Holy Spirit –'it', or 'he'?

Written by K B Napier
Tuesday, 21 October 2014 16:25

Genuine Western believers have no problem speaking of the Holy Spirit as a Person, the third Person of the Trinity. Yet, modern Greeks have a distinct problem with this and I did not realise this until I had an email conversation with a reader who had only recently converted from Greek Orthodoxy. The problem is big enough to prevent even saved Greeks (almost all of whom are born into orthodoxy – see my article on Orthodox beliefs) from accepting the Holy Spirit as a Person. Without doubt they hold that the Spirit is not a Person, but a holy force.

Therefore, I want to look at this phenomenon, which arises from the Greek language itself (which has hardly changed since koine Greek was used two thousand years ago). Compared to this Greek reader (who I will call MF), who is a native, intelligent Greek speaker, I am just a novice, yet I hope to show that whilst the orthodox linguistic view may be true, it forgets that to have any real meaning, words often require *qualifying* words. You will get the gist as we move on...

The Reader's Information

The Greek reader (MF) says this:

"The Greek language is not easy, even for the Greeks. It is a very rational language, so that makes things easier, but it requires a lot of study. Not all Greeks speak/write Greek well."

As I have pointed out before, though I use Greek, I do not converse in the language. Why not? Simply because I did my Greek course way back in the early 1980s, and had no-one with whom to converse! Today, then, my use of Greek is specific and academic, whereas, as I have also said before, there are Christians of far greater prowess in the Greek language, because they teach or converse in it. But, my main attention must be to our Greek reader, who has spoken the language from birth and who has herself studied its forms. (As for Greeks who cannot speak or read Greek well – this applies to many in Britain, who cannot speak English well, either!).

Having acknowledged this, we must now turn to something far more serious concerning the Trinity (see my article on this topic) – that Greeks do not see each 'facet' as a Person at all. For example, in another email, we have this:

Holy Spirit –'it', or 'he'?

Written by K B Napier
Tuesday, 21 October 2014 16:25

"Strictly speaking 'Person' in Greek is ΑΝΘΡΩΠΟΣ (=man).

God is definitely not a person, nor is the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ is both a God and human. That is what we the Orthodox believe (and which, incidentally, happens to be correct doctrine).

But I do not think we could refer to the 3 facets (so to speak) as Persons in Greek, (because Persons would mean 3 separate people, and would not make sense).

Actually, we use the word ΠΡΟΣΩΠΟΝ (=face, neutral), NOT the word Person in order to describe the triadic nature of the Holy Trinity.

GR.ORTH doctrine hymns say "ΤΡΙΑΣ ΟΜΟ-ΟΥΣΙΟΣ ΚΑΙ ΑΧΩΡΙΣΤΟΣ", i.e. "of the same substance and inseparable."

"Thus, the Greek Orthodox say "the three ΠΡΟΣΩΠΑ ΤΗΣ ΑΓΙΑΣ ΤΡΙΑΔΟΣ"."

To illustrate this, MF sent a Wikipedia page in Greek titled Αγία Τριάδα (Holy Trinity). It speaks of one God in three persons, when, in truth, it should be three persons in one God. The idea of a Trinity cannot be explained adequately, because it must be acknowledged to be difficult. But, is it impossible to speak of each as a 'Person'?

The argument runs that because the Old Testament is monotheistic, we may not accept any notion of a Trinity. But, this is false reasoning, for the very first use of 'God' in the Old Testament has a plural meaning! (Note that as a ministry we insist on using the KJAV because of its accuracy).

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."

In this, the very first verse of scripture, 'God' is *'elohiym* (NOT Jehovah as so many mistakenly believe). It is not a name, but a designation or office. It is a masculine noun (not neutral) and it is plural (not singular). Thus, 'God' means there is more than one, and at least two Persons. God, then, is given the designation of Persons and not forces or anything that are non-persons. The given meanings include rulers, divine ones, angels, gods, etc. The 'plural intensive', however, can, at times, refer to the 'works or special possessions of God'. Even so, the first verse shown above refers to a Person and not just to His works. Indeed, it shows that God created... and only a Person can create. The later New Testament will never contradict the Old Testament, so the same meanings for 'God' MUST be the same.

'elohiym is the plural of *'elowahh*, so there is no mistake – the word 'God' is plural. The singular form is also a masculine noun, meaning God, or a false god. (It might be a prolonged version of another word, but this cannot be firmly proved), and only refers to Persons, and the personal acts of Persons. For example, "And God said..." (Genesis 1:3), "God saw" (verse 4): only a Person can say and see. Bear in mind that 'God' in Christian terms means 'The Trinity', all three Persons.

These same Persons "dealt well" with the midwives (Exodus 1:20). The same word for 'God' is used, so the early Hebrews knew that by 'God' is meant at least two Persons and not a singular God or a god-like force. Also, in verse 21, we see that God is referred to as "he"! He was and is a Person.

And so we read of this same God (plural) hearing, seeing, acting, and so on. These are all activities of persons (plural) and not a force. We cannot enter into a lengthy argument about this, but suffice to understand that genuine western Christians refer to God as three persons in one, and not as three separate gods. The words found in the Orthodox, 'the same substance and inseparable' are correct insofar as they go.

The English, translated *word* for 'person' in the Old Testament is various, depending on context and is only used of created men, whether good or bad. Nowhere in the Old Testament is the *word*
'person' used of God. Yet, 'God' means more than one Person!

However, in the New Testament 'Person' is used of Christ: "in the person of Christ".

Though it is a neuter noun, *prosōpon* - it definitely refers to Christ, Who was male and a Person. Modern Orthodox prefer to use the word 'face', but this is only one meaning. In this context 'Christ' is used in conjunction with 'person', which undoubtedly makes Christ a Person, though strictly 'Christ' is reference to the Messiah, Son of God. Though 'person' here means face, or one's inward thoughts and feelings (of Christ), it nevertheless qualifies itself when we are told they belong to Christ (the divine character of Jesus)... making Him and God 'Persons'.

Concerning the word 'person', in Matthew 22:16, we have *prosōpon* (a neuter noun), while in Matthew 27:24 we have *dikaios*, which is an adjective (rooted in a feminine noun) meaning, amongst other things, to be righteous or of Christ or approved of God. While the word itself does not refer to an human being, its qualifiers definitely do refer to persons (as understood in English)

Then, in 1 Corinthians 5:13, another word is used (in English) for 'person' – *ponēros*, another adjective, this time to describe a wicked person... but a person nevertheless. What I am getting at is that 'person' is used to speak of human beings (and God), but has to be qualified by surrounding words. Thus, 'person' in, say, Ephesians 5:5, can refer to people who are 'unclean', or 'covetous', or an 'idolater'.

When we come to Hebrews 1:3, we see 'person' used of God, i.e. "the brightness of his person" note 'his', 'he' etc). Here, 'person' in the Greek is *hypostasis*, a feminine noun. This can be termed the brightness of His substance or being, and also as the substantial quality of a person. The context shows us that it refers to a Person (as we know it in English). The difference we come across is in transliteration from Greek to English... but we can see that 'Person' when used with God refers to an actual Person and not just a thing. We see it in the qualifying terms of each text.

Holy Spirit

In scripture we read of the spirits of the Father, or of Christ, or of an human being. These do not in themselves speak of the Holy Spirit. The word 'Spirit' is qualified by the word 'Holy', or even by the use of a capital 'S' (again, in English). But, does that make the Holy Spirit a Person (in the English sense)? Or, co-equal?

In the second verse of scripture, Genesis 1:2, we find reference to the "Spirit of God". As each

Person in the Trinity has His own 'spirit', we know that this term does not refer to a collective 'spirit' or attribute, but to a Person – the Holy Spirit. In the text 'Spirit' is *ruwach*. It is a feminine noun with a number of possible meanings pointing to various holy attributes, but it is also used of the third   *Pers on*   of the trinity.

We see the same phrase, "And the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid..." Note that 'the Spirit' is used in conjunction with 'he', denoting a Person! This is also evident in 2 Samuel 23:2, where we see that "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue". A Person, not a force. In 1 Kings 22:24 we again see that a Person not a force spoke. In 2 Kings 2:16 we find the Spirit using the actions of a Person.

In 2 Chronicles 20:14,15 the Spirit of God came "in the midst of the congregation, and He said...". The words 'He said' shows the Spirit to be a Person. Similarly, in Isaiah 63:10 we see that the people vexed the Holy Spirit: "therefore HE was turned to be their enemy, and HE fought against them." (Emphasis mine). Without doubt, the word 'he' denotes a Person, and not simply an attribute. This Personhood is more strongly depicted in Ezekiel 3:24, "Then the spirit entered into me, and set me upon my feet, and spake with me, and said unto me, Go, shut thyself within thine house." This is a divine Person speaking to a man. He gives him instructions. Thus, He is a Person. Later in Ezekiel 11:1,2 etc., the same Spirit spoke again to him.

Scripture makes a difference between the 'ordinary' spirit of the Father, Son, etc., and the Holy Spirit.

New Testament

'Spirit' in Matthew 3:16 is indeed a neuter noun, *pneuma,* and though the word can refer to attributes it   *also* can refer to the Third person of the Trinity. And if we look at definitions found in a number of sources, we see that 'Holy Spirit' is "never referred to as a depersonalised force". We find that when a person speaks truth it is the Holy Spirit Who speaks in him (Matthew 10:20). Again, this refers to a Person, not a force. Yet, repeatedly, charismatics speak of the Spirit as 'it'! Sadly, this same error has been passed down to the Orthodox churches and even Protestant churches in Greece, and this confounds and perplexes Greeks. I am not surprised!

Written by K B Napier
Tuesday, 21 October 2014 16:25

In a number of texts, we find some people have evil 'spirits' within them. These are none other than demons, fallen angels, and therefore fallen beings who are persons, who cause others to act badly; they also speak to them – they are persons. All angels are persons.

Note that even Jesus was 'anointed' by the Holy Spirit, Who 'sent me'; actions of a Person not a force (Luke 4:18). And, of course, God the Father is a Spirit (John 4:24). The Holy Spirit is also named the Holy Ghost (John 7:39). Note that 'Holy' (*hagios*) refers to a 'most holy thing, a saint'. That is, a Person. This Personhood is further revealed in John 14:17, where unbelievers "seeth him not... neither knoweth him" – 'Him'! "But ye know
him
, for
he
dwelleth with you..." (my emphasis). This is a Person, not a thing or impersonal force.

 You will read in John 7:39 of 'the Spirit' who is synonymous with 'Holy Ghost (Spirit)'. Here again the Spirit is synonymous with a Person... 'him'. John 15:26 points to the 'Comforter', *para
kl   ēt
os
*. This is a masculine noun for one who comes to the aid of another, pleads his cause, a helper... all are reference to a Person. Thus, though modern Greeks see only a neuter noun, scripture gives us plentiful reason to accept the Spirit as an actual Person, and the word 'Comforter' supports this. The text also says that the Comforter is the Spirit of Truth, who is a 'he'.

Peter reinforced this personhood when he asked if conspirators (Ananias and Sapphira) had agreed to tempt the Spirit of the Lord (Acts 5:9)... one can only 'tempt' a Person, not a force or an 'it'. Also, the Holy Spirit "said unto Philip"... speaking is an act of a Person; the same Spirit spoke to Peter in Acts 10:19.

In John 14:16, the Comforter is said to be a 'he' and in verse 26 we find the Comforter is also the Holy Ghost or Holy Spirit, Who is spoken of as 'he', as He is in the next chapter (15:26). Of course, the pronoun *ekeinos*, can also mean 'it' – but one would need to struggle and do mental gymnastics to make it into an impersonal force, when very clearly the Spirit is given personhood. Then, in 16:7 Jesus Himself refers to the Comforter/Holy Ghost/Spirit in this way: "I will send   *him* unto you."

 Conclusion

Holy Spirit –'it', or 'he'?

Written by K B Napier
Tuesday, 21 October 2014 16:25

There is a concerted effort worldwide to eliminate the Spirit as a Person. It is a satanic effort, because successful removal removes the Trinity, and removes all personal references to God as Persons. I believe I have shown adequately that the Spirit is a Person, and that while 'person' (*anthropos*) might indeed mean man, it has other meanings, too. 'Person' itself is indeed a neuter noun in Greek, but it is qualified by so many personalised words that we cannot escape it with refusal to admit the Father, Son AND Holy Spirit are Persons, and that all three are one (1 John 5:7). Jesus would not have handed His apostles over to One who was less than God. And, of course, in Hebrew 'God' is plural.

Cults (and even some churches) try their best to reject the Trinity and to reject the Spirit as a Person, because it is in their own unbelieving self-interest to do so. Yet, a thorough and open reading of scripture cannot support such a denial.

© October 2014

---oOo---

{loadposition btm_address}