π would not have existed in the original Greek NT texts, for in none of the early Greek styles of writing were upper case letters used along with lower case.<sup>11</sup>

Beginning with Athanasius (and then Didymus), the presence of the article becomes something of an indicator for “the Spirit” as unique among other spirits. Were fourth-century fathers, however, aware of the indefinite meaning of the anarthrous πνεῦμα “a spirit”? Above (and in n. 10 below), we see that Athanasius, at least, was aware of it, for this is one of the reasons that he stresses the article to indicate “the Spirit” apart from indefinite spirits. But, on occasion, Athanasius does not abide by his own “unless-the-article-is-present” rule. For instance, he takes the anarthrous ἐν πνεύματι in John 4.24 to be “the Holy Spirit.”<sup>12</sup> At some point, both τὸ πνεῦμα and πνεῦμα simply became the same thing, “the Spirit.”<sup>13</sup>

The perseverance of this fourth-century reading is seen in English translations that make both the articular “the holy spirit” and the anarthrous “a holy spirit” in the Greek text identical to “the Holy Spirit.” Jason David BeDuhn observes the tendency among translation teams that do not distinguish between the articular and the anarthrous forms of “spirit.” These translation teams “make a habit of changing the wording ‘a holy spirit’ or ‘holy spirit’ into ‘the Holy Spirit,’ apparently so uncomfortable with the indefiniteness of the expression.”<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, in English versions, the articular is capitalized and the anarthrous is made definite. Steve Swartz notes to this effect: “By long-standing tradition, such references are capitalized, and even with the anarthrous references, the translations almost invariably translate with the English definite ‘the Holy Spirit.’”<sup>15</sup>

8 *On the Holy Spirit* 3.8; 15.73 (trans. mine; Hermann Josef Sieben, ed. and trans., *Didymus der Blinde: De Spiritu Sancto/Über den Heiligen Geist* [Turnhout: Brepols, 2004], 84-85; 130-31).

9 *On the Holy Spirit* 15.73 (Sieben, *Didymus*, 130-31). Both Athanasius and Didymus seem to understand the use of the article in a “particular” sense whereby the article particularizes a substantive to denote a particular person, thing, event, or idea.

10 *Ep. Serap.* 1.4 (Shapland, *Letters*, 68). Note Athanasius’s Greek text: μὴ ἀπλῶς λέγεται πνεῦμα, ἀλλὰ τὸ Πνεῦμα “he is called not simply ‘a spirit’ but ‘the Spirit’” (*PG* 26:537A), wherein Athanasius takes the liberty of distinguishing “spirit” from “Spirit” by capitalizing the Greek letter π.

11 The Greek texts of the New Testament available to Athanasius would more than likely have been majuscule. Therefore, they would have had no influence here.

12 *Ep. Serap.* 1.33. See *PG* 26:545A where π is capitalized as Πνεύματι; Shapland, *Letters*, 69 n. 3, 148-49.

13 See Shapland, *Letters*, 148 n. 4.

14 Jason David BeDuhn, *Truth in Translation: Accuracy and Bias in English Translations of the New Testament* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2003), 139.

15 Steve Swartz, “The Holy Spirit: Person and Power. The Greek Article and *Pneuma*,” *The Bible Translator* 44.1 (1993): 124-38(125, emphasis his). The influence here is Trinitarian. Larry Lee Walker

Translation teams are also warned about translating “holy spirit” with a term that could indicate “a certain spirit” among many spirits like it. For instance, Norm A. Mundhenk notes that a proper translation of “holy spirit” in Bibles intended for missionary efforts in a non-Western society must include a preliminary assessment of that society’s beliefs in the spirit world in order to avoid using “holy spirit” for any spirit other than “the Holy Spirit.” As Mundhenk states, “The Holy Spirit is not just one individual in a class of spirits.”<sup>16</sup>

### III. The Holy Spirit in the light of a historical reading of the first-century text

Many of us unconsciously think in terms of the theology of the Holy Spirit, for when we see πνεῦμα ἅγιον in the Greek New Testament we read aloud “the holy spirit” and think in our minds “the Holy Spirit himself.” But as trained biblical scholars who have control of the biblical languages and the *Sitz im Leben* of the text, we should consider the following: Does “the holy spirit” (and its variant “the spirit of God”) in the New Testament refer to “the Holy Spirit” as understood by fourth-century Christian theology? And should we let this theology influence our translation of the anarthrous πνεῦμα ἅγιον as “the Holy Spirit” when, in fact, the anarthrous is *indefinite* in Greek and so means in English “a holy spirit”?<sup>17</sup>

The doctrine of the Godhead has become the standard by which we understand and translate “holy spirit” in biblical texts.<sup>18</sup> Biblical scholars, however, are trained in the historical-critical method, which is suppose to help reveal the intentions and meanings of the *original authors* (as is possible) and not that of their fourth-century (and later) readers and interpreters. Some scholars do maintain the distinction between articular and anarthrous but they do so through Christian theology: “holy spirit” with the article is the Person, “the Holy Spirit”; and “holy spirit” without the article is impersonal divine power.<sup>19</sup>

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similarly notes, “Christian translators, as Trinitarians, must capitalize the word [spirit] when it refers to God the Holy Spirit” (“The Use of Capital Letters in Translating Scripture into English,” in *The Challenge of Bible Translation* [ed. Glen G. Scorgie et al.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2003], 403).

16 Norm A. Mundhenk, “Translating ‘Holy Spirit,’” *The Bible Translator* 48.2 (1997): 201-7(205). This follows Athanasius: “It is obvious that the Spirit does not belong to the many nor is he an angel. But because he is one, and, still more, because he is proper to the Word who is one, he is proper to God who is one, and one in essence with him” (*Ep. Serap.* 1.27 [Shapland, *Letters*, 133]). A few years earlier Cyril of Jerusalem asserted something similar: “For many things are called spirits. An angel is called a spirit; our soul is called spirit; the wind that blows is called spirit . . . such is not the Holy Spirit” (*Catechetical Letters* 16.12-16 [NPNF<sup>2</sup> 7:118-19]).

17 Note BDF §257: “τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα . . . without the article as a divine spirit” (F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and R. W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* [= BDF; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961]). Actually, without the article it should read “a holy spirit” and not “a *divine* spirit” which is θεῖον πνεῦμα. Scholars past and present have noted that the anarthrous πνεῦμα ἅγιον can mean “a holy spirit.” See Kirsopp Lake, *The Earlier Epistles of St Paul, Their Motive and Origin* (London: Rivingstons, 1911), 207 n. 1; Reginald St John Parry, *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* (Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926), 176-77; and E. Earl Ellis, “‘Spiritual Gifts’ in the Pauline Community,” *New Testament Studies* 20 (1973-1974): 128-44(128-29).

18 See R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy, 318-381* (London: T&T Clark, 1988; repr. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2005).

19 So Swartz, “The Holy Spirit,” 136-37; and D. P. Francis, “The Holy Spirit: A Statistical Inquiry,” *Expository Times* 96 (1985): 136-37.

If we follow the textual signpost for “the Holy Spirit” given to us by Athanasius (“unless the article is present”), then what are we to do with the equally articular τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ πονηρὸν “the evil spirit” found in the New Testament (e.g., Acts 19.15)? Does the use of the article here mean that there is only one Evil Spirit? No biblical scholar would make such a claim.

The use of the article in a particular sense can refer to a particular spirit, good or evil, without the added nuance of “unique” or “only spirit of its kind.” The evil spirit in Acts 19.15 is a particular evil spirit in question. The anaphoric function of the article expresses particularity without “uniqueness” as well when it points back to a previously mentioned substantive of the same kind. For instance, the articular form τὸ πνεῦμα is sometimes anaphoric because it refers back to “a spirit” by which “the spirit” is meant.<sup>20</sup>

Part of the problem seems to lie in the reading of first-century texts concerning “holy spirit” through the prism of fourth-century interpreters of those texts, the most common reading for “the holy spirit” today. Some authors, however, observe that “the Holy Spirit” is not clear in first- and second-century Christian literature. For instance, Arthur W. Wainwright stated that in the New Testament there was “no indication that there was a problem of the Spirit. Even Paul . . . does not show any clear awareness of a problem about the relationship of the Spirit either to Father or to Son.”<sup>21</sup> Susan R. Garrett has recently said something similar about the pneumatology of the Shepherd of Hermas: “The questions, ‘How do you know it was an angel, and not the Holy Spirit?’ and conversely, ‘How do you know it was the Holy Spirit, and not an angel?’ simply were not issues for Hermas.”<sup>22</sup> So why should we add the fourth-century problem of “the Holy Spirit” to our reading of first-century texts when such a problem did not exist among the earliest Christians?<sup>23</sup>

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20 In Acts 8.29 and 10.29 “the spirit” refers back to “an angel of the Lord” in 8.26 and 10.3. In Acts 16.18, “the spirit” refers back to “an oracular spirit” in v. 16. In Acts 19.15, 16 “the evil spirit” refers back to “the evil spirits” in v. 13. Luke 8.29, 9.42, and 11.24 use “the unclean spirit” to refer back to “demons” (8.27), “a spirit” (9.39), “a demon” (9.42), and “demons” (11.20). In 1 Cor 14.15 “the spirit” refers back to “spirits” in v. 12.

21 Arthur W. Wainwright, *The Trinity in the New Testament* (London: Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, 1962; repr., Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 249.

22 Susan R. Garrett, *No Ordinary Angel: Celestial Spirits and Christian Claims about Jesus* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2008), 145. However, more conservative authors find “the Holy Spirit” already in second-century texts such as the *Didache*. W. Harold Mare stated, “The Spirit is associated with the Father and the Son in such a way as to suggest that the Apostolic Fathers counted Him to be equal with the other two members of the Trinity” (“The Holy Spirit in the Apostolic Fathers,” *Grace Journal* 13 [1972]: 3-12[6]). Notice the fourth-century jargon here that has been read back into an earlier period.

23 André de Halleus makes the important observation, “It may seem obvious for the contemporary theologian to acknowledge the divinity of the Holy Spirit and his personal distinction within the Trinity, but we have only to read the Fathers of the fourth century to realize afresh how tremendously difficult it was for Orthodox pneumatology to shake itself free not only from subordinationism, but also from a certain confusion between the Spirit, on the one hand, and his gifts, or the divine nature, or the incarnate Logos, or the risen Christ, on the other, a confusion encouraged by the imprecisions of Scripture” (“Towards an Ecumenical Agreement on the Procession of the Holy Spirit and the Addition of the *Filioque* to the Creed,” in *Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ: Ecumenical Reflections on the Filioque Controversy* [ed. L. Vischer; London: Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, 1981], 75).

#### IV. Proposal: The NT spirit world is inhabited by holy spirits and not “the Holy Spirit”

This problem is circumvented if we look at the text in its first-century context, following the historical-critical method.<sup>24</sup> What happens when we lift the fourth-century prism from upon the page of the Greek New Testament? We see a plurality of holy spirits among others. In the Greek New Testament, we see the following for πνεῦμα: “a holy spirit,” “a spirit of God,” “the holy spirit,” “the spirit of God,” “the evil spirit,” “an unclean spirit,” and “a demon.” The term πνεῦμα is also used for God (John 4.24) and for Christ (1 Cor 15.45), and even angels are called “spirits” (Heb 1.7, 14).

In the first century, distinguishing among spirits was not a matter of distinguishing between “the Holy Spirit” and evil spirits. Rather, for Christians, spirits were of two orders, either “from God” or “not from God.” This fits nicely within the first-century Jewish beliefs in sentient spirit beings who were either “from God” or “from Beliar” (see 2 Cor 6.15).<sup>25</sup>

The New Testament states that there are “spirits from God” (“every spirit from God”) and “spirits not from God” (“every spirit not from God”) (1 John 4.2, 3). The spirits from God are classed under two rubrics, τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ “the spirit of God” and τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας “the spirit of truth” (1 John 4.2, 6). The spirits *not* from God are also classed under two rubrics, τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ ἀντιχρίστου “the spirit of antichrist” and τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς πλάνης “the spirit of deceit” (1 John 4.3, 6). Here, we see the use of the article in what Stanley Porter calls a categorical sense whereby the articular singular is used to denote the many.<sup>26</sup>

Uniqueness and separateness are not indicated by the articular phrases “the spirit of God” and “the spirit of truth,” as if there was literally only one deity called the Spirit of God/Truth. Likewise, uniqueness and separateness are not indicated by the articular phrases “the spirit of antichrist” and “the spirit of deceit,” as if there was only one deity called the Spirit of Antichrist/Deceit. Thus, the article here cannot be understood as Athanasius and Didymus understood it.

We see a similar grammatical phenomenon in the Shepherd of Hermas, a second-century Jewish-Christian text. In the eleventh mandate of Hermas, two camps of spirits are mentioned, God’s spirits and the devil’s spirits. In *Mandate* 11.5, language reminiscent of 1 John 4.2 occurs, πᾶν πνεῦμα ἀπὸ θεοῦ δοθέν “every spirit that is given of God.” As a body, these spirits are called τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ θεῖον “the divine spirit” in 11.7. The Shepherd also warns against the spirits of

24 As noted by Raymond E. Brown, “On the basic point of the Spirit, for instance, Christians are now shaped by a trinitarian theology worked out in the 4<sup>th</sup> century; there is no evidence that Paul had such clarity about the personhood of the Spirit” (*Introduction to the New Testament* [New York: Doubleday, 1997], 532).

25 Early Christian concepts of spirits and a spirit world are borne out of Jewish thinking. Craig S. Keener states to this effect, “Early Jewish pneumatology provides a context in which early Christian pneumatic experience may be understood” (*The Spirit in the Gospels and Acts: Divine Purity and Power* [Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1997], 27). The spirit world of early Judaism is best seen in the LXX, the Dead Sea Scrolls, *1 Enoch*, *Jubilees*, and *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*.

26 Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (2d ed.; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 104-5.

the devil, “Do not cleave to such spirits” (11.4). Since these spirits belong to the devil, they are, as a body, called αὐτοῦ πνεύματι “his [the devil’s] spirit” (11.3). Elsewhere in the Shepherd of Hermas, there is mention of ἅγια πνεύματα “holy spirits,” who are said to be “the powers of the Son of God” (*Similitude* 9.13).

Admittedly, nowhere in the New Testament is the phrase “holy spirits” found, but the plural “spirits” is used in a “holy” context in Paul, namely in 1 Cor 14.12 and 32. As for 1 Cor 14.12, Paul certainly would not encourage the Corinthians to seek any spirits except “holy” spirits, spirits that he had already mentioned in the anarthrous in 1 Cor 12.3, “a holy spirit” and “a spirit of God.” Since the anarthrous suggests one of many such spirits, then it reasonably follows that these are the same spirits mentioned in the plural in 1 Cor 14.12, 32.<sup>27</sup>

Paul’s qualification for “spirit” as ἓν “one” in 1 Cor 12.9, 11 might raise some eyebrows, suggesting a tacit caveat that Athanasius was right after all: there is only *one* Holy Spirit. But “one” here suggests “unity” (according to Paul’s polemic in 1 Cor 12–14) as in other NT phrases, “one body” or “one in Christ” or “unity of the spirit.” The spirits that the Corinthians are “zealous” for and that Paul encourages to build up the church with (see NAB 1 Cor 14.12) are “one” as a group (i.e., they are all “from God”).<sup>28</sup> A multiplicity of holy spirits suggests a spirit world from which they arrive among humans.

For modern Christians the spirit world is the exclusive world of demons and ghosts reminiscent of “paganism,” “folk religions,” or “occultism.” Hence, if the Bible speaks of “a spirit world,” then it can only be inhabited by demons and evil spirits and not by the Holy Spirit.<sup>29</sup> The spirit world is sometimes accommodated to Christian Trinitarian beliefs.<sup>30</sup> But this incorporates a theology that did not exist for spirit beliefs of the earliest Christians (i.e., “the Holy Spirit”). Contemporary Christian thinking on spirits maintains this separateness for “the Holy Spirit” as a deity set apart from all other spirits.<sup>31</sup>

The Greek term πνεῦμα, however, is used for *both* holy and evil spirits. Thus, in keeping with the spirit beliefs of the early Christians we “require a label like ‘the spirit world’ . . . for *all* those beings and agencies whose nature and existence

27 See also 1 John 4.1, “do not believe every spirit but test the spirits,” and Rev 22.6, “the spirits of the prophets.”

28 As for the existence of “the Holy Spirit” in early Judaism, Kirsopp Lake questioned whether in early Jewish thought “there were many bad but only one good spirit.” He concluded, “If this question is confined to the actual fact of the existence or non-existence of many good spirits, there can be but one answer. There were many” (*The Beginnings of Christianity: The Acts of the Apostles* [5 vols.; ed. F. J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake; London: Macmillan, 1920-1923; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979], 1:287).

29 The OT anti-divinatory laws are often interpreted as injunctions against intercourse with the spirit world, e.g., Lev 20.27 and Deut 18.10-12.

30 Thomas A. Noble, “The Spirit World: A Theological Approach,” in *The Unseen World: Christian Reflections on Angels, Demons, and the Heavenly Realm* (ed. Anthony N. S. Lane; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1996), 185-223.

31 See Laurence Cantwell, *The Theology of the Trinity* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Fides, 1969); and Rob van der Hart, *The Theology of Angels and Devils* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Fides, 1972). This is a legacy of the fourth century. See Shapland, *Letters*, 120-21, 132-33; Dong-Chan Chang, “The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the Thought of the Cappadocian Fathers” (Ph.D. diss., Drew University, 1983); and *St. Basil the Great: On the Holy Spirit* (trans. David Anderson; Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980).

is not fully perceptible to the naked human eye.”<sup>32</sup> This would further require our not imposing the fourth-century “Holy Spirit” onto the spirit world beliefs of the first-century Christians.

So, how are we to understand an articular referent, “the holy spirit” (and variants, “the spirit of God” and “the spirit of truth”), throughout the New Testament? Depending on context, the articular referent might refer to a particular holy spirit, sometimes with the anaphoric use of the article (but one from *among many* holy spirits, e.g., 1 Cor 14.15 “the spirit” refers back to “spirits” in 14.12). It might also have a categorical meaning in the same way that “the spirit of God” and “the spirit of truth” are meant in 1 John 4.2, 6. New Testament phrases such as τὸ πνεῦμα “guides,” “speaks,” “is poured out,” or is “quenched” express either the manifestation of holy spirits among humans or the cessation of the manifestation of holy spirits. In such cases, the historical context requires us to translate τὸ πνεῦμα as “the spirit world,” τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον as “the holy spirit world,” and τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ as “the spirit world of God.”

As for the anarthrous references, we may translate with the English indefinite article, “a holy spirit.” But modern Christian theology (expressed pseudo-mathematically: the Holy Spirit > all other spirits) has influenced the translation of the anarthrous referent. For instance, the anarthrous prepositional phrases ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτῳ (Mark 1.23; 5.2) and ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ (1 Cor 12.3) are both indefinite in meaning. The former is rendered as such in the versions as “with an unclean spirit” but the latter is rendered as definite and capitalized, “by the Holy Spirit.” The latter translation suggests that “the Holy Spirit” (and all of its fourth-century theology) can be translated directly from the first-century Greek text. This translation, however, is very misleading because, historically, the first-century anarthrous prepositional phrase would not have looked like “by the Holy Spirit.”

Joseph A. Fitzmyer, a historical critic, is aware of the indefinite meaning and correctly translates the anarthrous “holy spirit” in Acts 2.4 with the English indefinite article. He, however, doggedly holds on to Christian theology and capitalizes “holy spirit,” thereby giving us “They were filled with a Holy Spirit.”<sup>33</sup> Such a translation must look highly irregular to a theologian, because for him there is only one Holy Spirit, but the indefinite article suggests one of many “Holy Spirits.”

### V. What about the Hebrew רוח אלהים and רוח יהוה and their LXX counterparts πνεῦμα θεοῦ and πνεῦμα κύριος?

Sometimes the anarthrous πνεῦμα θεοῦ is seen in the light of its Hebrew counterpart רוח אלהים, usually translated as “the Spirit of God.” The Hebrew construct chain is often invoked as an argument for the definite translation of the otherwise anarthrous Greek πνεῦμα θεοῦ. A characteristic feature of the construct chain is that if the second element in the chain is a proper noun, then the first noun

32 Guy Williams, *The Spirit World in the Letters of Paul the Apostle: A Critical Examination of the Role of Spiritual Beings in the Authentic Pauline Epistles* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 15.

33 Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Yale Anchor Bible 31; New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998), 238.



has a definite reference without an affixed Hebrew article ה. If an indefinite reference is indicated by the first noun, then the construct chain is broken up with the preposition ל affixed to the proper noun in the construct chain.<sup>34</sup>

These features of syntax simply do not follow in Greek. In Greek “the spirit of God” is written τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ as is clearly seen in 1 John 4.2. The Hebrew construct that comes closest to this is רוח יהוה “the spirit of the Lord,” since יהוה (*YHWH*) is a proper noun. But we cannot always be this pedantic about definiteness, even in the Hebrew construct chain. In the Saul narratives of 1 Sam 16.14, 23 there appear, on the one hand, “an evil spirit from the Lord” (רוח רעה), “an evil spirit of God” (רוח אלהים רעה), and “the evil spirit” (רוח הרעה), and, on the other hand, “the spirit of the Lord” (רוח יהוה) and, in 19.23, “a spirit of God” (רוח אלהים), usually translated as “the Spirit of God.” Simply put, God has withheld one of his good spirits from Saul and sent an evil spirit to torment him.

In the Old Testament, God’s spirit world is explicitly mentioned in 1 Kgs 22.19, 20 in the phrases “the whole host of heaven” and “one [spirit] said this, another [spirit] said that.” In v. 21, one of these spirits is called הרוח, literally “the spirit,” but with the meaning “a certain spirit.” NAB correctly understands the function of the Hebrew article ה and translates הרוח as “one of the spirits” who steps forth from among the previously mentioned many in v. 20 and presents itself to *YHWH*.<sup>35</sup>

As for the OT phrases רוח אלהים and רוח יהוה Mundhenk claims that while “a spirit of God” or “a spirit from God” are mentioned here, these phrases should not be understood as indicating the Holy Spirit.<sup>36</sup> This claim is simply Christian theological prejudice superimposed onto the Hebrew text, a prejudice that always distinguishes between “the Holy Spirit” and “a spirit” of whatever kind.

Edward Lee Beavin observed that those who try to distinguish between “the Holy Spirit” and “a holy spirit” are unable to “clear their minds of the hypostasis prejudice,” i.e., reading later Christian theology of the Holy Spirit as a person (*hypostasis*) into Old or New Testament πνεῦμα.<sup>37</sup> He argued that English versions of Wis 1.5 betray this prejudice by rendering the anarthrous πνεῦμα ἄγιον as “the Holy Spirit,” whereas those who translate as “a holy spirit” led Beavin to conclude that “a holy spirit and the holy spirit are the same thing. Both phrases designate a spirit.”<sup>38</sup>

34 Paul Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (trans. and rev. Takamitsu Muraoka; 2 vols.; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1996), 2:§130b.

35 For a Qumran text, see 4Q403 1 II, 3-4, כבודו רוח[י] ממלכות רוח, “kingdom of the spirit[s of] his glory.”

36 Mundhenk, “Translating,” 205.

37 Edward Lee Beavin, “*Ruah Hakodesh* in Some Early Jewish Literature” (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1961), 23.

38 Ibid. Note similarly that NAB translates the anarthrous in 2 Cor 6.6 as “in a holy spirit” whereas most English versions read “in the Holy Spirit.”

## VI. Gordon D. Fee on translating πνεῦμα ἅγιον

The debate over “the Holy Spirit” or “a holy spirit” was raised by Gordon D. Fee in his tome devoted to the exegesis of every spirit text in the Pauline corpus. In it, he attempts to settle the issue of whether Paul knew of “a holy spirit” or only knew of “the Holy Spirit himself.”<sup>39</sup> Fee concludes that Paul’s use of the anarthrous forms of πνεῦμα is purely stylistic and has nothing to do with Paul’s indication of “a spirit.”

Fee provides two illustrations that attempt to support his argument for the improbability of the anarthrous to indicate “a holy spirit”: (1) If Paul means “a spirit” by πνεῦμα, then the anarthrous use of θεός in the phrase πνεῦμα θεοῦ might as well mean “a spirit of a god” also; and (2) Paul’s use of the anarthrous formulaic phrases ἐν πνεύματι and ἐν σαρκί side by side, where the latter always means “in the flesh,” shows that by ἐν πνεύματι Paul can only mean “in the Spirit.”<sup>40</sup>

As for point one, it is true that Jews as well as Christians would not have understood θεός in an anarthrous construction with πνεῦμα to mean “a certain god” other than the one true God. BDF notes that the article appears with θεός and κύριος “when the specific Jewish or Christian God or Lord is meant (not ‘a divine being’ or ‘a Lord’), but it is sometimes missing especially after prepositions.”<sup>41</sup> So, the one and only God can be represented in prepositional phrases, such as ἐν πνεύματι θεοῦ, without the article. But this does not mean that πνεῦμα ἅγιον and its equivalent, πνεῦμα θεοῦ, without the article cannot be understood as “a holy spirit.”<sup>42</sup>

As for point two, it is true that in some cases the noun of a prepositional phrase does not have to be articular in order to convey an articular sense. Fee explains that the abundant use of the anarthrous in the dative in Paul (thirty-two occurrences) is simply a conventional or stereotypical anarthrous usage, nothing more. A comparison of ἐν σαρκί and ἐν πνεύματι, however, yields a misleading perspective on the matter. The only possible translation of ἐν σαρκί into English is an articular translation, “in the flesh,” for “in a flesh” makes little sense. The translation of ἐν πνεύματι as “in a spirit,” however, is possible and far more realistic than is the translation “in a flesh.” We see this in Mark 1.23 and 5.2 where ἐν πνεύματι is “with a spirit” and not “with the spirit.” Thus, it is equally possible to render πνεῦμα ἅγιον and πνεῦμα θεοῦ in 1 Cor 12.3 as “with a holy spirit” and “with a spirit of God” respectively.<sup>43</sup>

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39 Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994), 24.

40 *Ibid.*, 24.

41 BDF §254.

42 See n. 17 above.

43 Williams states that Fee’s claim that Paul knows no such thing as “a spirit” or “a holy spirit” is “a dubious inference. More accurate would be the claim that Paul has no linguistic procedure for singling out indefinite rather than definite spirits. The model which Fee uses to analyse the meaning of ‘spirit’ in Paul is taken from the analysis of proper names elsewhere in the New Testament, and thus includes a strong presumption in favour of a distinct person as Holy Spirit” (*Spirit World*, 24 n. 25).

Furthermore, the prepositional phrase ἐν πνεύματι occurs in *Didache* 11.7, 8, 9, 12 in the context of true and false prophets who might speak “with a spirit.” Nothing here suggests that for the true prophet ἐν πνεύματι should translate “with the Spirit” and for the false prophet should translate as “with a spirit,” indicating a spirit other than “the Holy Spirit.” Fourth-century patristic pneumatology is not the appropriate position from which to delineate πνεῦμα in first- and second-century Christian texts.

## VII. Conclusion: Out with “the Holy Spirit”?

How do “a holy spirit,” “a spirit of God,” the anaphoric meaning of “the spirit,” the categorical meaning of “the spirit of God,” and “spirits” who are implicitly “holy” (all legitimate grammatical phenomena in the Greek New Testament) fit fourth-century readings for “the Holy Spirit” in the New Testament? They do not. It seems that our inheritance of the theology settled upon during the Arian controversy of the fourth century has overridden the nuances studied here in the Greek New Testament. These nuances have simply been ignored while the Greek text is distilled through Athanasian-Cappadocian readings without further criticism.

Examples of translations that remain sensitive to the anarthrous πνεῦμα and the articular τὸ πνεῦμα in their Jewish-Christian, first-century setting can be illustrated by comparing a few texts with NRSV. Whenever NRSV reads “the Spirit of God,” “the Spirit,” or “the Holy Spirit,” we might translate “God’s spirits,” “God’s spirit world,” or “the holy spirit world.” In Matt 12.29, NRSV “the Spirit of God” becomes “God’s spirit world.” In the famous triadic “proof-text” of Matt 28.19, NRSV “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” becomes “in the name of Father and of the Son and of the holy spirit-world.” In 1 Tim 4.1, NRSV “the Spirit expressly says” becomes “God’s spirit world expressly declares.”

The articular τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον might sometimes be translated as a plural, understanding “the holy spirit” in a categorical sense. In Acts 10.44, NRSV “the Holy Spirit fell upon” becomes “holy spirits came upon.” In John 16.13, NRSV “When the Spirit of truth comes” becomes, “When the spirits of truth have come.”

The anarthrous is almost always translated as articular—“the Holy Spirit” and “the Spirit of God”—in NRSV, whereas we can translate, “a holy spirit” and “a spirit of God.” In John 20.22 “Receive the Holy Spirit” (NRSV) becomes “Receive a holy spirit.” In Acts 2.4 “All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit” (NRSV) becomes “Every one was filled with a holy spirit.”<sup>44</sup>

These alternative translations might breach Christian theology of the Holy Spirit, but they certainly do not breach the Greek New Testament text. If a translation that is sensitive to the matrices of the first Christians clashes with the more familiar modern English translations that are shaped by fourth-century Trinitarian readings, then we ought to discriminate, more closely, historical boundaries of the New

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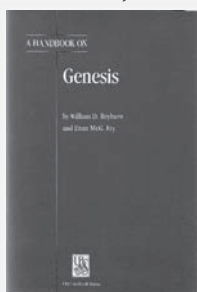
44 See n. 33 above.

Testament texts themselves as well as the spirit beliefs of the early Christians. Fourth-century pneumatology can be expressed thusly: “the Holy Spirit” is greater than all other spirits (angels, demons). First-century pneumatology looks more like this: God is greater than all holy spirits (Christ, angels, heavenly spirits) and evil spirits (Satan, demons, devil).

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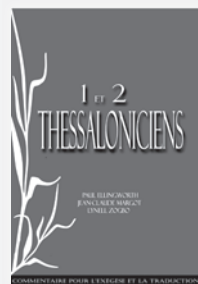
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