

The Scope of the Term "Spirit of God" in the Old Testament

M. R. WESTALL*

The term 'Spirit' is one which is frequently used when we wish to talk in a wide sense about God's presence or activity in the world, or within human nature. It is a natural word to use. After all it is merely the Latin word for breath or wind, and so appears an apt one for the pervasive yet mysterious presence of God throughout his creation. In fact in John 3:8 the double sense of the word is used for precisely this analogy. 'The wind (*pneuma*) blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit (*pneuma*).' A word which can be used in such a dual sense is an obvious one to employ when one wishes to talk of God's presence and activity in the work of his creation. It seems peculiarly appropriate when one wishes to speak most generally—dare one say most vaguely?—about God's relationship to the whole created world.

It is thus without surprise that one frequently finds the word being used in precisely this sense. Lindsay Dewar, for example, insists that Jesus 'clearly teaches that the Holy Spirit is at work at the natural level in every man'.¹ He regards it as a defect in St Paul's theology that he lays so little stress on this.² Bishop John Taylor, in his masterly book on the Holy Spirit, states that 'It is essential for our doctrine of the Holy Spirit to recognise that so much can be said about him which is universal. Just as he works anonymously through all the processes of creation, so to all men of all beliefs at all times he gives the unexpected opening of eyes. . .'.³ On this basis he can insist that 'in any dialogue between the Church and the world, or between Christians and men of other faiths, the Holy Spirit is speaking in both participants'.⁴ In much the same way, Fr James Dupuis has spoken of an approach to members of other religions which, 'will consist in discovering in their religious life the active presence and enlivening influence of the Holy Spirit'. He continues: 'The eschatological effusion of the Spirit which has resulted from Christ's glorification

* The Rev. M. R. Westall is Vice-Principal of Bishop's College, Calcutta.

¹ Lindsay Dewar, *The Holy Spirit and Modern Thought*, (New York: Harper, 1959), p. 19.

² *Ibid.*, p. 66.

³ J. V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God*, (London: SCM Press, 1972), p. 83.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

is not limited to the boundaries of the Christian Church; it extends to the whole universe'.⁵ R. C. Zaehner in a recent essay characterises the Holy Spirit as 'the God who is the inspiration of all religions and peculiar to none'.⁶ Such a point of view has received official recognition in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*: 'We must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all men, in a manner known to God alone, the possibility of being associated with the Paschal Mystery'.⁷

Such quotations could easily be multiplied. The thesis of this paper is simply this: that the use of the term 'Spirit of God' with such a wide reference is almost entirely lacking from the Bible.⁸ What, if anything, follows for our own thinking from that is a secondary matter and no more than hints will be offered. Some would no doubt hold that this is largely irrelevant to our way of thought. Since it is usually in the Old Testament that this usage is recognised, Zaehner, who speaks of the Reformation 'so unwisely resuscitating the Old Testament',⁹ would presumably decide that nothing at all follows. It is certainly in no way intended to suggest that God does not act outside the boundaries of his People; but simply that the concept of the Spirit of God is seldom, if ever, used in this context.

In the case of the New Testament, this statement is not too difficult to prove. As Hendry says, 'The New Testament contains no trace of the conception of the Spirit as the principle that animates the life of man as God's Creature. . . The Spirit of God is always a gift that comes from God and testifies to the human spirit of the salvation that God has wrought in Christ'.¹⁰ So for example in the passage already quoted, John 3:8, the term is applied, not to God's activity in general, but to his activity among human persons, particularly among those who respond to God. There are, of course, a few New Testament passages where life-giving is associated with the Spirit. But, even when this happens, the term is not used in a cosmic, but in a much more particular sense. In John 6:63, 'It is the Spirit that gives life, 'the flesh is of no avail', there is a quite specific application of *pneuma* to the human realm, and more particularly to the new life which comes through Christ. John, further, as C. K. Barrett says, 'is writing with the completed work of Christ (7:39) in mind, includ-

⁵ James Dupuis S. J., "The Cosmic Influence of the Holy Spirit and the Gospel Message", in *God's Word Among Men*, ed. George Gispert-Sauch, S. J., (Delhi: Vidyajyoti, 1973), p. 119.

⁶ R. C. Zaehner in *Truth and Dialogue: The Relationship between World Religions*, ed. J. Hick, (London: Sheldon Press, 1974), p. 18.

⁷ *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.5.

⁸ This insight I owe to a talk given by Professor C.F.D. Moule several years ago. He bears no responsibility for the manner in which I have tried to work it out.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁰ G. S. Hendry, *The Holy Spirit in Christian Theology*, (London: SGM Press, 1965), p. 29.

ing his ascension and the gift of the Spirit, and the discourse of this chapter is incomprehensible except from this standpoint'.¹¹ In Romans 8:11, the Spirit is brought into explicit connection with the resurrection. In the context of the whole Epistle, 'the Spirit is able to give life—because of justification, because, that is, man is now rightly related to God in whose gift the Spirit lives'.¹² In 1 Corinthians 15:45, 'The first man Adam became a living being, the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit', the Spirit is again specifically attached to Jesus as the last Adam. Life-giving does not refer to a general cosmic activity of making alive, but to the new life which has become available through Jesus. In 2 Corinthians 3:6, 'The written code kills, but the Spirit gives life', there is once again definitely a particular reference to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit who gives life to believers.¹³ Finally, perhaps, a mention should be made of John 4:24, 'God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in Spirit and truth'. This is not a reference to the omnipresence of God, who can therefore be worshipped anywhere. If that were the case, there would be an implied contrast between Spirit (which is not localised) and matter or body (which is localised). But John, like Paul, contrasts Spirit not with body, but with flesh (cf. John 3:6). Flesh, in John, refers to everything that belongs to the human realm, everything that is accessible to man. Thus 'God is Spirit' means, not that he is present everywhere, but that he is present in his own realm, to which man as such has no access.¹⁴

There does thus seem to be no scope for finding a general cosmic activity of the Spirit in the New Testament. Welch appears to be no more than reflecting the New Testament evidence when he claims, 'When the Christian speaks of the Holy Spirit, he does not refer to just any spirit or spirituality, certainly not to the spirit of man, or merely to a general immanence of God, but to a *Holy* Spirit consequent upon the event of objective revelation and reconciliation in Jesus Christ the Son'.¹⁵

Such a position might win fairly general acceptance. It is, after all, in the Old Testament rather than in the New that the Spirit of God is apparently used with a wider reference. In fact it is often taken for granted that the Spirit of God in the Old Testament is used in a cosmic sense. An examination of the evidence, however, suggests that this occurs very rarely, if at all.

A basic text here is clearly Genesis 1:2c, 'the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters'. The verse is, of course, a well

¹¹ C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, (London: SPCK, 1955), p. 251.

¹² C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, (London: A and C Black, 1957), p. 159.

¹³ See e.g. F. V. Filson, *Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 10, (New York: Abingdon, 1953), p. 306.

¹⁴ G. S. Hendry, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

¹⁵ *Theology Today*, VIII, 1, p. 29.

known and much discussed *crux interpretum*.¹⁶ The point at issue is whether this sentence continues the description of chaos in verse 2ab, or whether it describes a creative action of God upon the chaos. At first sight the case for translating *ruah 'elohim* as 'Spirit of God' is impressive. If *ruah* stands for wind as an element of chaos, then '*elohim*' cannot be translated as God. An attempt by Powis Smith to provide an alternative translation of 'mighty'¹⁷ has since been seriously questioned by Winton Thomas¹⁸ and others¹⁹ on the grounds that nowhere else in the Old Testament does *ruah 'elohim* bear this meaning. Secondly, it is pointed out that *ruah* appears, not as a created element, but as creating power in texts from approximately the same period as the Priestly source, Isa. 40:13, Ps. 33:6, Job 26:13.²⁰ It is also argued that the translation of *ruah* as 'Spirit' best explains the meaning of the unusual Hebrew word *merahepheth*, which qualifies it, translated as 'brooded' in the AV, as 'was moving' in the RSV.²¹

Nevertheless, the contrary evidence, to say the least, throws this interpretation into question, and it has been rejected among others by May,²² Powis Smith,²³ Orlinsky,²⁴ Speiser,²⁵ Peters,²⁶ Kilian,²⁷ Von

¹⁶ For a survey of the history of interpretation of this text to the date of writing, see K. Smoronski, 'Et Spiritus Dei Ferebatur Super Aquas', *Biblica*, 6 (1925), pp. 140-156; 275-293; 361-395.

¹⁷ J. M. P. Smith, "The Syntax and Meaning of Genesis 1:1-3," *American Journal of Semitic Languages*, 44 (1927-28), pp. 109-115; 45 (1928-29), pp. 212-3.

¹⁸ D. Winton Thomas, "A Consideration of Some Unusual Ways of Expressing the Superlative in Hebrew", *Vetus Testamentum*, 3 (1953), pp. 209-224.

¹⁹ B. S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament*, (London: SCM Press, 1960), p. 36; Edward J. Young, "The Interpretation of Genesis 1:2", *Westminster Theological Journal*, 23, (1960-61), p. 172; L. Neve, *The Spirit of God in the Old Testament*, (Tokyo: Seibunsha, 1972), pp. 67-8.

²⁰ Neve, *op. cit.*, pp. 68f; Childs, *op. cit.*, p. 32 says that "The Priestly Writer already had the example of Second Isaiah to follow"; W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, Vol. 2, (ET, London: SCM Press, 1967), refers to the 'patent dependence' of Ps. 33 on the priestly account of creation.

²¹ Neve, *op. cit.*, pp. 69f; Young, *op. cit.*, p. 178; cf. Childs *op. cit.*, p. 36, n. 2 for a philological note on this word. Others have simply assumed the translation 'Spirit of God' without argument: e.g. C. Armerding "The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament". *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 92 (1935), pp. 277-278.

²² H. May, "The Creation of Light in Genesis 1:1-3". *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 43 (1939). pp. 203-204.

²³ Smith, *op. cit.*

²⁴ H. Orlinsky, "The Plain Meaning of Ruach in Gen. 1:2", *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 48 (1957-58) pp. 174-182.

²⁵ E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1964), p. 3.

²⁶ J. P. Peters, "The Wind of God", *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 30 (1911), pp. 44-54; 33 (1914), pp. 81-86.

²⁷ R. Kilian "Gen. 1:2 und die Urgötter von Hermopolis", *Vetus Testamentum*, 16 (1966), pp. 420-438.

Rad²⁸ and K. Galling.²⁹ Indeed the translation of *ruah* as wind in Genesis 1:2 has an impressive pedigree in the history of interpretation, beginning with the Septuagint and Targum Onqelos.³⁰ There is no exact parallel in the Old Testament to *ruah 'elohim* in the sense of 'mighty wind'. There are, however, several clear examples of '*elohim* being used as a superlative.³¹ For example, in Psalm 68:16 (English v. 15), where *har 'elohim* (i.e. mighty mountain) is applied to Mount Bashan in contrast with Mount Zion, which is God's chosen mountain.³² In Psalm 36:7 (English v. 6) '*el* is used in the same way. The whole stress here is on height and depth and *harere-'el* must therefore be translated as 'the highest mountains'. In Jonah 3:3, Nineveh is described as a city, *gedhola 'elohim*, literally 'great unto God', which can only mean 'exceedingly great'; in Psalm 80:11 (English v. 10) '*arze-'el* means 'mighty' or 'lofty cedars'. Other examples of the use of divine names as superlatives could be cited.³³ Thus, although it can be agreed that 'mighty wind' is not the usual meaning of *ruah 'elohim*, it is not an impossible rendering if the context appears to demand it on other grounds.

The texts which are cited as parallels to Gen. 1:2 will be dealt with below and so may be omitted from consideration here. It is enough to say that the precise force of *ruah* in them is not sufficiently clear for them to determine the interpretation of Genesis 1:2. In fact they have normally been interpreted in the light of Genesis 1:2, so that to use them as evidence here is to beg the question.

With regard to the term *merahepheth* which qualifies *ruah 'elohim* and is used by Neve to support the translation 'Spirit of God', the opposite seems to be the case.³⁴ This verb is used only three times in the Old Testament. In Jer. 23:9 it occurs in the line which the RSV renders 'all my bones shake'. In Deut. 32:11, it is used of an eagle hovering over its young as they fly. The Septuagint translates this by *epephereto*, a word which occurs in the passive in only one other passage, Gen. 7:18, when it describes the ark as being borne upon the waters. The Targums all render *merahepheth* by some form of the root *rahaph*, 'to blow', showing that the thought of *ruah* as 'wind' is in the background, even when they translate it as 'Spirit'. Further, it is argued that the association with Deut. 32:11, where

²⁸ G. Von Rad, *Genesis*, (London: SCM Press, 1961), p. 47.

²⁹ K. Galling, "Der Charakter der Chaosschilderung in Gen.1:2", *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 47 (1950), pp. 145-157.

³⁰ Orlinsky, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

³¹ For these examples, see J. M. P. Smith *op. cit.*

³² This particular example tells against the argument of Winton Thomas, (*op. cit.* p. 215) that the divine name, even when used as a superlative, invariably retains its religious force. In this case where *har 'elohim* is being directly contrasted with the mountain of God the religious sense can scarcely be to the fore.

³³ See J. M. P. Smith, "The use of Divine Names as Superlatives", *American Journal of Semitic Languages*, 45 (1928-29), pp. 212-3.

³⁴ See especially Smith, *op. cit.*

merahepheth qualifies an eagle, suggests by analogy that *ruah* in Gen. 1:2 similarly possessed wings, thus alining it with *ruah*, wind, to which wings are ascribed in Ps. 18:11 and 104:3.³⁵ In any case the root *rahaph* clearly refers to a vigorous motion in Jer. 23:9 and Deut. 32:11, so that there is a presumption that the same is true of Gen. 1:2, namely, that it refers to the hard blowing of the wind.³⁶

Several other arguments support the translation 'wind' in Gen. 1:2. First, syntactically verse 2c belongs to the description of chaos as some opponents of 'wind' recognise.³⁷ Secondly, if *ruah* refers to the divine Spirit, it is remarkable that it plays no further part in the rest of the process of creation.³⁸ Thirdly, this would mean that *ruah* here corresponds to its use in other parts of the cosmogony. In Gen. 3:8 *leruah hayyom* must mean 'towards the breeze (i.e. cool) of the day', the sense of 'Spirit' being precluded. So the Septuagint translates it here as *to deilanon*. In Gen. 6:17 and 7:15 (P) *ruah hayyim* means 'breath of life', corresponding to *nishemath hayyim* in Gen. 2:7 (J).³⁹ Fourthly, it has been suggested that *bohu* in Gen. 1:2 is related to Baau in Phoenician mythology, who was the goddess of the night and wife of Kolpia the wind; thus again providing a hint for the translation of *ruah* by 'wind' in Gen. 1:2.⁴⁰ Finally, the Hebrew *tehom* (deep) in Gen. 1:2 is etymologically related to the Akkadian Tiamat. Thus several commentators see a connection between the seven winds used by Marduk in his struggle with the dragon, Tiamat, and the use of *ruah* in Gen. 1:2.⁴¹

It can readily be agreed that not one of these arguments is by itself conclusive. Cumulatively, however, they do amount to a strong case for *ruah 'elohim* meaning simply 'a mighty wind' in Gen. 1:2, referring to an almighty hurricane which played upon the surface of the primeval chaos. At least they preclude the use of this verse to form the basis of the doctrine of the Spirit in the Old Testament. Thus the key verse for the idea of the Creator Spirit in the Old Testament is removed from the reckoning. What else is there to support such an idea? The answer would seem to be that there is not very much.

³⁵ Cf. P. Van Imschoot, "L'Esprit de Jahvé, Source de Vie dans L' A. T.," *Revue Biblique*, 44 (1935), . 490.

³⁶ Cf. Paul Jöuon, "Quelques Remarques sur Genèse 1:2", *Recherches de Science Religieuse*, 16 (1926), pp. 304-307. For a contrary view, see, e.g., W. H. McClellan, "The Meaning of *Ruah 'Elohim*", *Biblica*, 15 (1934), pp. 524f.

³⁷ Childs, *op. cit.*, p. 35; Neve, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

³⁸ J. Skinner, *Genesis*, p. 18.

³⁹ Orlinsky, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

⁴⁰ See L. Waterman, "Cosmogonic Affinities in Genesis 1:2", *American Journal of Semitic Languages*, 43 (1927), pp. 177f. cf. Childs, *op. cit.*, p. 33, n.3.

⁴¹ E.g. H.G. May, "The Creation of Light in Genesis 1:3-5", *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 43 (1939), pp. 203-204; Orlinsky, *op. cit.*, p. 177; Speiser; *op. cit.*, p. 3; Peters, "The Wind of God", *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 30 (1911), pp. 52-54.

(1) Psalm 104:30 'When thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created'. It is true that the verb 'create' here (*bara*) is the verb which is used of God, and God alone, creating. However, the comparison with v. 29 makes it natural to interpret this as the vitalising of what has already been created, the in-breathing of God's breath of life into the animal frame. Thus *ruah* here is being used synonymously with *neshamah* (breath) in Gen. 2:7, where this distinction between original creation and subsequent vitalising is clear and explicit. Neve argues that the different modifying pronouns in verses 29 (*ruham*; RSV 'their breath') and 30 (*ruhekha*; RSV 'your Spirit'), points to a distinction between the creative Spirit of God and the life-breath in the nostril of every creature.⁴² This is not so. As Lys says, 'Cette variation sur les suffixes possessifs montre bien que (*ruach*) ne désigne pas une entité—qui serait ou divine ou créaturelle—mais exprime la précarité de la vie humaine manifestée (en tant que vie et en tant que précarité) dans le souffle de la respiration'.⁴³

(2) Psalm 33:6 'By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath (*ruah*) of his mouth.' At first sight this does appear to support a creationist pneumatology and Neve enlists it for this purpose. It 'makes explicit what was seen to be implicit in Gen. 1:2 . . . The Spirit of Yahweh participates in the creation. It is the power whereby he created the heaven and its hosts'.⁴⁴ It is notable, as we mentioned earlier, that Gen. 1:2, which was earlier interpreted by Neve with the help of Ps. 33:6, is now in its turn being used to assist in the interpretation of Ps. 33:6. A closer look at the passage, however, suggests that this interpretation is anything but obvious. The plain parallelism of the verse throws it into doubt. 'Breath' or 'Spirit of his mouth' is paralleled by 'the word of the Lord.' It is therefore natural to understand 'breath of his mouth' as the breath with which the divine command is spoken, rather than to take it in a more immanent sense as the actual activity of God in creating. The idea of creation is thus parallel to Gen. 1:3 ff., where the world is created purely by divine fiat. So Eaton comments, 'The breath . . . of his mouth is, as it were, the material of the word and hence an equivalent term';⁴⁵ and Lys speaks of 'La parole, articulée par le souffle'.⁴⁶

⁴² Neve, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

⁴³ D. Lys, '*Ruach*', *Le Souffle dans L'Ancien Testament*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962), p. 287.

⁴⁴ Neve, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

⁴⁵ J. H. Eaton, *Psalms*, (London: SCM Press, 1967), p. 99.

⁴⁶ Lys, *op. cit.*, p. 279.

- (3) Psalm 139:7 'Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?' This text again cannot be used as the basis of a doctrine of the Spirit, since it is only, as the parallel shows, 'a reverent circumlocution for God himself'.⁴⁷ This is a usage which appears elsewhere in the Old Testament, for example, Isa. 63:10.
- (4) Job 26:13 'By his wind (*beruho*) the heavens were made fair; his hand pierced the fleeing serpent'. 13a means literally 'by his wind/Spirit the heavens are brightness (*shiprah*)'. Some commentators note that the Akkadian word for net (*sipuru*) is similar to this obscure word, which occurs in Ps. 56:8 in the sense of 'bag' or 'skin bottle' as a receptacle for tears. Then *shamayim* (heavens) is divided as *sham yam*, so that 13a is translated as 'By his wind he put the sea (in) a bag'.⁴⁸ This, however, depends on a number of conjectures. The normal interpretation which regards this as a reference to the wind which blows away the clouds and brings the clear sky is to be preferred.⁴⁹
- (5) Job 33:4 'The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life'. This verse, which at first glance appears unquestionably to refer to the Creator Spirit, turns out on closer examination to offer no help to a cosmic interpretation of *ruah 'elohim*. Spirit and breath occur in parallel lines earlier in the Elihu speech, at 32:8: 'It is the Spirit in a man, the breath of the Almighty, that makes him understand'. This clearly refers, not to something which every man possesses in virtue of his being alive, but to a particular ability which is conferred on certain people by the Spirit (cf. Gen. 41:38; Exod. 31:3; Num. 27:18; Isa. 11:2). Ch. 33:4 must be interpreted in the light of this. 'Elihu is not here saying that he is like all men in having the breath of God in him (cf. Gen. 2:7), but that he in particular is inspired by God, so that his words are not alone sincere, but of special value'.⁵⁰
- (6) Job 34:14 f. 'If he should take back his Spirit to himself, and gather to himself his breath, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust'. This verse is strikingly similar to Ps. 104:30, the scope now being restricted to man, as opposed to all creatures. Thus the same remarks apply. Here again (as in Isa. 42:5 also) *ruah* is paralleled

⁴⁷ W. S. McCullough, *Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 4, (New York: Abingdon, 1955), p. 714.

⁴⁸ M. H. Pope, *Job*, (New York: Doubleday, 1965), p. 166.

⁴⁹ H. H. Rowley, *Job*, (London: Nelson, 1970), p. 219.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 269 cf. Pope, *op. cit.*, p. 216: 'Elihu apparently means to suggest that he has the charismatic gift of divine wisdom which was deficient in his elders who were unable to confute Job successfully'.

by *neshamah* and reflects the conception of Gen. 2:7. It refers, not to the Creator Spirit, but to the vitalising of what has already been created. As Lys asserts, 'Le parallèle entre (*ruah*) et (*neshamah*) exclut qu'il puisse être question d'entité.'⁵¹

- (7) Isaiah 40:13 'Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord, or as his counsellor has instructed him?' The Septuagint translates v. 13a '*is egno noun kuriou*', thus interpreting *ruah* as 'mind'. This is rejected, for example, by Muilenburg who understands the passage to mean God sending forth his Spirit 'as an active and life-giving force to do his work and achieve his purpose'.⁵² If this were the case, there would be a reference here to the Spirit as the agent of God in creation. It is more likely, however, that the Septuagint translation reflects the meaning more accurately. The verb *takhan* ('directed' in RSV) in its *piel* form (as here and in v. 12) means to 'measure' or 'to regulate'. In its *qal* form it appears three times in the Old Testament, Prov. 16:2, 21:2 and 24:12. Each time it is used in the sense of weighing the heart or the Spirit. 'Weighing the heart' in all probability reflects the action of the Egyptian god, Horus, who weighed the hearts of the dead before Osiris, the judge. Thus when Second Isaiah uses the expression *tachan ruah*, he is both showing that he is familiar with the wisdom school in which *lebh* and *ruah* were used interchangeably, and also with the Egyptian myth in which 'heart' stood for man's inner will and intelligence, 'weighed' at his death. Thus, by using *ruah*, he is pointing not to the agent of God in creation, but to the intelligent centre of the being of God himself. The words 'instructed', 'enlightenment', 'taught', 'knowledge', 'understanding', which are used in the immediate context also serve to confirm this interpretation.⁵³ Here again a reference to the Spirit of God in the cosmic-creational sense for which we have been looking seems to be precluded.

Thus the Old Testament knows very little of the use of the term 'Spirit' with the wide reference which we noted at the outset. There are some partial exceptions to this in apocryphal works, but even here the exceptions are few. Judith 16:14, 'Thou didst speak and they were made. Thou didst send forth thy Spirit and it formed them', appears to be a paraphrase of Psalm 33. But here there is a subtle alteration away from creation by the divine Word and towards

⁵¹ Lys, *op. cit.*, p. 314.

⁵² J. Muilenburg, *Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 10, (New York: Abingd n, 1956), p. 437.

⁵³ Neve, *op. cit.*, pp. 98 ff.

the Creator Spirit: here the term 'formed' or 'buildded' is applied to the Spirit's work. Similarly, II Baruch, the Syriac Apocalypse, 21:4 reads: 'O Thou that hast made the earth, hear me, that has fixed the firmament by the word, and hast made firm the height of the heaven by the Spirit'. Here again is the idea of actually building or making firm with the Spirit. More characteristic of this literature is the idea of the Spirit as pervading the world, rather than actually creating it. This appears, for example, in the Wisdom of Solomon 1:7, 'The Spirit of the Lord has filled the world'; 12:1 'Thy immortal Spirit is in all things'. The Dead Sea Scrolls also use the word for Spirit fairly frequently and here too the scope of the word is similarly limited. W. D. Davies writes, 'The limitation of the term *ruah* to human and moral realities, without reference to the created order, is largely the case with Paul and the Scroll.'⁵⁴

The use of the term 'Spirit' in a cosmic sense is largely, if not entirely, absent from the Old Testament. How then is the term used? Briefly, it is used to describe God's activity among men, chiefly in manifestations of extraordinary power or ability, and mainly among the men of his own people, Israel. This is so obvious and so well-known that it requires little documentation. The Spirit descends upon the Judges, giving them ability and authority to lead, particularly at moments of crisis (Judges 3:10; 6:34; 12:29). Samson's enormous strength is ascribed to the invasion of the Spirit (Judges 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14). The Spirit gives similar abilities to Saul, when he delivers Jabesh-gilead (1 Sam. 11:6). After his disobedience, however, we are told that 'the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil Spirit from the Lord tormented him' (1 Sam. 16:14). Meanwhile, David in his turn has received the Spirit (1 Sam. 16:13). The presence and activity of the Spirit is also manifested through prophetic gifts. It is supposed to remove Elijah from one place to another (1 Kings 18:12). Elisha is said to inherit a double share of Elijah's Spirit (2 Kings 1:9f). Among the classical prophets, the Spirit is spoken of most in Ezekiel. His ecstatic visions are due to the Spirit's influence (8:3; 37:1). Another unusual manifestation of the Spirit's presence and power is in the craftsmanship of Bezalel, which enables him to make the tabernacle (Exod. 35:31).

It is interesting to note that only rarely is the Spirit associated with moral qualities. The chief exceptions here are the gifts with which the ideal ruler is endowed in Isaiah 11, and in Micah 3:8: 'But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord, and with justice and might to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin'. Here the Spirit of God is associated with the courage which enables the prophet to deliver as unpopular message.

⁵⁴ W. D. Davies, "Paul on Flesh and Spirit", in *The Scrolls and the New Testament*, ed., K. Stendahl, (London: SCM Press, 1958), p. 177.

This list is far from complete. But it is sufficient to substantiate the point: the Spirit is used of God revealing himself among human beings in unusual ways. Further, in nearly every use the Spirit is manifested among Israelites. The only exception to this rule, I think, is the case of the prophet Balaam with whom the Spirit of God is associated (Num. 24:2). Yet, this exception in effect serves only to confirm this view. The Spirit of God so overpowers Balaam, that he can only bless Israel, not curse. On this one occasion the Spirit does not act through an Israelite, but it acts for Israel. Even if a broader view is taken, and cases in which exceptional powers are granted without the Spirit being mentioned are taken into account, the same holds true. Cyrus is referred to as 'his anointed'⁵⁵ (Isa. 45:1). 'Only here in the Old Testament is the ascription applied to a foreign king or to anyone outside the covenant people'.⁵⁶ Cyrus himself, on the Cyrus Cylinder, says that Marduk 'called Cyrus, King of Anshan. He nominated him to be ruler over all'.⁵⁷ But for Second Isaiah Cyrus's world empire is only incidental to the main goal of his call, which is the restoration of Israel.

Thus we are suggesting that the Spirit of God in the Old Testament is seldom, if ever, used for God's cosmic activity as Creator or World-Maker. It is used almost exclusively for his activity in the human realm, and further almost exclusively among his own people, Israel. The Spirit acts within the Covenant. It is only in the Greek Apocrypha where *pneuma*, *sophia* and *logos* are used almost interchangeably for God's all-pervading presence that a change occurs: Here *pneuma* does become a general word of mediation between God and the world, though even here it is seldom used to mean the Creator Spirit.

Two other points about the Spirit of God in the Old Testament are relevant for us. They are much less controversial than the point this paper has been trying to make thus far and so can be dealt with more briefly. The first is that, although the Spirit acts almost exclusively among mankind, nevertheless, it remains God's Spirit. Though the Spirit is immanent in its activity, nevertheless, it stands for transcendence.

It is necessary here to distinguish a different and separate use of the term *ruah* in the Old Testament. It can be used, in a manner approaching the modern psychological sense, of a man's essential self, the centre of his personality. Thus Pharaoh's spirit is troubled after his dream (Gen. 41:8); Ahab's spirit is vexed, when he is unable to obtain Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21:5); God stirs up the spirit of Pul, King of Assyria (1 Chron. 5:26), or Cyrus (Ezra 1:1) or Zerub-

⁵⁵ MT *Limeshiho*; LXX to *christo*; Vulg. *christo meo*.

⁵⁶ J. Muilenburg, *Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 5, (New York: Abingdon, 1956), p. 522.

⁵⁷ D. Winton Thomas (ed), *Documents from Old Testament Times*, (London: Nelson, 1958), p. 92.

babel (Haggai 1:14). With these can be compared the expression 'the God of the spirits of all flesh' (Num. 16:22; 27:16). In all these cases, *ruah* means little more than the person himself, though fairly frequently the person in his openness to the invasion of God's power. Thus more than one modern study of *ruah* in the Old Testament use as the main divisions for their classification *ruah* in man, whether breath or spirit, and *ruah* of God.⁵⁸

There is the use of *ruah* with reference to man. But Spirit, used of God, is the very antithesis of man. It is summed up in Isa. 31:3, 'The Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses are flesh and not spirit'. Spirit stands for transcendent divine power, and in contrast with flesh (*basar*), which in the Old Testament refers to man in his weakness and transitoriness (Isa. 40:6). The activity of God's Spirit is to be recognised chiefly among men. Nevertheless it is God's Spirit. It is among men only because God put it there and it remains only so long as he leaves it there. This is seen in Num. 11:24 ff., where God takes some of the Spirit that was on Moses and puts it upon the seventy elders. Thus when Samson's hair is cut, or when Saul is disobedient, there is nothing which they can do to preserve the presence of the Spirit which had earlier descended upon them (Judges 17:20; 1 Sam. 16:14). In the Elijah stories, the operation of the Spirit tends to be also capricious. It is certainly not within Elijah's control (1 Kings 18:12). Eichrodt points out that it is the false prophets who apparently feel themselves to be autonomous possessors of the Spirit (e.g. 1 Kings 22:24; Jer. 23:21, 30 ff.). The true prophet does not control his gift. 'Often enough he is not in a position to give the awaited answer—a sign that he is dependent on the divine power which alone can equip him for his function.'⁵⁹ Even external aids to ecstasy, which might appear as man's effort to control the Spirit, 'simply place a man in the right disposition to receive the Spirit, which is absolutely autonomous in its working and may even come upon particular men of God quite unexpectedly'.⁶⁰ The Spirit, as Jacob says, is 'primarily in the Old Testament the prerogative *kat' exochēn* of God and his instrument of revelation and action *par excellence*'.⁶¹

Secondly, almost absent from the Old Testament is the idea of the Spirit dwelling in every member of God's people. Here again it is necessary to distinguish the use of *ruah* as a parallel to *neshamah*, indicating simply breath, life, 'le souffle vital; sans elle il n'y aurait aucune vie sur la terre'.⁶² This usage occurs, for example, in Gen.

⁵⁸ So J. Scheepers, *Die Gees Van God en Die Gees Van Die Mens in Die ou Testament*, (Amsterdam: J. H. Kok, 1954); D. Lys, *op. cit.*; L. Neve, *op. cit.*

⁵⁹ W. Eichrodt, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1 (London: SCM Press, 1961), p. 319.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 318.

⁶¹ E. Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1958), p. 123.

⁶² P. Van Imschoot, "L'Esprit de Jahvé, Source de Vie dans L' Ancien Testament", *Revue Biblique*, 44 (1933), p. 486.

6:17, 'all flesh in which is the breath of life' (*ruah hayyim*); Gen. 7:22, 'everything . . . in whose nostrils was the breath of life died'; Isa. 42:5, 'Thus says God, the Lord, . . . who gives breath to the people upon (earth) and spirit to those who walk in it.' In the last case the parallelism between *neshamah* and *ruah* is explicit. But the idea of *ruah* as that which comes from God as a gift to every member of his people and draws them closer to him is almost totally absent. The nearest the Old Testament comes to this is in Ps. 51:13 (English v. 11), 'Take not thy Holy Spirit from me'. As McCullough says of this, 'In his conception of the function of the Spirit of God, the psalmist is moving away from the religion of the Old Testament to that of the New Testament'.⁶³ The nearest parallel to this is Ps. 143:10. Apart from these instances, however, a general outpouring of the Spirit on the whole people of God, the fulfilment of Moses' longing that all of God's people might become prophets (Num. 11:29 'J'), is an eschatological hope. It appears in Isa. 32:15, (probably a secondary passage), in Isa. 44:3; Ezek. 39:29 and Zech. 12:10. It is thus a late idea within the Old Testament. As McKenzie says, 'It is only in later literature that the Spirit is diffused upon a whole people; this is an event of the messianic age'.⁶⁴ The most obvious example of this general eschatological outpouring of the Spirit is Joel 2:28 f., to which Acts 2:17 f. refers back. Here the fulfilment of Moses' hope is promised in a general outpouring of the Spirit upon 'all flesh'. This latter term would by itself mean all mankind, as it does in Isa. 40:5, but the following possessives, 'your sons and your daughters' and so on, show that the phrase here means all Israel.⁶⁵

Thus in the Old Testament, the Spirit of God means, predominantly at least, the transcendent power of God at work immanently among certain selected individuals of his chosen people. It is not necessarily a moral power, but it is directed towards the fulfilment of his purposes for his people.

What change comes over the term in the New Testament? First, as we have already anticipated, the New Testament regards the promise of a general outpouring of the Spirit in the messianic age as having been fulfilled. Acts 2:17 f. sees the fulfilment of the Joel prophecy in the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The Spirit is thus no longer confined to certain exceptional or selected individuals. Indeed you cannot be a member of the Christian community without having the Spirit. 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' Paul asks the disciples at Ephesus (Acts 19:2). This is essential for membership. 'Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him' (Romans 8:9). If one does

⁶³ W. S. McCullough, *Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 4, (New York: Abingdon, 1955), p. 271.

⁶⁴ J. L. McKenzie, *Second Isaiah*, (New York: Doubleday, 1968), p. 63.

⁶⁵ J. A. Thompson, *Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 6, (New York: Abingdon, 1956), p. 752.

not have the Spirit one cannot be a Christian, for 'all were made to drink of one Spirit' (1 Cor. 12:13). In this respect, then, the scope of the term Spirit in the New Testament has broadened: it includes all the People of God.

But in another respect the scope of the term has broadened not at all. Even more consistently than the Old Testament, the New Testament reserves the term Spirit for God's action among his own People, that is, within the Christian Church. This is a particularly striking fact. Cosmic functions are, of course, attributed to Christ and wisdom (*sophia*) and word (*logos*) are associated with him in these functions (e.g. Col. 1:28; 2:3; John 1:1). But, whereas in late Jewish apocryphal literature word and Spirit are practically interchangeable, in the New Testament word and wisdom and Christ are all used with a cosmic reference, while Spirit is confined to the Christian community.⁶⁶ If the Spirit is creative at all in the New Testament, it is creative with respect to the new creation, the creation not of the universe, nor of mankind, but of the company of the redeemed (e.g. Gal. 4:29). Fr. Dupuis has argued that the New Testament does presuppose a universal presence of the Spirit. The Spirit is active outside the Christian communities in bringing about man's re-creation.⁶⁷ But the passages which he cites are hardly convincing. Some do not refer to the Spirit (e.g. Eph. 1:10; Col. 1:20); some concern men who have come or are coming to faith in Christ (e.g. Eph. 2:18). The meaning of St Paul's 'Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom' (2 Cor. 3:17) is strained to agree with him: this does not necessarily mean, 'Where there is freedom, there the Spirit of the Lord is'. Thus the only exceptions to these restrictions are in the Lucan infancy narratives, in which the Spirit is used with reference to the birth of Jesus (Luke 1:35), to Elizabeth (1:41) and to Simeon (2:25). Even these can hardly be called exceptions, since the Spirit is working among the people of the Old dispensation towards the fulfilment of his purposes in the New.

Such, then, so far as I can judge, is the scope of the term 'Spirit of God'. What significance, if any, does this hold for us today? Here only a tentative suggestion can be put forward. In Christian discourse there is the continual need to reconcile the particular with the universal; the particularity of the revelation in Christ with the universality of God's presence among mankind; the centrality, indeed finality, of Christ in the experience of the Christian with the genuineness of the experience of God by other men. These two poles can be related in a number of different ways. To take only some recent formulations of major theologians, there is on the one hand the decisively negative attitude towards other religions of the neo-orthodox theologians. Brunner, for example, states: 'A real Christian faith is impossible apart from the conviction that here, and here alone, is

⁶⁶ I owe this point to Professor Moule, in the talk mentioned in n. 8.

⁶⁷ Dupuis, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-125.

salvation.⁶⁸ Tillich, more openly, distinguishes between the spiritual community in its latent and manifest forms.⁶⁹ Macquarrie advocates a tension between commitment to a particular tradition and openness to others.⁷⁰ Today it is popular to emphasise the universal, that which is common to all. A verse such as Amos 9:7, which suggests that other peoples besides the Israelites had enjoyed parallel experiences, is very popular. Any hint of particularity is readily condemned as sectarian. So Zaehner writes, 'The enemy of us all is Satan, the principle of division, dissociation and discord.'⁷¹

The importance of openness to other faiths cannot be questioned. A retreat into isolation and arrogance would be disastrous and it is certainly not desired to advocate that. Rather this examination of the scope of the word *ruah* leads to a plea for accuracy in the use of the terms employed in discussion and dialogue. It is not, perhaps, necessary to restrict terms in contemporary use to their scope within the Bible, but at least an awareness of this is necessary. The scope of the terms *ruah 'elohim* in the Old Testament and *pneuma* in the New Testament might suggest that these are among the less helpful in the search for common ground.

⁶⁸ E. Brunner, *The Mediator*, (London: Lutterworth, 1934), p. 201.

⁶⁹ P. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, (London: Nisbet, 1968), pp. 162 ff.

⁷⁰ J. Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, (London: SCM Press, 1966), pp. 155 ff; *Christian Unity and Christian Diversity*, (London: SCM Press, 1975), pp. 102 ff.

⁷¹ R. C. Zaehner, *op. cit.*, p. 18.