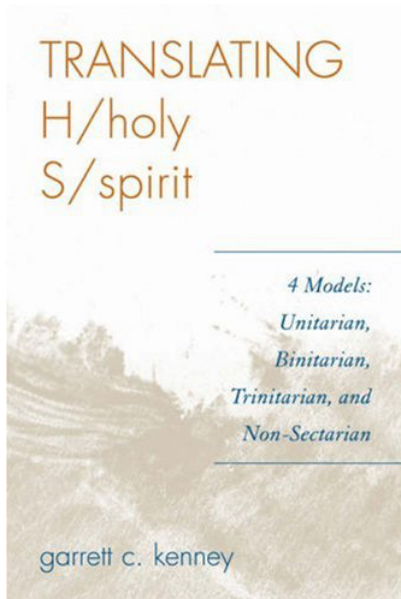


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Kenney, Garrett C.

Translating H/holy S/spirit: Four Models: Unitarian, Binitarian, Trinitarian, and Non-Sectarian

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This book by Garrett C. Kenney deals primarily with the translation of the word, or better still, the words “Holy Spirit.” Is the proper translation that of “Holy Spirit” or “holy spirit”? Kenney recognizes that the majority of English translations favor the former rendering as opposed to the latter, and the motives for doing so are theologically motivated, according to Kenney. While the reader assumes that the book deals mainly with questions of translation, Kenney starts off on a tangent by stating in his preface that “the book represents a quest for understanding the concept of the Holy Spirit in the Christian tradition” (xi). While the book appears *prima facie* to address questions of translation, it commences by giving the reader the impression that pneumatology is the topic under study and that within the “Christian tradition.” Thus from the start the book appears to begin with a theological thrust.

Kenney presents with four models—Unitarianism, Binitarianism, Trinitarianism, and Nonsectarianism—and deals with their approach to pneumatology respectively. Immediately following the preface, Kenney presents the four models and defines them individually. What is defined is the pneumatology of these four models, that is, what these four models *believe* about the Holy Spirit. In the introduction Kenney begins with initial questions and an overview of the study. Kenney appears to veer off the topic by

addressing the topic of the Trinity and its origins and whether it is the “preferred explanation” for what is found in “scripture” and “tradition.” This reasoning strikes the reader as more of a polemical and apologetic approach than an analytical grammatical one.

The reader is also given the impression that the work is moving in the direction of a polemic against Trinitarianism from the start rather than addressing the topic under study. Kenney proceeds to define basic terminology in regard to the term *Holy Spirit*, and he breaks the application of “Holy Spirit” to three usages. In usage 1, the Holy Spirit functions as a synonym or metonym for God. This usage is common among Unitarians. In usage 2, “holy spirit” functions as an expression of God’s attributes or action in creation or in relation to his creatures, and these actions are seen in impersonal categories such as “power,” “influence,” or “ability.” This view would also be compatible with Unitarians and Binitarians. In usage 3, the Holy Spirit is viewed as a “distinct hypostasis” in the Godhead, which is the view of Trinitarianism. While Kenney addresses the respective views of Unitarians, Binitarians, and Trinitarians with the above three usages, he provides a note indicating that the Nonsectarian position, while accepting all three usages at same time, doubts their validity due to their “inconsistency” and “ambiguity of usage.” In short, the Nonsectarian position remains skeptical on the matter.

In chapter 1 Kenney presents a number of biblical passages from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament where the Spirit or Holy Spirit is mentioned. The paucity of references to the New Testament with the exception of only one (1 Cor 2:16) is unfortunate, since it is in the New Testament that much more attention is given to the Holy Spirit. Kenney examines each one and engages the reader on the proper translation and interpretation of the Hebrew word *ruach* and the Greek word *pneuma*. Endnotes are provided at the end of each chapter, including the introduction.

Chapters 2–4 deal with the Unitarian, Binitarian, and Trinitarian models. Each of the chapters begins with a brief summary of each respective position and then surveys a number of biblical passages from the Old and New Testaments that are utilized by each of these models, including expanded discussions. Kenney addresses a number of New Testament texts that deal mainly with Christology rather than the topic at hand, which is the Holy Spirit.

In chapter 5 the Nonsectarian model is given a very brief summary, and then Kenney again resumes an expansion of the Unitarian, Binitarian, and Trinitarian arguments and briefly reiterates the Nonsectarian position. This is then followed by the conclusion, where Kenney summarizes the four models used throughout his text. At the end of the

book a number of illustrations are provided to help explain the various models used in the book.

While Kenney supplies the reader with a bibliography, it nevertheless appears very scantily supplied with books related to the topic. Most of the texts listed are related more toward Christology than pneumatology. In perusing the bibliography, it was a disappointment to not find listed among them Gordon D. Fee's *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994), a classic and standard text in any study of pneumatology.

Kenney attempts to show how each of these models translate the term *Holy Spirit*. The way this term is translated, Kenney argues, usually reflects the respective theological leanings of the translators. While this can be said about recent and present translators, this cannot be said about the original writers of these texts for reasons I will outline below.

In Kenney's treatment of the Hebrew and Greek words, *ruach* and *pneuma*, he leaves these words unitalicized. This may have been an oversight on Kenney's part or perhaps that of the publisher. It was also startling to find that while Kenney appealed to the Hebrew Old Testament and Greek New Testament he never makes reference to the Septuagint, which also makes wide use of *pneuma*.

Another point Kenney could have made clear was the fact that the use of capitalization and lowercase letters for translating "Holy Spirit" are only applicable to translations such as English, not to biblical Hebrew or the earliest biblical Greek texts. There were no capitals or lowercase letters in biblical Hebrew. While Greek later came to have a capital and lowercase lettering system, the earliest Greek manuscripts of the New Testament only used uncials (all capital letters), the minuscules only being used much later. This point would have been helpful because it would indicate that the early writers of these texts were not encumbered with the fine distinctions that Kenney seeks to make in translating the term either as "Holy Spirit" or "holy spirit." The difficulty here is that Kenney leads the reader to think and assume that the New Testament authors struggled with the choice of employing capital or lowercase letters when speaking of the Spirit, as when Kenney states, "Lower case spirit would no longer suffice. An upper case Spirit was required" (54)!

In some cases Kenney appears to argue theologically rather than textually. In his treatment of the triadic formula in Matt 28:19, for instance, he argues in an inconsistent manner. While he argues that this is a "liturgical" formula, he also stresses that it is an "invocation" of the Father and Son as well. However, grammatically the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all included together in this "invocation," as evidenced in the use of the

definite article preceding each of the nouns and joined together by the conjunction *kai* (“and”). Kenney’s exegesis of Matt 28:19 appears to be influenced more by theological presuppositions than by an exegetical reading of the text along grammatical lines.

At other points Kenney veers off topic and deals with Christology when the subject of his book is primarily pneumatology. While there is a measure of relevancy between the Holy Spirit and Christ in the New Testament, Kenney seems to overstate the case and moves the reader away from the intended topic under study. In another case Kenney argues for a wisdom Christology and states that wisdom was “hypostatized” (50). This appears to say more than the evidence allows for. That wisdom was personified seems a much more suitable explanation than a full-scale hypostatization for wisdom.

While Kenney’s book makes for interesting reading, it appears that it was written too hastily and that a number of the biblical passages under study were not given sufficient and in-depth exegesis. It is here that Fee’s *God’s Empowering Presence* would have proven helpful, since the biblical passages under discussion in Kenney’s text are treated there in an in-depth manner. At times it seems as if Kenney’s own theological biases get in the way. This becomes evident in his treatment of Trinitarian theology, which appears more polemical than analytical. In dealing with the topic of pneumatology, Kenney’s approach only touches the surface, and while the question of how to translate “H/holy S/spirit” only has relevance to later translations, it tells us virtually nothing about the original writers of Scripture, since the distinctions of capital and lowercase letters or even the use of punctuation marks were not part of their grammatical retinue. The fine distinctions between “Holy Spirit” and “holy spirit” are for all intents and purposes a postbiblical phenomenon. While this can reveal something about the translator’s theological scruples, it says virtually nothing about the literary motives of the original authors.

While Kenney examines other biblical translations in respect to their references to the Holy Spirit, he nevertheless uses as his standard translation the King James Version. It would have been perhaps a better choice to allude to the King James Version but to have used a more updated and standard translation, such as the New Revised Standard Version. Surprisingly, twice (29, 31) Kenney brings *The New World Translation* of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society into his discussion, a translation that it is not really suitable for use in academic circles nor generally recognized as such. Moreover, Kenney also cites nonscholarly sources such as Paul Victor Wierwille (35 n. 30), founder of the religious movement The Way International, as an authoritative reference on the church fathers and their use of Matt 28:19. Many more competent and scholarly references on this subject could have been readily provided. I found it odd that in his author index (77) he does not include Wierwille, even though he is cited. This book could have been greatly improved upon if given closer and careful study rather than an all-too-hasty treatment.