

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS

W. HAROLD MARE

Professor of New Testament Language and Literature
Covenant Theological Seminary

The writings from the sub-Apostolic Church in the period just subsequent to the time of the New Testament, are important in enabling us to compare doctrines continued by the tradition of the church in the light of the Biblical teaching of the canonical Old and New Testaments. An important subject for comparison is the Holy Spirit as He is presented in the Apostolic Fathers. One recent author has commented in connection with one of the earliest Apostolic Fathers, Clement of Rome, in the First Epistle to the Corinthians that there are just passing references to the Holy Spirit and that "the doctrine of the Spirit is only inchoate" in this epistle just mentioned.¹

Such a statement raises for us several questions regarding the doctrine of the Spirit not only as they might relate to I Clement but also to all of the writings of the Apostolic Fathers. Is it true that references in I Clement to the Holy Spirit are referred to only in "passing," and are the references actually few and far between in the Apostolic Fathers as a whole? Is the terminology in reference to the Holy Spirit in the Apostolic Fathers similar to that of the Old and New Testaments, or both? Is the teaching about the Spirit in I Clement and elsewhere in the Fathers² only inchoate and actually inconsequential, or do the doctrinal concepts suggested correspond to many of those set forth in both of the Testaments? What divergences, if any, from the Biblical doctrine of the Holy Spirit can be detected in the Fathers?

In this study of the Holy Spirit in the Apostolic Fathers the following works have been examined:³ The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians (dated between 75 and 110 A.D.); 2 Clement to the Corinthians⁴ (± 150 A.D.); The Epistles of Ignatius (98-117 A.D.); The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians (c. 110-115 A.D.); The Didache (2nd century A.D., possibly early 2nd century); The Epistle of Barnabas (the end of the 1st century or beginning of the second, A.D.); The Shepherd of Hermas (c. 120-150 A.D.); The Martyrdom of Polycarp (c. 156 A.D.); and The Epistle to Diognetus (of uncertain date, but possibly 2nd or 3rd century, A.D.).

Evaluation of the Number of References to the
Holy Spirit in the Apostolic Fathers

In comparison with over 200 references to the Spirit in the New Testament⁵ the Fathers have in excess of 70⁶ which is comparable to the number of times to which reference is made to the Spirit in the Old Testament.⁷ Such references can be found in almost all of the Fathers and are distributed in the following way:

1 Clement	11
2 Clement	6
Ignatius	6
Polycarp to the Philippians	1
The Didache	3
The Epistle of Barnabas	4
The Shepherd of Hermas	41
The Martyrdom of Polycarp	<u>3</u>
Total	75

Some of these references are grouped in one section or sections of a particular work due to the nature of the author's thought, such being the case in 2 Clement 14:3-5 (6 references), Hermas, Mand. 10:3 (7 uses), Mand. 11 (13 uses), and Hermas, Sim. 5:6, 5-7 (8 uses).

The Epistle to Diognetus is the only work in the Apostolic Fathers which does not make reference to the Spirit, which may reflect a later date of authorship for the work (possibly 3rd century A.D.),⁸ when the teaching on the Holy Spirit does not seem to be prominent.⁹ Although the Didache refers to the Spirit only three times, two of the three uses occur quite appropriately in that section of instructions for Christians given in the last half of the work (sections 7-16) when the sacrament of baptism is discussed with the baptismal formula "into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" being given twice (Didache 7:1 and 3).

That the Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians refers to the Spirit only once (5:3) may be attributed to the subject matter of the epistle which consists of a warning concerning church disorders and apostasy and of the letters of Ignatius to the Philippians. But when bringing in the practical aspects of living a virtuous Christian life, Polycarp does refer to the Spirit in a statement about "lust warring against the Spirit" which seems to be a composite thought from Gal. 5:17 and I Peter 2:11.

Thus we observe that in almost all of the Apostolic Fathers there is considerable reference to, and discussion of, the Holy Spirit which is sufficient to indicate that the doctrine of the Spirit was important in the

life of the sub-Apostolic Church.

The Terminology Used in the Apostolic
Fathers for the Holy Spirit

In the Old Testament the names used to express the concept of the Divine Spirit vary, with the terms "the Spirit" and "the Spirit of the Lord" occurring most frequently (about 25 times each), while the phrase "Spirit of God" is used 11 times, and the term "Holy Spirit" is only expressed in three places.

In contrast the New Testament in its more frequent reference to the Spirit only uses "Spirit of the Lord" in three passages, and refers to the Spirit of God" 17 times, but very frequently the two expressions, "the Spirit" and "the Holy Spirit," are employed (over 90 times each). Almost half of the uses of "Holy Spirit" (41 times) occur in the Acts of the Apostles, with the Gospels having 26 occurrences and Paul's epistles 17. It is Paul who employs most frequently the term "Spirit of God," with 12 of the 17 uses. The expression "the Spirit of the Lord" occurs only once each, in the Gospels (Luke 4:18 in a quotation from the Old Testament), in Acts (5:9) and in Paul (2 Cor. 3:18).

The terminology of the Fathers in reference to the Spirit is generally that employed in the two Testaments, but the pattern of frequency more nearly follows the New Testament in not often using the terms, "Spirit of the Lord" (only 3 times) and "Spirit of God" (only once) and in using more often the words, "Holy Spirit" (38 times), and "Spirit" (22 times). In addition to New Testament usage the Apostolic Fathers introduce three new terms: "the Divine Spirit" (used 7 times in *Hermas*), "the delicate Spirit" (*Hermas Mand.* 5:2,6; compared *Hermas Mand.* 5:1,3); and "the Spirit of the Godhead" (twice in *Hermas*, both of which, however, are used in the same context with the expressions, "Holy Spirit" and "Spirit," *Hermas* 11).

It is obvious, therefore, that the Apostolic Fathers show familiarity with the New Testament usage of terms for Holy Spirit and generally follow this pattern of expression. In the case of the occasional use by the Fathers of expressions found more frequently for Spirit in the Old Testament it is to be observed that of the three uses of the name "Spirit of the Lord" by the Fathers, two are a part of quotations from the Old Testament. One occurs in the Epistle of Barnabas 14:9, and quotes Isa. 61:1,2 where both in the Hebrew and the LXX the term, "Spirit of the Lord," occurs. The other appears in I Clement 21:2, being a quotation of Proverbs 20:27 where there is a textual problem (I Clement having πνεῦμα κυρίου, whereas the Hebrew and LXX of Proverbs 20:27 have הַיְהוָה יְגִר and פִּי שֶׁל הַיְהוָה, respectively).¹⁰ The third

instance of this expression in the Fathers is also in the framework of reference to the teaching of the Old Testament, where in the Ep. Barn. 9:2 in quoting a passage from the Old Testament he introduces it with the words, "the Spirit of the Lord prophesies."

So only in Old Testament quotations where the term, "Spirit of the Lord," occurs or as an introduction to an Old Testament quotation is the phrase to be found in the Apostolic Fathers, and that basically only in one document, the Epistle of Barnabas.

The only reference in the Fathers to the phrase, "Spirit of God," a designation frequently used in both the Old and New Testaments, is found in Hermas, Mand. 10:2 where it is used interchangeably with two other terms, "Spirit," and "Holy Spirit," both of which, as we have observed, are common expressions in the New Testament.

In overall pattern, therefore, the terminology for Spirit in the Fathers generally follows the usage of the New Testament, only employing the more distinctive Old Testament expression, "Spirit of the Lord," in a very few places where the Old Testament is quoted or where a quotation is introduced. It may be reasonable to suggest that this general uniformity to the usage of the New Testament terminology for Spirit argues for the knowledge of, reverence for, and dependence upon the New Testament on the part of the Apostolic Fathers.

The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit as Seen in the Apostolic Fathers

The Person of the Holy Spirit

It has been said that ". . . upon the whole their [i.e., the early Christian writings] testimony is unmistakably in favor of the personality [of the Holy Spirit]."¹¹ On the basis of several references in the Fathers to the Spirit which present a high view of His person, a viewpoint comparable to statements in the New Testament regarding the supernatural character and work of the Spirit, it is proper to say that the Fathers go beyond just identifying the personality of the Spirit, but likewise present a concept of the Holy Spirit's person which is supernatural and divine. The Spirit in several places 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. Twice in the Didache (7:1 and 7:3), in reference to the baptismal formula, the Holy Spirit is included with the Father and the Son, and the formulary expression is identical to that set forth in Matthew 28:19 (εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος).¹²

It is tempting to suggest that either the Didache and Matthew had a common source or, better, that the author(s) of the Didache knew the contents of the Gospel of Matthew.

In Ignatius Mag. 13:1 the Spirit is associated with the Son and the Father in a challenge to obedience to the Word for prosperity in the Christian life. In this passage the Son and the Father in that order are associated together in one prepositional phrase (with ἐν), the Spirit following in a separate phrase.¹³

In Hermas, Sim. 5:6,5 there is a strong statement that the Holy Spirit is the creator of all things and also that He is the pre-existent one (τὸ πνεῦμα ἅγιον τὸ πρῶτον), but this passage does not bear on the person of the Spirit Himself since it seems to be identifying the concept of Holy Spirit in this context with Christ.

In His dying prayers (Martyrdom of Polycarp 14:2) Polycarp expresses his gratitude to God for the coming resurrection life and considers the Holy Spirit as well as the Father, and the Christ to be responsible for this blessing, and in 14:3 of the same work in an expression of final praise Polycarp again includes all three persons of the Trinity, closely associating here the Holy Spirit with Christ in a single σύν phrase (σὺν αὐτῷ καὶ πνεύματι ἁγίῳ). In concluding notes by a later scribe (Martyrdom of Polycarp 22:3) the thought is set forth that divine glory belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ, to the Father and the Holy Spirit, and in this case the Father and the Spirit are closely associated together in one σύν phrase (σὺν τῷ πατρὶ καὶ ἁγίῳ πνεύματι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰῶνων).

In Ignatius Ephesians 18:2 the Trinity is associated together in the incarnation of Christ,¹⁴ a thought similarly expressed, but in different words, in Luke 1:35.

The statement in Hermas, Mand. 11:21 is that the Spirit is Divine (the expression is, "Divine Spirit", τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ θεῖον).

That "the Divine Spirit coming from above is powerful" (the clause is πνεῦμα τὸ θεῖον ἄνωθεν ἐρχόμενον δυνατὸν ἐστίν) in a general context which associates this concept with the Spirit of the Godhead and of the Holy Spirit (Hermas, Mand. 11:21 and 11:8-10) further confirms the conclusion that the Apostolic Fathers present the Spirit as a supernatural person.

That the term "Spirit" or "Holy Spirit" carried in the Fathers a divine connotation is further argued by the fact that in three places the Son of God or Christ is said to be the Holy Spirit (Hermas, Sim. 9:1, 1;

Sim. 5:6,5 and 2 Clem. 14:4.¹⁵

Thus, since in the Apostolic Fathers the Spirit is associated in the baptismal formula and in benedictions so closely with the Father and the Son and since the term, Holy Spirit, is used in the same way of the divine Son of God, Jesus Christ, as of the Spirit, we conclude that the concept of the divine personality of the Holy Spirit is generally taught in the Apostolic Fathers, although not to the extent nor as clearly as set forth by Christ and the Apostles in the New Testament record.

The Work of the Holy Spirit

In a number of ways the work of the Holy Spirit in the Fathers corresponds to that developed on the subject in the New Testament.

The first of these areas concerns the emphasis given to the Spirit's inspiring and authoring Holy Scripture. In introducing a quotation of Ezekiel 33:11-27, 1 Clement 8:1 refers to the Old Testament prophets as speaking through the Holy Spirit (διὰ πνεύματος ἁγίου). This is similar to Acts 4:25 where the identical prepositional phrase is used in referring to David as being used by God to give the prophecy in Psalm 2:1ff. Several times in the Fathers Old Testament quotations are introduced by the statements, "the Holy Spirit says" (1 Clement 13:1, in quoting Jeremiah 9:23, 24), "the Holy Spirit spoke" (1 Clement 16:2, 3, before citing Isa. 53), "Christ through His Holy Spirit calls us" (1 Clement 22:1, in quoting Psalm 34:11-17), and "the Spirit of the Lord prophesies" (Ep. Barn. 9:2, in citing Psalm 33(34):12 and Exodus 15:26). In some cases the statement of inspiration by the Spirit is not followed by a direct quotation of Scripture, such a case being in Ignatius Phila. 7:2 where the statement, "the Holy Spirit preaches and says" is not succeeded by a direct quote from either Testament but by what sounds like a combination of 1 Cor. 6:19, Ephesians 4:1-3; 5:1, and 1 Thessalonians 1:6.¹⁶

Presented as though an accepted principle of the Church 1 Clement 45:2 concludes that the Holy Scriptures are given through the Holy Spirit¹⁷ which Scripture in the context of the immediate sections 45-47 seems to include the Old Testament and possibly parts of the New.¹⁸

Secondly, there are allusions in the Fathers as to the Spirit being involved in the beginnings of the Christian's salvation. The Spirit is said to have prepared the men whom God calls (Didache 4:10), and He is also the author of the hope which those who believe in Jesus and participate in the sacrament of baptism possess (Ep. Barn. 11:11).

Further, the Spirit is also represented in the Fathers as being a vital spiritual influence in the development of the Christian Life. He is said to dwell in (Hermas Mand. 5:1,2)¹⁹ and to be poured out in

abundance upon the Christian (1 Clement 2:2).²⁰ Hermas Mand. 11:9 suggests that those with the prophetic spirit are filled with the Holy Spirit (compare also Hermas Mand. 10:2,5).²¹ As to the Spirit's ministry of influencing and developing a holy life in the Christian, Christ is said to call us to such a life through the Holy Spirit and Psalm 34:11-17²² is quoted as supporting this thought (1 Clement 22:1). 1 Clement 21:2 argues that since the Spirit of the Lord is a lamp searching the inward parts of the Christian, therefore, the believer is to live a godly and pure life (compare also Hermas Sim. 5:6,5). The test of a true prophet who has the Spirit according to Hermas Mand. 11:7 is to be found in his meek and godly life, and the fact that the Apostles and teachers of the New Testament era walked in righteousness and truth is to be attributed to the fact that they had received the Holy Spirit (Hermas. Sim. 9:25, 2). That the Christian can grieve the Spirit (compare Ephesians 4:30-32) by committing acts of sin is taught in Hermas Mand. 10:2,2 where ill temper and doublemindedness are set forth as grieving elements.

As he is set forth in the New Testament, so the Holy Spirit in the Apostolic Fathers is the one who grants charismatic gifts to the believers. The Apostles used spiritual discernment and knowledge (compare 1 Cor. 2:10 and 12:8) in choosing proper officers for the Church (1 Clement 42:4). In preaching the Word of God purely, the Apostles and New Testament teachers were guided by the Spirit (Hermas Sim. 9:25, 2), and they preached in the assurance of the Holy Spirit (1 Clement 42:3). As to the prophetic office, it is the Spirit on the true prophet who enables Him to speak prophetically (Hermas Mand. 11:9, 10), whereas the false prophet does not have the power of the Divine Spirit (Hermas Mand. 11:2) (compare 1 John 4:1-3). As to the gift of faith (1 Cor. 12:9), Hermas Mand. 11:9 knows of righteous men who have the faith of the Divine Spirit.

Thus it is clearly observable that the presentation in the Fathers of the divine person and effective supernatural work of the Spirit is quite comparable to, though not as full and complete as that set forth in the New Testament.

Some Divergences in the Apostolic Fathers from the Biblical Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

Even a cursory reading of the Fathers will show some erroneous and enigmatic statements regarding the Spirit obviously at variance with Biblical teaching. A few illustrations will suffice. 1 Clement 63:2 suggests that there were others than the Apostles and their close acquaintances in subsequent times, who through the Spirit were authors of Scripture.²³

In Hermas Mand. 5:1 and 2 the erroneous thought is presented that the individual Christian can lose the Holy Spirit through a spirit of

ill temper, bitterness, etc. 2 Clement 14:3 sets forth the enigmatic statement that God will receive the spiritual Church back again in the Holy Spirit if she is guarded in the flesh without corruption.

Thus, we conclude from such illustrations of doctrinal divergence, that although the statements of the Apostolic Fathers regarding the Holy Spirit evidence a first hand knowledge of the New Testament record, yet these statements do not set forth as clear, full and true a record on this subject as is found in the New Testament itself.

Conclusions

From this study of the Holy Spirit in the Apostolic Fathers a number of conclusions can be drawn.

In the first place, the references to the Spirit in the Fathers are not an infrequent occurrence. Secondly, terminology used by the Fathers for the Holy Spirit follows the pattern of the Biblical books, especially those of the New Testament. Then, too, it has been observed that the teaching in the Fathers concerning the Spirit's person and work is not inchoate and inconsequential, and the doctrinal concepts suggested coincide with many of those set forth in the Old and New Testaments.

However, it is to be noted that, contrary to the Scripture, the teaching by the Fathers on the Spirit is not free from erroneous and enigmatic statements.

On the whole, the presentation of the Holy Spirit by the Fathers evidences the heartbeat of early New Testament Christianity close to the time of the Apostolic period. The results of this study do not agree with the statement, "The doctrine of the Holy Spirit was not made prominent till the fourth century,"²⁴ This statement may be true when applied to the later Ante-Nicene Fathers but it is certainly not true of the Apostolic Fathers.

DOCUMENTATION

1. Henry Bettenson, ed. and trans., The Early Christian Fathers (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 41.
2. Hereafter the Apostolic Fathers are meant when the term "Fathers" is used.
3. Kirsopp Lake, tr., The Apostolic Fathers, in The Loeb Classical Library, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959).

4. It is somewhat dubious that Clement wrote this. See Lake, op.cit., Vol. I, p. 126.
5. About 225.
6. There are approximately 75 references.
7. There are in the Old Testament over 60 references to the Divine Spirit.
8. Lake, op.cit., Vo. II, pp. 348, 349.
9. The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, ed. S. M. Jackson, Vol. V. (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1909) p. 331, "Holy Spirit."
10. Thus, this passage in I Clement 21:2 is suspect as to whether this is a valid quotation of an Old Testament reference to the term, "Spirit of the Lord."
11. The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, Vol. V, p. 331, "Holy Spirit."
12. The phrases are identical to this both in Didache 7:1 and 7:3, only that in the latter reference the Greek article, τοῦ, is omitted in the case of each member of the Trinity, concerning which it may be suggested that the author thought it was not necessary to repeat τοῦ in each case, since he had just included the formula in its full form a sentence or two earlier.
13. It is not necessary to infer on the basis of these two separate prepositional phrases that Ignatius is subordinating the Spirit to the Father and the Son, for in the same context there are two other prepositional phrases introduced separately by ἐν which are undoubtedly, to be understood as equally parallel thoughts: ἐν ἀρχῇ καὶ ἐν τέλει.
14. The text says, "Our God, Jesus the Christ, was conceived by Mary by the dispensation of God . . . of the Holy Spirit." There is a textual problem over the word θεοῦ, however. See Lake, op.cit., Vol. I, p. 192.
15. In Hermas Sim. 9:1,1 the Holy Spirit is called the Son of God, which expression reminds us of 2 Cor. 3:17. In 2 Clement 14:4 the Spirit is said to be Christ, and in Hermas Sim. 5:6,5 the Holy Spirit seems to be equivalent to the Son of God discussed in an earlier part of the section.
16. The statement reads, "Do nothing without the overseer, keep your flesh as the temple of God, love unity, flee divisions, become imitators of Jesus Christ, as also He was of His Father."
17. Observe the use again of the same prepositional phrase, διὰ τοῦ πνεύματος ἁγίου.
18. The illustrations and quotations are from Daniel, the Psalms, Jesus and Paul.
19. Compare I Corinthians 6:19.
20. Compare Acts 2:1ff. and Romans 5:5.

21. See also a similar expression regarding the fulness of the Spirit in Eph. 5:18
22. This may be interpreted to mean that the Holy Spirit both divinely inspired Psalm 34:11-17 and urges through it the living of a godly life.
23. The phrase is, "If you are obedient to the things which we have written through the Holy Spirit." It is possible to take the phrase διὰ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος with ὑπακούει which would then mean "if you are obedient through the Spirit," but the διὰ phrase is too far removed from ὑπακούει to make such a suggestion plausible.
24. The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia, Vol.V, p. 331, "Holy Spirit."