

# THE DISAPPEARING GHOST

by Pr. William P. Terjesen

In the Authorized Version of the Bible, in our older hymnals (like The Lutheran Hymnal), and in much of classic English literature, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity is frequently referred to as the Holy Ghost. Modern Bible translations and hymnals have universally changed this to Holy Spirit with the result that congregations using them never hear the term Holy Ghost. I've been to services with fellow pastors and heard them say Holy Spirit when the liturgy and the people say Holy Ghost. They obviously think they've latched on to an improvement. The reason usually given for the change from Ghost to Spirit is that the word 'Ghost' is an archaic word, and, that it has the connotation of, well, spooks and specters to the modern ear. I disagree, and I think the change was a bad idea for several reasons.

FIRST, in our liturgies, wherever the phrase 'Holy Ghost' has been changed to 'Holy Spirit', the result is rhythmically awkward and jarring to the ear. We are continuously annoyed by the addition of an extra syllable setting things off balance, whether in the Trinitarian Invocation, the Gloria Patri, the Gloria in Excelsis, the creeds, or the termination of the collects, introducing many an "Anglican Thump" into a previously euphonic liturgy. There are some places where 'Holy Spirit' sounds good, as for example, in the offertory "Create in Me a Clean Heart," but for the most part it's like driving over a speed bump. A few examples:

OLD: In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

NEW: In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Note the extra, grating syllable at the end? Like a pimple!

Or,

OLD: ...though Jesus Christ Thy Son our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost...

NEW: ...through Jesus Christ Your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit...

Again, that unfortunate extra syllable!

I'm not saying that we should never use the term Holy Spirit. The term is used in the Authorized Version and other older literature. I'm saying that banishing 'Holy Ghost' is unnecessary and contributes to the ugliness of most modern liturgies.

SECOND, that the word 'ghost' is not an archaic word. People still use that word today and know what it means. It is similar to the German word 'geist' and is still in common use in English speaking countries. People in churches who use older Bibles and hymnals use the term with no confusion whatever. My dictionary doesn't make any references to its being archaic,

except to mention that it comes from the Anglo Saxon word 'gast'. Therefore, we shouldn't be deprived of a lovely, round, evocative word on the false claim that it is archaic and obsolete. But some will say, "Yes, but when modern people hear the word 'ghost' they think of ghosts and goblins, Halloween and things that go bump in the night." Well, that may be overstating it a bit. People are not as stupid as the "rennovators" constantly suppose. But even if they do, what of it? At least they are thinking of a personal being! And that brings me to my third point.

THIRD. The term 'Holy Ghost' began to be universally replaced with 'Holy Spirit' in the Revised Version (of the Bible) of 1881. One of the members of the revision committee was, mystifyingly, a unitarian universalist by the name of Mr. Vance Smith. What such a 'cultist' was doing on the Anglican revision committee of the Holy Bible is beyond me. This anti-trinitarian false prophet, this dog in the manger, campaigned loudly for the discarding of the word 'Ghost' in favor of 'Spirit'. Why? Because the word Ghost connotes a personal being, and no self-respecting heretic wants to confess and believe that the Holy Ghost is an actual personal being; the Third Person of the Trinity. Much better in their minds to use a word that is capable of "creative, flexible interpretation." That way when they use the term 'Holy Spirit' they can sound like Christians, but mean something completely different from what Christians mean by that term.

Think about it. We use the term 'spirit' in all kinds of impersonal ways. We talk of the 'American spirit', or, 'school spirit', by which we mean certain attitudes or dispositions. In an age that frequently thinks of God as "The Force", an impersonal influence or power, the term 'Holy Spirit' is easily misunderstood. The term 'Holy Ghost' is not. When we consider that unitarian universalists, liberal rationalists, Jehovah's Witnesses, New Agers, and other heretics are pleased with the term 'Holy Spirit' because they can interpret it according to their heresies in which the "holy spirit" is an impersonal power or influence, isn't it a shame that the Christian Church of the 20th century has played right into their hands?

In the term 'Holy Ghost' we have a euphonic, clear, understandable and accurate designation that forces us to think in terms of personal being, and thus steers us away from thinking in ways that are heretical. Let's use it and enjoy it. I am not suggesting that we should use only the term 'Holy Ghost'; there are times when it is appropriate and acceptable to use the term 'Holy Spirit'. Even the Authorized Version uses 'Holy Spirit' occasionally. Nor am I castigating anyone who has in good faith preferred the more modern term. What I am suggesting is that in this day of manifold heresies, we reclaim a perfectly good, accurate and useful word, 'ghost', and thus in our prayers and Bible readings make clear to a dark world precisely what we mean when we confess that we "believe in the Holy Ghost...", that we are unabashedly orthodox Trinitarians.