

## Origin of the Spirit of Man

*Maurice W. Lusk, III*

Throughout Scripture God's movement or presence in our world is identified with the expression *ruach Elohim* (spirit of God). From the earliest writings of Scripture we read that the *ruach* (spirit/breath) of God moved upon the face of the deep to effect the creative activity that brought about the heavens and the earth (Gen 1:1-2).

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. <sup>2</sup> Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God (Ha Ruach Elohim) was hovering over the waters.*

In Gen 2:7, we are told, "the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living soul." Then in Gen 3:8, when man sensed the presence of God in the garden, the Hebrew text says, "he heard the sound of God moving in the *ruach* (breeze, wind) of the day."

*Then the man and his wife heard the sound of Yahweh Elohim as he was walking in the garden in the cool (ruach) of the day, and they hid from Yahweh Elohim among the trees of the garden. <sup>9</sup>But Yahweh Elohim called to the man, "Where are you?" <sup>10</sup>He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."*

In the earliest written tradition of man's knowledge of God we see God associated with the idea of *ruach* (wind, breath, or spirit) and that his presence in man's realm of existence (our space-time dimension of existence) is experienced as "spirit" (*ruach*). Not only is God identified as spirit, man is also identified with the term "spirit" (*ruach*). Job's comments concerning the nature of man as a being

possessing breath and, therefore, spirit (*ruach*), is of great importance to our understanding of who we are in relationship to God. Job says,

*Your hands shaped me and made me. Will you now turn and destroy me? <sup>9</sup>Remember that **you molded me like clay**. Will you **now turn me to dust again**? <sup>10</sup>Did you not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese, <sup>11</sup>clothe me with skin and flesh and knit me together with bones and sinews? <sup>12</sup>**You gave me life and showed me kindness, and in your providence watched over my spirit** (Job 10:8-12).*

*. . . as long as **I have life** within me, **the breath of God** in my nostrils, <sup>4</sup>my lips will not speak wickedness, and my tongue will utter no deceit (Job 27:3-4).*

*I thought, "Age should speak; advanced years should teach wisdom."  
<sup>8</sup>**But it is the spirit in a man, the breath of the Almighty**, that gives him understanding. It is not only the old who are wise, not only the aged who understand what is right (Job 32:7-8).*

***The spirit of God** has made me, and **the breath of the Almighty** has given me life.(Job 33:4).*

*If he set his heart upon man, if he gather unto himself **his spirit and his breath**; **15** all flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust (Job 34:14-15).*

In each of these references we have a parallelism; i.e., two different expressions are used in parallel to say the same thing with emphasis resulting from the repetition. In the parallelism of Job 10:12, we have the life of man and the spirit of man paralleled; in 27:3, we have man's life and the breath of the Almighty in parallel; in 32:8, we have the spirit of man and the breath of the Almighty in parallel; in 33:4, we have the spirit of God and the breath of the Almighty in parallel. Thus, it is God as spirit who has made man, and it is God's breath that brought man to life. So, it is God as *Ruach Elohim* who has created our world as we read in Psalms 33:6, "By the word of *Yahweh* were the heavens made; and all the host of them by **the breath of his mouth**." He created man in his image, interacts with man, and moves in this space-time dimension we call our world by means of *ruach* (spirit).

All of this may appear somewhat complex but it must be acknowledged that the terminology and imagery used here equates one expression with the other making them say the same thing. Why would God choose this terminology and the imagery associated with it to reveal something of himself to man? Within this question lies an investigation that may reveal more to us about who we are than is obvious at first consideration.

## Spirit and Soul (*Ruach* and *Nephesh*)

God has revealed to man that he created him and gave him life or conscious existence (made him a living soul). The Hebrew word for "soul" in the Gen 2:7 text is *nephesh*, which implies life as the conscious existence of a being having breath. God formed the man (*ha adam*) of the dust of the ground (*ha adamah*), breathed into him the breath (*neshamash*) of life (*chay* - creaturely existence), and he became a living soul (*nephesh*). The Hebrew term *nephesh* tells us that man was given conscious existence; however, *nephesh* is not the word for spirit, rather it has to do with a living, breathing entity, but is this not the same as the word spirit; *ruach*, implies something of God that *nephesh* does not.

It is important to note that God is consistently referred to in the Hebrew Scriptures as "*ruach*" (spirit)" but never as "*nephesh*" (soul/life). Man experiences conscious existence as a *nephesh*, he is a "living soul" or better, he is a "living being," in that he has within him "the breath of life." But, he is more, in that in him is also the presence of *ruach*, the word used to identify God himself. God is characterized in Scripture as interacting with man in much the same way it is associated with God. In fact, when *ruach* is used of man, something of significance is being said that could not be as communicated by the term *nephesh* (soul). This "something" has to do with what man has most in common with God.

## The Spirit and Moral Conscience

The psalmist identifies the moral consciousness of man as that which dwells within the spirit of man, "Blessed is the man whose sin *Yahweh* does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit (Psalms 32:2). Man's purity of heart, his steadfast faith, and the joy of salvation, are somehow related to the Holy Spirit. The psalmist writes,

*Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. 11 Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me (Psalm 51:10-12).*

An interesting statement is found in Proverb 20:27. The exact translation of the Hebrew text is debated, but the most literal reading is something like, "The lamp of *Yahweh* [is] the breath of man, searching his inmost being." The Greek Septuagint translates the Hebrew text, "The light of the Lord is the breath of men, which searches the inward [being]." This is a text of interest in the study of inspiration; but for our purposes it is the singling out of "the breath of man" as that which relates man to God or that which is the "thin place" (to use a Celtic metaphor) where God is most sensed in one's consciousness. This may be a uniquely "Irish way of seeing," and that is very possible with this author.

## The Spirit Returns to God

One of the most familiar texts of the wisdom writings, as relates to what happens to the spirit of man when the body experiences death, is the twelfth chapter of Ecclesiastes. Here we have a poetic description of the day of death. Beginning with verse 5 we read of the aging of a man, "When men are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets; when the almond tree blossoms [man's hair turns white] and the grasshopper drags himself along [man becomes feeble] and desire no longer is stirred [his passion is gone]. As old age overtakes the body the poet says, "Then man goes to his eternal home and mourners go about the streets." The reader is admonished

to take care to enjoy life before age takes him in death, “Remember him before the silver cord is severed, or the golden bowl is broken, before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, or the wheel broken at the well, and **the dust returns to the ground** it came from, **and the spirit returns to God who gave it,**” (Eccl 12:5-7). These words clearly call to memory the Genesis account of the creation of man, that he was created from the dust of the earth and was brought to life by the breath of God, which is here identified as, “the spirit that returns to God who gave it.” If God is a being whose existence is identified as *ruach* (spirit) and man is a being whose existence is identified with *ruach* (spirit), is this not the ground of unity or oneness between God and man?

### The Spirit Is Not the Soul

It should also be noted that what we see of the Hebrew terms for spirit and soul is true as well in the language of the Greek OT (Septuagint/LXX) and the Greek New Testament. In the Greek language the terms for “spirit” (*pneuma*) and “life/soul” (*psuche*) are often confused, as is the case in Hebrew. The word *pneuma* (spirit), however, is distinct from *psuche* (soul) and is the more important of the two in that *pneuma* is consistently used to identify the personality of living being whether natural or supernatural.

*Pneuma* derives from the word for breath (*pnoe* - wind, breeze, or breath). The most important factor in identifying the meaning of any word is the way it is used within a given culture. Words are simply sounds (when spoken) or symbols (when written) intended to convey an idea or concept held within the mind. What gives a word its meaning beyond its etymological root is the way it is used in the communication of thought within a give context. For our purposes in this study, it is significant that the word *pneuma* is used in both the Greek Septuagint and the Greek NT to identify the “Spirit of God” or “Holy Spirit,” as well as the “human spirit.” It is the *pneuma* of man that leaves his body at death and, according to Eccl 12:7, returns to God when the body or flesh returns to the earth from whence it came.

## Origin of the Spirit of Man

To resume the discussion begun earlier, we return to the word *ruach* as it appears first in Gen 1:2, “and the **Spirit of God** (*ruach Elohim*) moved upon the waters.” It appears again in Gen 6:3, where God says, “**my Spirit** (*ruach*) will not contend with man forever.” Throughout the Books of Moses *ruach* is used primarily of **the Spirit of God**, with exception of some minor references to *ruach* in connection with human emotions (Gen 45:27; Num 14:24; Deut 2:30). Throughout the historical books, from Joshua through Nehemiah, *ruach* is used to identify the Spirit of God or *Yahweh* with only a number of incidental references to evil spirits (Judges 9:23; 1 Sam 16:14-16), and the spirit of prophecy (1 Sam 19:20, 2; 2 Sam 23:1-2).

When we come to the wisdom writings, from Job through Ecclesiastes, we find several intriguing concepts, expressed in imagery and terminology, relating to the origin and nature of the human spirit. As for its origin, we read in Job 32:8, “[there is] **a spirit** (*ruach*) in man (*enosh* – human beings): and the inspiration of the Almighty gives man understanding.” In verse 18, Job says, “I am full of discourse (*millah* – words of instruction), **the spirit** (*ruach*) within me compels me.” In 33:4, we read, “**The Spirit of God** (*ruach Elohim*) has made (*asah* – as in Gen 1:7, 11, 12, 16) me, and the breath (*neshamah* – Gen 2:7) of the Almighty has given me life (*chayah* – as in Gen 2:7).” In Job 14:14-15, Job says, “If he [should] set his heart on man, [and] he gather to himself **his spirit** (*ruach*) and **his breath** (*neshamah* – Gen 2:7); all flesh shall perish together, and man (*adam*) shall turn again to dust (*aphar* – Gen 2:7; 3:19).” Here, spirit and breath appear to be used as a parallelism, as mentioned above.

In Psalms 104:29-30, the psalmist says to God, “You hide your face, they are afraid; you take away their breath (*neshamah* – Gen 2:7), they die, and return to the dust (*aphar* – Gen 2:7; 3:19). You send **forth your spirit** (*ruach*), they are created (*bara* – Gen 2:7), and you renew the face of the earth (*adamah* – Gen 2:7).” Also, in Psalms 146, we read,

Put not your trust in princes, [nor] in the son of man/Adam (ben adam - offspring of Adam), in whom [is] no help; **his breath/spirit (*ruach - spirit*) goes forth [and] he returns to the earth (*adamah* - Gen 2:7; 3:19); in that very day his thoughts perish (Psalms 146:3-4).**

In the later writings of the prophets we see the same language and imagery. The prophet Zechariah says of the revelation he received from God,

*The burden of the word of Yahweh for Israel, says Yahweh, who stretches forth the heavens, and lays the foundation of the earth, and forms the **spirit of man (*ruach adam*)** within him (Zech 12:1).*

From what we see in these texts, it appears evident that man's spirit was placed in him by God (Zech 12:1). From the psalmist we are told that when God sends his spirit man is created (Psalms 104:30); and when man's breath is taken away (104:29), or his spirit leaves his body (146:4), he dies, his body returns to the earth, and his spirit returns to God (Eccl 12:7). When God moves in our space-time dimension of existence, it is by means of *ruach*; and when God moves in the lives of men, it is by means of *ruach*.

## Conclusion

From what we have seen in these biblical references, it should be evident that since God is spirit and not an empirical being, the image of God cannot be interpreted in terms of the empirical. If this is so, it would follow that the image of God must, in some mysterious way, be identified with the spirit of man.

When Jesus was asked a question concerning the resurrection, he asked for a coin and then inquired concerning the image on the coin, "Whose image is on this coin?" "Caesar's," they answered. "Give to Caesar that which is Caesar's," says Jesus, "and that which is God's to God." What is implied by what Jesus says here is, "Give to Caesar that which bears his image and to God that which bears his image." But man does not bear the image of God as the coin bears the image of Caesar. So, how is one to understand Jesus' words? It

is Jesus who tells us, "God is spirit!," (John 4:24); it must be the case that if man is created in the image of God and God is "spirit," the image of God must be that which is reflected in the spirit of man.

When God is seen as he wishes to be seen, it is by means of revelation. He revealed himself to the forefathers through the prophets, and "in many ways and in various manners," to use the words of the writer of Hebrews (Heb 1:1). But in the final revelation of himself he has made himself known through someone who was "one of us," yet was "God with us;" as one who was not only *created* in the image of God, but *was* the very image of God (2 Cor 4:4).

Man, when he is who he was created to be, is a reflection of the one known in history and in the New Testament as Jesus of Nazareth. The one who spoke of himself as a son of Adam, one of us, could also say to his disciples, "In that you have seen me, you have seen the Father," (John 14:9).

If God has revealed himself to us, what means has he used to do so? He has revealed himself to us, not only in the historic writings called Scripture, but in all of this world that is a reflection of him. Wherever we can see a trace of him, there he is revealed. As a part of creation we can see him in creation, which includes the wonders of this world as well as the wonder of the beings that dwell within this world. The culminating act of creation was the creation of man, who was created in God's image. To see the Creator in man, one must look not for an empirical reflection as one's face in a mirror, one must look into the inner being of man where exists the spirit of man. Here is that part of man that is in reality more akin to God than any aspect of our being.

When man is who he was created to be, he is a being filled with who God is: his moral character, his love and compassion, his goodwill or *agape* toward the human race, and his longing for our return to him as the beings he created. Jesus of Nazareth was one of whom it could be said, "In that you have seen me, you have seen the Father." The implications of this for us is that in him we have a paradigm of what it means to be a being created in the image of God. This Jesus could say of himself because he was not only one created in the

image of God, he was the very image of God. In him we have revealed all we need to know to be transformed into who we are supposed to be.

But perhaps, a more relevant question here is not so much who we believe ourselves to be, as much as what do we want to believe about who we are. Do we truly want to believe that man is a being created in the image of God, or would we rather believe that we are descendents of primeval beings who came from lower forms of life than ourselves? But why would any member of the human race want to believe that? Why? Perhaps, it's because to believe such a thing as recorded in the creation account of Genesis requires not only a greater capacity for belief than we have, but it requires a will to believe.

Why would one not will to believe such a thing about who we are as is revealed in Genesis 1-3? What would such a truth or reality demand of us? Here is, in all probability, the underlying problem. If I am a being created in the image of God, what expectation does this place on me? Why do most of the human race not act like beings created in the image of God? Is it because the desires of the flesh are so much greater and immediately rewarding that the desires of the spirit?

If we are only an evolved species of predatory primates, the decadence before us is not so inexplicable. The expectations of a being created in the image of God may be too demanding, too much for us to reach for, too difficult to attain. But, realistically, if there is every good reason to believe something and no good reason to not believe it, why would one not believe it? Is it because we don't have the capacity to believe or is it that we don't have the will to believe?

If you don't have the capacity to believe, why do you think this is so? And if you don't have the will to believe, why don't you? Can we say that man wants to be better than he is, or does man want to be just as he is? And, what does this say about us? We slaughter unborn babies by the millions; we lie and steal, rape and kill. Why would we not want to change? Maybe it's because we don't think we can. If we are descendents of predatory life forms, we are behaving

as expected. We behave this way because this is who we are; and it's not our fault, it's our nature! After all, with beings who are only an evolved species of lower life forms, who feels guilty for simply being who we are?

MWLIII