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# Give Up the Ghost and Get the Spirit

Marvin H. Folsom

... Christ the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, which is one Eternal God. (Alma 11:44)

**A**s shorthand for “the Spirit of the Lord”, the third member of the god-head, we very frequently hear expressions such as “the Spirit”, “my Spirit”, “his Spirit”, and the phrases “teach/learn by the Spirit”, “feel the Spirit”, “get the Spirit”, “guided by the Spirit”, “the voice of the Spirit”. In this context, we never use the phrases \*his Ghost, \*my Ghost, \*the Ghost, \*by the Ghost, \*the Ghost of God, or \*the Ghost of the Lord. We cannot use the noun *Ghost* by itself. We must add the modifier *Holy*, and we cannot use a personal or any other adjective as a modifier. We have only a few very specialized contexts where we use the full phrase “the Holy Ghost”; in the first article of faith: “We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost”; in the baptismal prayer: “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (D&C 20:73); in the prayer at confirmation: “Receive the Holy Ghost”; and in two hymns: “Singing to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost” (*Hymns* 1985, 82) and “Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost” (242). It is also used commonly in the phrase “by the [gift and] power of the Holy Ghost”.

Let us take a look at the linguistic background leading up to the present circumstances. The pair of words *Spirit/Ghost* belongs to the many pairs of synonyms in

the language of the King James Version of the Bible (KJV): *charity/love, eternal/everlasting, just/righteous*, etc. The first member of the pair stems from the Latin/(Norman) French influence in English (Latin *spiritus* > French *esprit*, English *spirit*). The second member of the pair stems from the Germanic/Anglo-Saxon component of English (OHG *geist* Du *geest* Eng *ghost*). In the KJV, the same Greek word, *pneuma*, was sometimes translated into the Latin/French word *spirit* and sometimes into the Anglo-Saxon word *ghost*. The single Greek word *pneuma*, occurring 385 times in the New Testament, was translated as follows in the KJV: Spirit 111; Holy Ghost 89; Spirit (of God) 13; Spirit (of the Lord) 5; (My) Spirit 3; Spirit (of truth) 3; Spirit (of Christ) 2; human (spirit) 49; (evil) spirit 47; spirit (general) 26; spirit 8; (Jesus’ own) spirit 6; (Jesus’ own) ghost 2; miscellaneous 21 (Folsom 1991, 10–16).

Of course the problem of near-synonymous pairs does not exist in modern foreign language Bibles (German, French, Spanish, etc.) because they do not have a dual-language tradition with near synonyms. The Romance languages uniformly have titles derived from Latin *Spiritus Sanctus*: *L’Esprit-Saint* (French), *El Espiritu Santo* (Spanish), *Lo Spirito Santo* (Italian). In the Germanic languages (German and Dutch) we find titles related to the word *ghost*: *der Heilige Geist* (German), *De Heilige Geest* (Dutch). In the English of the KJV, we have preserved both traditions to the present day: the *Holy Ghost* and the *Holy Spirit*.

The translations of the Bible in the historical precursors of present-day German had a similar problem in the ninth century. On the one hand, there was the phrase *der helago geist*, 'the Holy Ghost', from the Anglo-Saxon Christianization in the north and on the other hand, the phrase *ahma sa weiha*, literally 'Spirit the Holy', from the Gothic Christianization in the south. In the Weipenburger Catechism from the beginning of the ninth century, we find in the second article *ther infangär ist fona heilige-mo geiste*, 'who was conceived by the Holy Ghost', and in the very next article, *gilauabu in Étum wāhan* 'I believe in the Holy Spirit'. In the course of time, the northern phrase *der Heilige Geist* completely replaced the alternate phrase in the south. Except for a couple of linguistic relics, this is the situation in modern religious English: *Holy Spirit* has virtually replaced *Holy Ghost* except in a few older religious texts and in a few archaic religious dialects.

How are these circumstances reflected in modern Bible translations? In a search of English Bible translations in electronic form (Bibleworks 4.0), only two translations—King James Version 1611/1769 and the Douay-Rheims American Edition 1899—used the phrase "Holy Ghost". All the other translations<sup>1</sup> used the more modern "Holy Spirit". When I examined sample verses in additional translations not in electronic form,<sup>2</sup> I found that they all used the phrase with the modern word *spirit*, and none used the archaic word *ghost*.

On the other hand, when I checked LDS conference addresses (Infobase 97), arranged approximately by decade (1897–1970), I found that the use of *Holy Spirit* has decreased steadily from 65% early on to 28% in the sixties. The numerous converts from various linguistic and religious backgrounds who spoke at the conferences clearly had a preference for *Holy Spirit*. Over the decades, practices mitigating against diversity—

Table 1. Changing Use in Conference Addresses

Years	Holy Ghost	Holy Spirit	% Holy Spirit
1897–1899	76	141	65%
1900–1909	233	361	61%
1910–1919	362	404	53%
1920–1929	406	333	45%
1930–1939	237	184	43%
1940–1949	292	168	36%
1950–1959	409	220	35%
1960–1970	558	262	28%

proofreaders, editors, committees, etc.—resulted in the ascendance of *Holy Ghost*.

In LDS hymns, the use of the title *Holy Ghost* is not as common as is the use of phrases with *Spirit*. In the hymns found in the 1997 Infobase file, there were six instances of "the Spirit", one of the "Spirit of God", thirteen of "thy Spirit", two of "his Spirit", and six of "the Holy Spirit". The phrase "Holy Ghost" appeared only six times (17.6% as compared to 82.4% for "Spirit").

I also examined the texts of the hymns in K. W. Osbeck's, *Amazing Grace: 366 Inspiring Hymn Stories for Daily Devotions* (1990). There were ten examples (20.8%) of "Holy Ghost",—three in the phrase "Father, Son, and Holy Ghost". On the other hand, there were thirty-eight examples (79.2%) of "Spirit"—only slightly higher than that in the LDS group. Because I examined each group as a whole, there is some overlapping; each contains some of the same hymns as the other.

There are only two occurrences of the word *phantasma* in the New Testament. Table 2 shows the corresponding words in twelve different translations of the Bible.

Most have either *ghost* or *apparition* in Matthew and Mark. Only the King James Version and Revised Webster Bible (RWB) use *spirit*. Even the New King James (NKJ) has gone over to *ghost*. In Luke, where the word *pneuma* is used to

Table 2. Use in Bible Translation

Translation	Mt 14:26 <i>phantasma</i>	Mk 6:29 <i>phantasma</i>	Luke 24:37 <i>pneuma</i>
KJV	spirit	spirit	spirit
NIV	ghost	ghost	ghost
NIB	ghost	ghost	ghost
NAU	ghost	ghost	spirit
RSV	ghost	ghost	spirit
NRS	ghost	ghost	ghost
NKJ	ghost	ghost	spirit
DRA	apparition	apparition	spirit
RWB	ghost	spirit	spirit
YLT	apparition	apparition	spirit
NLT	ghost	ghost	ghost
NJB	ghost	ghost	ghost

refer to the resurrected Jesus, there is no agreement on which word to use. But clearly Luke is not referring to the same kind of thing as are Matthew and Mark. Matthew 14:26 and Mark 6:49 refer to Jesus walking on the sea, not to him as a resurrected being. Luke 24:37 refers to Jesus' appearance among his disciples after his resurrection.

If we look at the Latter-day Saint standard works, we find the data found in Table 3.

Table 3. Forms Used in LDS Standard Works

Form	Old Test	New Test	B of M	D&C	PGP	Total
Holy Ghost	0/-50%	90/+21%	94/+15%	50/+10%	15/+3%	252
Holy Spirit	3/-43	4/-6	16/+13	21/+36	1/0	46
Spirit of the Lord	26/-15	5/-8	40/+32	2/-7	1/-1	7
Spirit of God	14/-24	12/+8	20/+16	3/-4	4/+6	53
Spirit of Christ	0/-50	2/+25	2/+18	1/+10	0/-2	5
Holy Spirit of Promise	0/-50	1/-2	0/-22	7/+78	0/-2	8
Spirit of Truth	0/-50	4/+10	0/-22	12/+65	0/-2	16
Spirit of prophecy	0/-50	1/-11	17/+49	2/-2	2/+6	24
Spirit of revelation	0/-50	0/-15	9/+60	2/+8	0/-2	11
my Spirit	12/-31	3/-10	6/-13	40/+53	3/+3	64
His Spirit	4/-37	4/-2	18/+36	4/+3	1/+1	31
the Spirit	17/-43	99/+27	61/+4	55/+13	3/-1	236

For each standard work, the first number shown represents the number of occurrences for each form; the second number indicates the percentage of expected occurrences for a book of that size (according to the computer program).

A closer look at the material in the Doctrine and Covenants shows an interesting pattern (see Table 4).

For some reason, for which I as yet have no explanation, Joseph Smith used *Holy Ghost* exclusively in the revelations recorded up to January 1931, but later he used both *Holy Ghost* and *Spirit*, sometimes in the same section.

When we look back at Elizabethan English, we find that forms derived from *ghost* were still used with the original meaning:

1. A ghostly confessor (reference to Friar Laurence in Rom/Jul III 3 49)
2. Ghostly father, adviser (priest, spiritual adviser)
3. Ghostly director, instructor (priest, spiritual instructor)
4. Ghostly counsel (spiritual counsel)
5. Ghostly day (day set apart for worship)

In present-day English dictionaries the word *ghost* has the following meanings:

1. The seat of life or intelligence
2. The disembodied soul (of a dead person)
3. Spirit or demon
4. A remote possibility

Table 4. Use in the Doctrine and Covenants

	Holy Spirit	Month	Holy Ghost	
		Apr 1829	Sec 8	1
		Jun 1829	Sec 14, Sec 18 2x	3
		Mar 1830	Sec 19	1
		Apr 1830	Sec 20 9x +, 21	10
		Jul 1830	Sec 25	1
		Oct 1830	Sec 33 2x	2
		Nov 1830	Sec 34	1
		Dec 1830	Sec 35 3x, Sec 36	4
		Jan 1831	Sec 39 2x +	2
2	Sec 45, Sec 46	Mar 1831	Sec 46 3x, 49 +	4
3	Sec 53, 55 2x	Jun 1831		
		Nov 1831	Sec 68 4x +	4
1	Sec 72	Dec 1831	Sec 84 3x	3
6	Sec 76 6x	Feb 1832		
1	Sec 99	Aug 1832		
2	Sec 88 2x	Dec 1832		
		May 1833	Sec 93	1
		Oct 1833	Sec 100	1
		Mar 1835	Sec 107	1
		Mar 1836	Sec 109	1
1	Sec 121		Mar 1839, Sec 121 3x +	3
1	*Sec 124	Jan 1841	Sec 124 2x	2
		Apr 1843	Sec 130 2x	2
4	*Sec 132 4x	Jul 1843	Sec 132	1
21 total				total 49

\* = ... of promise 5x

+ = gift of ... 5x

5. One who ghostwrites
6. A faint image on TV screen or photographic negative
7. A red blood cell that has lost its hemoglobin

There is also a separate listing for the idiom "give up the ghost", meaning 'die'. The reference to the specialized meaning in the phrase *Holy Ghost* was not listed under the word *ghost* but as a separate entry under *holy*. Many speakers of English will also think of the related words *aghast* 'struck with overwhelming shock or amazement' or *ghastly*, 'dreadful, horrible, resembling a ghost'.

In our church experience, we are not unacquainted with vocabulary changes

and innovations—Senior Cooperative Retrenchment Association 1870–1904, Young Ladies Cooperative Retrenchment Association, Young Men's Mutual Improvement Association; block teaching > ward teaching > home teaching; recreation hall > cultural hall; gleaner > laurel; trekker > varsity scout; senior Aaronic > prospective elder, etc. Sometimes the meaning is made more precise, but often the vocabulary change does not change the intrinsic meaning. We may recall Shakespeare's comment in *Romeo and Juliet*: "What's in a name? that which we call a rose / By any other name would smell as sweet". We will likely never sing \*Praise Father, Son, and Holy

Spirit, because it does not fit the music. On the other hand, we cannot very well sing \*Let the Holy Ghost guide.

Since I have been focusing on this aspect of our Mormon language, I have heard at least three instances of “the Spirit of the Holy Ghost”. This seems to be the *final stage* in the global treatment of the phrase *Holy Ghost* as a title without any direct reference to the unembodied aspect of the personage, since it can be used in conjunction with the word *Spirit* without conflict. It seems to me that this neologism refers to the influence that emanates from the third member of the Godhead.

We may not realize that the *Holy Ghost* and the *Spirit* are referring to the same spiritual entity, and we may operate with two separate constructs, never associating the two. For me this is an even more compelling argument for clarifying the unified meaning by means of a single linguistic form.

It may be too much to expect an immediate acceptance of a change in the first article of faith or in the baptismal prayer, but we have already switched over to the Latin/French phrase in virtually every other environment. If we did begin systematically using only *Holy Spirit*, we would eliminate some confusion and fuzzy thinking, and we would also speak the same language as the rest of the English-speaking Christian world, not drawing attention to our archaic usage.

## NOTES

1. Webster Bible 1833, Young’s Literal 1862/1898, Darby Bible 1884/1890, Bible in Basic English 1949/1964, Revised Standard Version 1952, New King James Version 1982, American Standard Version 1901, New American Standard 1977/1995, New International Version U.S. 1984, New Revised Standard Version 1989, New International Version British 1990, New Jerusalem Bible 1990, New Living Translation 1996.

2. New English Bible 1970, New American Bible 1970, God’s Word 1995, New Life Bible 1993, New

Century Translation 1991, The Message 1993, Contemporary English Version 1995, A New Testament Translation (Cassirer) 1989, New World Translation, Phillips, Amplified, Good News.

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