

Is the Holy Spirit a Third Person?

by Anthony Buzzard

It is completely misleading to read into the Bible a third Person, the Holy Spirit. The spirit of Elijah (Luke 1:17) is not a different person from Elijah. Nor is the spirit of God a different person from the Father. The Holy Spirit is the operational presence of God, His mind and character. It is God impacting the creation with His creative influence. It is remarkable that greetings are never sent from the spirit and in no text in the Bible is the spirit worshipped or addressed in prayer. In the New Testament the spirit is also the risen/glorified Messiah Jesus. Paul equates the spirit with the risen Jesus when he says, “This comes from the Lord who is the spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18).

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The spirit of God and the mind of God are beautifully equated in 1 Corinthians 2:16 where Paul refers to “the **mind** of Christ,” quoting from Isaiah 40:13 which refers to God’s **spirit**. The Hebrew text reads “spirit.” *Mind, heart, spirit, and word* are very closely associated in the Bible. Making the spirit a third Person introduced a great deal of confusion.

The following quotations — including four from Catholic encyclopedias or dictionaries — speak for themselves as testimony against reading into the Bible the conclusions of post-biblical creeds:

“The Jews never regarded the spirit as a person; nor is there any solid evidence that any Old Testament writer held this view... The Holy Spirit is usually presented in the Synoptics and in Acts as a divine force or power.”¹

“Although this spirit is often described in personal terms, it seems quite clear that the sacred writers [of the Hebrew Scriptures] never conceived or presented this spirit as a distinct person.”²

“Nowhere in the Old Testament do we find any clear indication of a Third Person. Mention is often made of the Spirit of the Lord, but there is nothing to show that the Spirit was viewed as distinct from Jahweh Himself.”³

“The Old Testament clearly does not envisage God’s spirit as a person... God’s spirit is simply God’s power. If it is sometimes represented as being distinct from God, it is because the breath of Yahweh acts exteriorly (Isa. 48:16; 63:11; 32:15)... The majority of New Testament texts reveal God’s spirit as something, not someone; this is especially seen in the parallelism between the spirit and the power of God.”⁴

¹ Edmund Fortman, *The Triune God*, 1982, p. 6, 15.

² Ibid., p. 9.

³ *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, “The Blessed Trinity,” Vol. 15, p. 49.

⁴ *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, “Spirit of God,” Vol. 13, p. 427, 428.

“On the whole, the New Testament, like the Old, speaks of the Spirit as a divine energy or power particularly in the heart of man.”⁵

“The true divinity of the third Person was asserted at a Council of Alexandria in 362...and finally by the Council of Constantinople of 381.”⁶

“There is no text in the NT that clearly or even probably asserts the personality of the Holy Spirit through the route of Greek grammar...The *grammatical* basis for the Holy Spirit’s personality is lacking in the New Testament, yet this is frequently, if not usually, the first line of defense of the doctrine of many evangelical writers. But if grammar cannot legitimately be used to support the Spirit’s personality, then perhaps we need to reexamine the rest of our basis for this theological commitment.”⁷

Matthew 28:19 “proves only that there are the three subjects named,...but it does not prove, by itself, that all the three belong necessarily to the divine nature, and possess equal divine honor...This text, taken by itself, would not prove decisively either the personality of the three subjects mentioned, or their equality or divinity.”⁸

⁵ William E. Addis and Thomas Arnold, *A Catholic Dictionary*, “Trinity, Holy,” 1884, p. 816.

⁶ Ibid, p. 819.

⁷ Daniel Wallace, “Greek Grammar and the Personality of the Holy Spirit,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research*, 2003, p. 122, 125.

⁸ McClintock and Strong, *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*, 1886, Vol. 10, p. 552.