

The Christological Flesh-Spirit Antithesis

By Siegbert W. Becker

The New Testament usage of “flesh” and “spirit” as designations for the old man and the new man in the believing child of God is familiar to all students of the New Testament. Paul says, for example, that the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh (Ga 5:17). Commentators some-times debate whether the word “spirit” in such passages should be spelled with a lower or upper case letter. In the final analysis it makes little difference how that question is answered. Any striving against the flesh that is carried on by the “spirit,” or the new man, is done only in the strength supplied by the Holy Spirit and under his guidance and direction.

Not nearly so well known and not as easily understood are those passages in the New Testament in which the flesh-spirit antithesis is used in reference to the Lord Jesus. Obviously when the New Testament speaks of the flesh of Christ it cannot have in mind the depraved side of man’s nature. To ascribe such a corrupt nature to the Son of God would be a blasphemous denial of what the Scriptures have to say about the sinlessness of Christ.

It is evident therefore that the use of the flesh-spirit antithesis in Christological passages must be approached from a radically different point of view. In these passages the spelling of the word “spirit” will change the meaning of the text significantly.

The question therefore arises, “*How is this flesh-spirit antithesis in Christology to be understood?*”

There are three passages in the New Testament in which we are confronted by this contrast between flesh and spirit in Christ. These passages, in the AV, are the following:

1 Pe 3:18c-19: (Christ was) put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit, by which also he went and preached to the spirits in prison.

1 Ti 3:16b: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit.

Ro 1:3b-4: (Jesus Christ) was made of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.

1 Peter 3.18 “In the flesh”

We have chosen to begin with the First Peter passage because it appears to furnish us with the clearest context and leaves less room for varying interpretations.

It should be pointed out first of all that in the original Greek text the words “flesh” and “spirit” are used in exactly the same grammatical form. This fact is obscured by the AV when it translates: “put to death *in* the flesh and quickened *by* the Spirit.” Moreover, the phrases in which the words occur are formally identical. Each phrase consists of three words, an aorist participle followed by a particle and a noun in the dative case. The two participles stand in obvious parallel antithetical relationship to one another: “Being put to death”—“being made alive.” The following particles *men* and *de* also indicate rather strongly that the two phrases stand in close antithetical correlation. Both nouns *sarki* and *pneumati* are datives without the article, and thus also clearly are used to denote parallel concepts. It would therefore seem proper to translate both words in the same way. If *sarki* is translated “in the flesh” it would seem that *pneumati* ought to be translated “in the spirit,” and not “by the Spirit” as is the case in the AV.

The NIV follows the same pattern but translates *sarki* with “in the body.” The following chart demonstrates how these two words are treated in the most widely used modern translations.

Version	<i>sarki</i>	<i>pneumati</i>
AV	in the flesh	by the Spirit
NIV	in the body	by the Spirit (mg. spirit)
NASB	in the flesh	in the spirit (mg. Spirit)
AAT	in his body	in His spirit
BV	physically	spiritually
RSV	in the flesh	in the spirit

NEB	in the body	in the spirit
S-O	physically	in the Spirit
Phillips	(the death) of his body	in the spirit
Mof	in the flesh	in the Spirit
JB	in the body	in the spirit
LB	though his body died	his spirit lived on

It will be noted that six of the above translations render *sarx* with “body.” This is hardly satisfactory. It ought to be obvious that such a translation suggests strongly, at least to the ordinary reader, that the resurrection of Christ is not a bodily resurrection. While it may be correct to say that Christ was put to death in the body, it is surely also emphasized in the Scriptures that it was the body of Christ that was made alive. He was made alive in the body just as surely as he was put to death in the body. This false view of a purely spiritual resurrection is especially suggested when the second phrase is translated “in the spirit” or even “in his spirit.” How easily a translator can totally distort Peter’s view of Christ’s resurrection is illustrated by the periphrastic rendering of the

Living Bible, which says, “Though his body died, his spirit lived on,” a translation that does violence to biblical truth.

For these reasons, therefore, “in the flesh” is a translation that ought to be preferred to “in the body.”

In dealing with the word *pneumati* two questions need to be considered. Almost all of the translations reproduce the Greek dative with a prepositional phrase in English. Eight of the translations cited above translate “in the spirit (or Spirit).” Only two say, “by the Spirit.” As has already been said, it would seem that if *sarki* is translated “in the flesh,” then *pneumati* should be translated “in the spirit,” because the two Greek words have exactly the same form, and stand in an obvious parallel relationship to each other.

While it would make good sense and be perfectly compatible with Scripture to say that Jesus was made alive “by the Spirit,” yet it is surely difficult to understand why Peter would see a parallel between the flesh of Christ and the Holy Spirit. It might be pointed out also (though it is not a decisive argument) that there is no other passage in the Bible which so specifically names the Holy Ghost as the active agent in the resurrection of the Savior. Usually the New Testament simply says that God raised Jesus from the dead. When the resurrection is ascribed to one of the distinct persons of the Trinity it is either said that the Father raised him (Ro 8:11, Ga 1:1 ; Eph 1:17-20; 1 Th 1:10; 1 Pe 1:17-21) or that Christ raised himself (Jn 10:18).

The absence of the article with *pneumati* does not enable us to rule out the view that Peter is here speaking of the Holy Ghost. While it is true that when the word *pneuma* is used without a modifier (either “Holy,” “eternal,” “of God,” “of the Lord,” or “His”) as a name for the third person of the Trinity it usually has the article, yet there are several passages in the New Testament in which the context makes it clear that an anarthrous *pneuma* denotes the Holy Spirit. One of these passages is found in 1 Peter (1:2). That fact prevents us from using the absence of the article as a cogent argument against the translation “in the Spirit” or “by the Spirit.

Nevertheless, the absence of the article is significant. It seems rather strange that not a single one of the cited versions renders Peter’s words in English as “Christ (was) ... put to death in flesh and quickened in spirit.” Yet such a translation opens the way to a completely different approach to the understanding of this passage.

Only one of the above cited versions seems to have taken note of the absence of the article. The *Berkeley Version* says that Christ was put to death “physically” and made alive “spiritually.” While such a translation is as likely to be misunderstood as one that translates *sarki* with “in the body,” yet it has much to commend it. The absence of the article in Greek, as in English, often emphasizes the quality of the object named. In that case the noun without the article is almost equivalent to an adjective. For example, if we translate Jn 4:24, as we ought to, by saying “God is spirit,” rather than “God is a spirit” (AV), the emphasis of Jesus would become clear. He means to say that God is a spiritual being who requires spiritual worship. In the

same way, the absence of the article before *sarki* in our passage may well indicate that Peter is emphasizing the quality of flesh that is manifested in the death of Christ, or the type of death that he experienced.

In that case the dative case would also be significant. It is not a locative dative telling us where the death of Christ took place. It is rather a dative of manner that speaks to us about the kind of death with which we are dealing here. If the absence of the article gives the noun the virtual force of an adjective, then the dative of the noun, interpreted as a dative of manner, is practically the equivalent of an adverb. We may therefore interpret both *sarki* and *pneumati* as adverbs of manner and thus translate:

Christ (was) put to death in a fleshy way but made alive in a spiritual way,
or, as the Berkeley Version says, “put to death...physically but made alive spiritually.”

However, as we have already noted, such a translation is almost sure to be misunderstood. But nevertheless it may bring us a step closer to fathoming what Peter is trying to tell us, even though this passage with its context may not enable us to come to greater clarity than this.

This usage of *sarki* and *pneumati* provides us also with a clue to the understanding of the rather difficult statement of Peter in verse six of the following chapter. There the words *sarki* and *pneumati* are used of the dead believers in a way which is very similar to the use of these same words in regard to the dead and risen Savior in 3:18. Literally translated the words of 1 Peter 4:6 read: “For this the Gospel also was preached to dead people in order that they might be judged in flesh according to men but live according to God in spirit.” We know from Paul’s First Letter to the Thessalonians that there were some people in the early church who had the opinion that those people who died before the parousia of the Savior would somehow be at a disadvantage and lack some of the blessings that the second coming would bring. If something of a similar nature lies in the background of Peter’s remark the significance of this verse becomes a little easier to determine. In verse five Peter speaks of the return of Christ to judge both the living and the dead. While the exact meaning of the next verse is difficult to establish it very likely means that Christians who have died have not been deprived of the blessings of salvation. The Gospel was preached to them while they were living for this purpose that even though their death was an indication that in their earthly mode of existence (*sarki*) they were still judged in a way that is common to men (*kata anthropous*) nevertheless the purpose of the preaching of the Gospel is still fulfilled in their case because they can look forward to a new kind of life in spirit (*pneumati*) which is similar in some ways to the kind of existence that God has (*kata theon*). Here, too, the translation for *sarki* - *pneumati* which would be most satisfactory would be either “in flesh”—“in spirit,” or “in a fleshy (or earthly) mode of existence”—“in a spiritual mode of existence.”

Hebrews 5:7—The days of His Flesh

There are, however, other passages that shed light on Peter’s words. One of these is Heb 5:7, which speaks of Christ’s tearful cries for help in “the days of his flesh.” When we are told that Christ during the days of his flesh offered up prayers with tears, it is obvious that the writer of Hebrews has in mind the time during which Jesus lived here on earth in his state of humiliation. It certainly does not refer to his life after his resurrection, when there is no more trace of the effects of sin in his life (cp. Ro 6:4,9-10). The “days of his flesh” cannot mean the days during which he had a body of flesh. He has such a body today. After his resurrection he still had flesh and bones (Lk 24:39).

The days of his flesh are rather those days during which he lived here on earth as an ordinary human being in lowliness and humility, subject to all the limitations and weaknesses that “the flesh is heir to.” One of the modern translations evidently understood the passage in this way for it translates the literal phrase “in the days of his flesh” as “during the days of Jesus’ life on earth” (NIV). It may be of some interest to list the various translations of this phrase in Hebrews 5:7.

AV	in the days of his flesh
NIV	during the days of Jesus’ life on earth
NASB	in the days of his flesh
AAT	in his humble life on earth
BV	in the days of his flesh
RSV	in the days of his flesh

NEB	in the days of his earthly life
SG	in his life on earth
Phil	in the days when he was a man on earth
Mof	in the days of his flesh
JB	during his life on earth
LB	while Christ was here or earth

Taking our cue from this passage in Hebrews, we might paraphrase Peter's words by saying that Christ was put to death in a way that is common for ordinary sinful human beings here on earth. His death was like that which any common disgraced criminal might die on a cross. It was a humble, inglorious death, which involved pain and sorrow, just as the days of his flesh, according to Hebrews, were marked by tears and cries for deliverance.

Such an understanding of this passage is closely related to one of the most common usages of the word "flesh" in both the Old and the New Testament. "Flesh" is a standard term for the inherent sinfulness that indwells fallen man. Life "in the flesh" is a life that manifests all the debilitating and destructive influences that affect the quality of existence in a world of sin. Life "in the flesh" is a life in which man eats bread that has been earned with tears in the sweat of his brow and has been wrung from an earth that rewards man's labor with thorns and thistles. It is a life in which "the path of glory leads but to the grave." Such a life became the lot of the Son of God when the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

1 Peter 3:18--In the spirit

Once we have understood the phrase "in the flesh" in this way the meaning of "in the spirit" also becomes clear.

The apostle Paul, in describing the resurrection of the body in his First Letter to the Corinthians, uses language which will help us clarify the significance of Peter's words. Paul tells us that a decaying body is raised as a body no longer subject to decay, a shameful body is raised in glory, and a weak body is raised in power. All this he then sums up by saying, "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body."

In our thinking a "spiritual body" is almost a contradiction in terms. A common definition of "spirit" is "a personal being not possessing a body." Yet the Bible leaves us in no doubt about what is meant by a spiritual body, even though there is much in that term which is not yet clear to us. Paul tells us in another place that Christ will change our vile bodies (literally, the body of our lowliness) so that they will become like his glorious body (Php 3:21).

The body that Christ had after his resurrection was no longer the same kind of body that he had during "the days of his flesh." While it was very definitely the same body that had been nailed to the cross and pierced with the soldier's spear, it was tremendously changed. Even though it was still a body of flesh and bones (Lk 24:39), yet it could appear and disappear at will. It could pass through solid walls and locked doors (Jn 20:19) and apparently also through the linen wrappings in which it had been tightly bound (Jn 20:6-7). It had become, in very simple terms, a "spiritual" body.

We are now, in the light of all this, prepared to define what Peter meant when he said that Christ was made alive "in spirit." It does not mean that somehow he was now divorced from flesh, or from his body. But he was raised in that spiritual state in which his body was no longer subject to the natural laws that govern all material things nor to all the natural ills to which the flesh is heir because of the fall into sin. To make everything crystal clear we might suggest that Peter's words be translated as follows:

Christ (was) put to death in a fleshly (or natural) mode of existence and made alive in a spiritual (or glorified) mode of existence.

Sarki is thus related to what we call the state of humiliation and *pneumati* to the state of exaltation and in more dogmatic terms we might translate:

Christ (was) put to death in the state of humiliation and made alive in the state of exaltation.

In this new state, or mode of existence, he then descended into hell to preach to the spirits in prison.

That this interpretation is correct is substantiated by the words that follow. Commentators have had difficulty in explaining what Peter meant when he wrote, “in which he went and preached to the spirits in prison.” The difficulty is compounded when we translate, as the AV does, “by which he went and preached to the spirits in prison.” As long as *pneumati* is viewed as a reference to the Holy Ghost, those words will always be unclear. What would Peter have in mind if he were saying that in (or by) the Holy Spirit Christ descended into hell? But if *pneumati* is indeed a reference to the new spiritual state in which Christ now lives after his resurrection, all difficulties with this construction vanish.

1 Timothy 3:16

This interpretation of the flesh - spirit antithesis also fits very well in the First Timothy passage, where we have the same contrast. There (3:16) Paul says, in the AV rendering, that “God was manifest in the flesh and justified in the Spirit.”

Before analyzing these words it may be of value to list the various translations also for this passage.

KJV	manifest in the flesh and justified in the Spirit
NIV	appeared in a body. was vindicated by the Spirit
NASB	revealed in the flesh. was vindicated in the Spirit
AAT	appeared in flesh. became righteous in spirit
BV	revealed in the flesh. vindicated by the Spirit
RSV	manifested in the flesh. vindicated in the Spirit
NEB	manifested in the body. vindicated in the spirit
SG	revealed in flesh. He was vindicated by the Spirit
Phil	showed himself as a human being. and met. as such. every demand of the Spirit
Mof	manifest in the flesh. vindicated by the Spirit
JB	made visible in the flesh. attested by the Spirit
LB	who came to earth as a man. was proven spotless and pure in his Spirit.

In this passage, too, as in 1 Peter 3:18, the Greek phrases are identical in form. However, instead of the simple dative, we have here a prepositional phrase with the noun in the dative, namely, *en sarki* and *en pneumati*. It would appear, therefore, that the two phrases ought to be translated in the same way in English, if that would yield a meaningful rendering. Yet about half of the versions cited translate the two grammatically identical phrases differently. However, if *en sarki* is translated “in the flesh,” *en pneumati* ought to be translated “in the spirit,” especially because this is actually more meaningful than “by the Spirit.”

Once again the article is missing in both phrases. Among the versions cited the only one which indicates this fact in English is Beck’s AAT, although Goodspeed clearly takes note of it in the first phrase.

Here, too, we are faced with the problem of whether the word “spirit” should be capitalized. We might ask what is meant if we say that he was “justified in the Spirit.” This sort of language is found nowhere else in the New Testament. The Bible does say that Jesus was led into the wilderness *en too pnemati* (Lk 4:1). However, Matthew, in telling the same story says that Jesus was led into the wilderness *hypo tou pneumatos* (Mt 4:1). In Acts 17:31 *en* is clearly used to indicate the intermediate agent. We may therefore conclude that both the NIV and the AV translate correctly in Luke 4:1 when they say that Jesus was led *by* the Spirit into the desert. It should be noted, however, that in this passage *pneumati* has the article. There can be no doubt, because of the article and the whole context, that the word is clearly a designation for the Holy Ghost.

“Justified by the Spirit” might make sense. But there is no other passage in Scripture that speaks in this way. Moreover, because of the absence of the article and the antithesis between *en sarki* and *en pneumati*, such an interpretation would seem to be fraught with difficulties.

But if we understand the words *sarx* and *pneuma* here also as a reference to the two states of Christ, everything once more becomes clear. The word flesh is often used in the Scripture as a designation for man and particularly for man in his weakness (cp. e.g. Isa 40:6). Christ was manifest in flesh, that is, he appeared in this world as a lowly, despised and weak human being. But he was justified in spirit, that is, he was publicly

vindicated by God as Lord and Christ (Ac 2:1,6) in that new glorified, spiritual state in which he appeared to his disciples after his resurrection.

Incidentally, such an interpretation of this passage would shed light on the words of Paul in Ro 6:4 where he says that Christ was raised from the dead *dia tees doxees tou patros*. Many commentators insist that Paul here must have had the power of God in mind because in another place he writes that God raised Jesus *dia tees dunameeos autou* (1 Co 6:14). But if Paul in Romans had wanted to emphasize the role of the power of God in the resurrection he would surely have used these same words. While this common interpretation is in accord with the analogy of faith, yet it makes the passage more intelligible in the context to treat the *dia* as the *dia* of accompaniment or attendant circumstance and to say that Christ was raised with or in the glory of the Father. Thus Paul can go on to say that just as Jesus lived in a new glorified state when he was raised, we also “should walk in newness of life.”

It is noteworthy then that just as Paul connects this new glorified state with the resurrection, so also the “spirit” in 1 Peter 3:18 and Romans 1:4 is closely tied to the resurrection.

At first glance there seems to be no reference to the resurrection in 1 Timothy 3:16. Yet we may surely find a connection between the new spiritual mode which is indicated in the phrase *en pneumat*i and the resurrection of Christ in the word “justified” or “vindicated.” Paul says that Christ was raised because of our justification (Ro 4:25). The resurrection of Christ is clear evidence that God has declared the human race free of guilt for the sake of this Christ who was delivered up to death because of our sins. But in a certain sense it can also be said that Christ was justified when he was raised. Just as he was numbered with the transgressors, that is, manifested to the world as a guilty man when he was hanging on the cross, so also by raising him from the dead God declared him to be free of all guilt and liability to punishment. This may actually be the meaning of the difficult passage in Romans: “He that is dead (or died) is free (literally, has been justified) from sin” (Ro 6:7). The context of this passage leaves us free to interpret this justification as having taken place when the one who died, namely Christ, was raised from the dead. Romans 6:7 would then shed light on Paul’s earlier statement that Christ was raised in the glory of the Father. Here, too, the whole emphasis is on the resurrection. For all these reasons it would be well to translate 1 Timothy 3:16 as follows:

“He (or God) was manifest in flesh justified in spirit.”

Romans 1:3

As has already been pointed out the Romans passage (Ro 1:3b-4a) in which the Christological flesh - spirit antithesis is found likewise connects this new spiritual and glorified state with the resurrection. Paul says that Christ was “declared to be the Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead” (Ro 1:4). Here again, however, we find a variety of translations that manifest a difference in the understanding of the words of the apostle. For ease in comparison we will list and treat verses three and four separately. Verse three reads, in the various versions, (The italicized words are the translation of the phrase *kata sarka*.)

KJV	made of the seed of David <i>according to the flesh</i>
NIV	who <i>as to his human nature</i> was a descendant of David
NASB	born of the seed of David <i>according to the flesh</i>
AAT	born a descendant of David, <i>in terms of human descent</i>
BV	<i>as to his human nature</i> was descended from David
RSV	descended from David <i>according to the flesh</i>
NEB	<i>on the human level</i> he was born of David’s stock
S-G	<i>physically</i> descended from David
Phil	a descendant of David <i>by human genealogy</i>
Mof	David’s offspring <i>by natural descent</i>
JB	<i>according to the human nature he took</i> , was a descendant of David
LB	<i>who came as a human baby</i> , born into King David’s royal family line

There is little significant difference in this verse between translators. It seems rather obvious that all the versions which do more than reproduce the Greek words literally proceed on the assumption that the words *kata sarka*, “according to the flesh,” have reference either to Christ’s human nature or to his natural birth from David’s line. If *kata sarka* speaks only of the process of human descent, it adds absolutely nothing to the words “made of the seed of David.” He could hardly have been made or born of the seed of David in any other way than *kata sarka*. If therefore we must make a choice between interpreting *sarx* as human nature or as the birth process, we would opt for the first.

Most commentators also view *kata sarka* in this same way. It must be granted that such an interpretation makes good sense if verse three is viewed by itself. In fact, if it were not for the following context we would perhaps not give it a second thought. But if we understand *kata sarka* in verse three to mean “according to the human nature,” this would immediately suggest that the phrase *kata pneuma* in verse four be understood as a reference to the divine nature. This, however, presents the exegete with some doctrinal difficulties. Verse four most certainly views Christ from the human side of his nature, even if the divine nature must be taken into account. Without the divine nature what is ascribed to the human nature of Christ here could not have taken place.

Because of this it would be preferable to interpret the phrase “according to the flesh” as another reference to the Savior’s state of humiliation. Theoretically Christ could have become man by an immediate miracle of divine omnipotence. He might have entered this world as a new Adam, sitting on a throne of glory, surrounded by ten thousand times ten thousand angels. This is said only to try to make the following point clear. From the viewpoint of Old Testament prophecy such an incarnation could not have taken place.

But instead of coming in glory, the Word was made flesh, a frail human being. He was born in disgrace, in poverty, and meanness, a despised Galilean. So began “the days of his flesh.” It was the Father’s will that he should suffer. It was the Father’s will that he should have a shameful advent and a shameful exodus in this world, and that his whole life on earth should be lived under the shadow of the cross.

And therefore, in accord with this “fleshly” mode of existence which the Father had laid out for him by His “determinate counsel and foreknowledge” (Ac 2:23), he was born of the seed of David at a time when this was no longer a manifest claim to honor and glory. As one born of the seed of David he had a glorious ancestry. The Messianic expectations aroused in Jewish believers by the words “the seed of David” often made even the disciples reject the concept of the “suffering Servant” (Mt 16:22). But he was made of the seed of David “*kata sarka*.” By the time Jesus was born the glory of David’s house had departed. The mighty tree of Jesse’s line had been felled and all that remained was a stump putting forth a shoot that by human standards had little prospect of becoming great. In that sense he was “born according to flesh.” Just as he later was to be put to death “in flesh,” in a lowly, humiliating manner, so he was also born “in flesh,” or “according to flesh.”

Romans 1:4

Because verse three is not understood in this way many of our modern translators have a great deal of difficulty with verse four. This becomes apparent when we examine them in detail. The pertinent parts of verse four are here listed for comparison.

KJV	declared to be the Son of God with power, <i>according to the spirit of holiness</i> , by the resurrection
NIV	<i>who through the Spirit of holiness</i> was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection
NASB	declared with power to be the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead, <i>according to the Spirit</i> , (mg: spirit) of holiness
AAT	<i>according to his spirit of holiness</i> , he was declared to be the mighty Son of God by his resurrection
BV	<i>according to the Spirit of Holiness</i> was openly designated as the Son of God with power when he was raised
RSV	designated Son of God in power <i>according to the Spirit of holiness</i> by his resurrection
NEB	<i>on the level of spirit—the Holy Spirit</i> —he was declared Son of God by a mighty act in that he rose
S-G	decisively declared Son of God <i>in his holiness of spirit</i> , by being raised

Phil	patently marked out as the Son of God <i>by the power of that Spirit of holiness</i> which raised him to life
Mof	installed as Son of God with power <i>by the Spirit of holiness</i> when he was raised
JB	<i>In the order of the spirit, the spirit of holiness</i> that was in him, was proclaimed Son of God in all his power through his resurrection
LB	by being raised from the dead he was proved to be the mighty Son of God <i>with the holy nature of God Himself</i>

The wide variation in the wording of this verse in the versions demonstrates the difficulty experienced by both conservative and liberal scholars in seeking to make sense out of the words of Paul.

Crucial to an understanding of the passage is once more the question of whether the word spirit should be spelled with a capital letter. Of the twelve translations examined seven spell the word with a capital “S,” although two of them (*NEB* and *NASB*) have difficulty making a decision. The *NEB* with an impossible translation tries to have its cake and eat it too. Only the *Authorized Version*, *Beck*, *Goodspeed* and the *Jerusalem Bible* definitely opt for a common noun.

The difficulty of making sense out of the passage if *pneuma* is here understood to be the Holy Ghost is underscored by the fact that two of the versions have translated the preposition *kata* with “by” or “through.” It is highly questionable whether *kata* ever means “by” or “through” to indicate either the intermediate agent or the efficient cause. The interpretation given to the phrase *kata pneuma* by the *NIV* and Moffatt would therefore seem to be impossible. *The Living Bible* rendering is not even a good paraphrase, and is only another indication of the general unreliability of this version.

Another point on which the translators have difficulty is the phrase *en dunamei*. This difficulty is directly traceable to a failure to understand the *kata pneuma* correctly. Three of the translations, with Luther’s German version, treat *en dunamei* as an adverbial modifier of *horis thentos*, which most of the versions render “declared.” Seven view it as an adjectival phrase modifying the Son of God. Two of the versions simply ignore the Greek grammar (*NEB* and *Phillips*) and try to make sense out of the words by an arbitrary word order that has little resemblance to the meaning of the Greek sentence structure.

All of these difficulties, however, disappear if we understand the word *pneuma* as a designation of the state of exaltation. By his resurrection the humble, lowly, despised Jesus of Nazareth, who had been made of the seed of David in accord with his fleshly mode of existence and who had died such a shameful death on the cross was openly declared to be the mighty Son of God in accord with that new spiritual mode of existence, a state characterized by holiness and complete separation from sin. He was crucified in weakness and raised in power. Once more we are reminded of Paul’s words in regard to the resurrected body, “It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power” (1 Co 15:43). Whatever the proper translation of 2 Corinthians 13:4 may be, the words there (*estaurōthee ex astheneias, alla dsee ek dunameos theou*) clearly associate the death of Christ with the state or mode of existence in which Jesus did not employ his communicated omnipotence, while the resurrection is seen as a display of divine power. The *AV*, together with most modern translations, says in this passage that Christ was crucified *in* weakness and that he lives *by* the power of God. Only the *NASB* indicates that the two prepositional phrases are identical in form in the original by rendering “because of weakness” and “because of the power of God.”

This display of divine power that is manifested by the resurrection is in full accord with that new spiritual or glorified state in which Christ now lives, it is *kata pneuma*. His being marked out as the Son of God who now in his human nature exercises all the power that was communicated to his human nature is in full harmony with this new exalted state which is characterized by holiness, that divine perfection which gives him the name which is above every name (Php 2:9). This is surely what Paul means to say when he writes, “He was by the resurrection from the dead designated as the Son of God in power, *in full accord with his spiritual mode of existence, an existence characterized by holiness.*” To use fourteen words to translate three Greek words

(*kata pneuma hagiosunes*) may seem unduly periphrastic, but the alternative would seem to be to remain with the AV rendition that few people can understand.

Conclusion

In all three passages, therefore, in which we find this Christological flesh - spirit antithesis it makes perfectly good sense to understand “flesh” as referring to the mode of existence in which Christ chose to live here on earth as a weak and humble human being who made no public display of his equality with God (Php 2:6-8). “Spirit,” on the other hand, denotes that glorified spiritual mode of existence in which the exalted Jesus now rules over all things at the right hand of God. It seems rather obvious that in this antithesis the word “spirit” ought not to be capitalized. Unless we are prepared to adopt a paraphrase, it would be best to translate each of these phrases word for word, spelling spirit with a lower case initial letter and omitting the article before “flesh” and “spirit.” This will create some difficulty in Romans 1:4, because the word *pneuma* has a modifier and on that account requires an article in English. This difficulty might be overcome by rendering, “declared to be the Son of God in power according to spirit, the spirit of holiness.” The three passages then would read as follows:

1 Peter 3:18, “being put to death in flesh but made alive in spirit.”

1 Timothy 3:16, “He was manifest in flesh justified in spirit.”

Romans 1:3, “made of the seed of David according to flesh and declared to be the Son of God in power according to spirit, -the spirit of holiness.”

However, to make the meaning clear perhaps the passages might be translated as follows:

1 Peter 3:18, “being put to death in a fleshly mode of existence and made alive in a spiritual mode.

1 Timothy 3:16, “He was manifest in a fleshly mode of existence justified in a spiritual mode.”

Romans 1:3, “made of the seed of David in accord with his fleshly mode of existence and declared to be the Son of God in power in accord with his spiritual mode of existence, an existence characterized by holiness.

Or perhaps some reader of this article can suggest a smoother translation that will give idiomatic English expression to the thought of St. Paul. Since it is planned to consider minor revisions of the NIV in about four years, perhaps the NIV translation committee will welcome your comments.