

Justin's Apologetic Pneumatology

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Scholars have long regarded Justin's pneumatology as "baffling."¹ Even a question as fundamental as whether Justin viewed the Holy Spirit as truly distinct from the Logos has been controversial. Already in the mid nineteenth century Charles Semisch could cite a large number of writers who had "wholly or partially" suggested that Justin Martyr "made no real distinction between the Logos and the Holy Spirit."² With this "mischievous" reading Semisch vehemently disagreed;³ yet, to the present day, it remains common to characterize Justin's attempts to distinguish between the Spirit and Logos as "confused."⁴ The reasons for this description are well known. While, on the one hand, in a number of passages Justin numerically differentiates the Father, Son, and Spirit, assigning each a separate rank,⁵ still, on the other,

¹ Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough, *The Theology of Justin Martyr* (Jena: Frommann, 1923), 176.

² Charles Semisch, *Justin Martyr: His Life, Writings, and Opinions*, trans. J. E. Ryland, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Thomas Clark, 1843), 2:208–10, at 208–9.

³ Semisch, *Justin*, 2:208.

⁴ See Anthony Briggman, *Irenaeus of Lyons and the Theology of the Holy Spirit*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 9. Cf. Briggman, "Measuring Justin's Approach to the Spirit: Trinitarian Conviction and Binitarian Orientation," *Vigiliae Christianae* 63 (2009): 107–37.

⁵ See *1 Apol.* 13.3: "We will show that with reason we honor . . . Jesus Christ, . . . the son of the true God, and we hold him in second place, with the prophetic Spirit in third rank" (Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν . . . υἱὸν αὐτὸν τοῦ ὄντως θεοῦ . . . ἐν δευτέρᾳ χώρᾳ ἔχοντες, πνεῦμά τε προφητικὸν ἐν τρίτῃ τάξει ὅτι μετὰ λόγου τιμῶμεν ἀποδείξομεν [text and translations of *1 Apology* are from *Justin, Philosopher and Martyr: Apologies*, ed. and trans. Denis Minns and Paul Parvis, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Oxford University

many have averred that Justin has no logic for distinguishing between the Logos and the Holy Spirit.⁶ In at least one passage—one that tends to determine how Justin's pneumatology is construed—he seems to deny their distinction completely: “It is not proper to consider the Spirit and the Power which is from God as anything other than the Logos.”⁷

This statement, a comment on Luke 1:35, has frequently been cited as “the proof-text *par excellence*” of Justin's confusion between the Logos and the Holy Spirit.⁸ Samuel Lange wrote centuries ago: “This passage is decisive, and I do not see how any one, after so plain a declaration, can still say that Justin does not consider the λόγος and the πνεῦμα as one subject.”⁹ More recently, Anthony Briggman has found here one of two instances in Justin's writing which constitute “a failure to distinguish the identity of the Spirit and the Word.”¹⁰

Press, 2009), with modifications]). See also 6.2, 61.3, 65.3, 67.2. In *Dialogue with Trypho* 128.4, Justin uses numbers to distinguish the Father from the Logos when their distinction is questioned, which suggests that, for Justin, to number the Logos “second” and Spirit “third” is to differentiate them in the clearest terms. Other aspects of Justin's writing also imply a distinction. For example, according to Briggman, the Holy Spirit has “a special role in testifying to the deity and sovereignty of the Father and Son” (*Irenaeus of Lyons*, 13); see *Dial.* 36.6 and 56.15, as well as Kyle Hughes, *The Trinitarian Testimony of the Spirit: Prosopological Exegesis and the Development of Pre-Nicene Pneumatology*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae [SVC] 147 (Leiden: Brill, 2018), ch. 1. Also notable is Justin's exegesis of Plato in *1 Apol.* 60.6–7.

⁶ See Leslie W. Barnard, *Justin Martyr: His Life and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 106; Barnard, *St. Justin Martyr: The First and Second Apologies*, Ancient Christian Writers 56 (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1997), 149n228; see also Briggman, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 14–21, whom Jackson Lashier follows in *Irenaeus on the Trinity*, SVC 127 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 152–53; David E. Nyström, *The Apology of Justin Martyr: Literary Strategies and the Defence of Christianity*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament (WUNT), 2nd ser., 462 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 128.

⁷ *1 Apol.* 33.6; τὸ πνεῦμα οὖν καὶ τὴν δύναμιν τὴν παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐδὲν ἄλλο νοῆσαι θέμις ἢ τὸν λόγον.

⁸ Stephen O. Presley, “Reassessing Justin Martyr's Binitarian Orientation in *1 Apology* 33,” *Perichoresis* 17 (2019): 42.

⁹ Samuel Lange, *Ausführliche Geschichte der Dogmen* (Jena, 1796), 1:107; translation quoted from Semisch, *Justin*, 2:210.

¹⁰ Briggman, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 21. The second passage Briggman mentions is *Dial.* 88.2 (25–31), which Bogdan Bucur similarly reads as binitarian in *Angelomorphic Pneumatology: Clement of Alexandria and Other Early Christian Witnesses*, SCV 95 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 148–55. Since Briggman's reading of *1 Apol.* 33.6 is related to his reading of *Dial.* 88.2, a comment is necessary here, though it must be brief for reasons of space. Briggman and Bucur's position that Justin conflates the Holy Spirit and Logos in *Dial.* 87–88 is dependent upon the belief that the singular δύναμις which Christ always had in *Dial.* 88.2 is identical with the Spirit's powers, the totality of which is the Spirit

Many scholars have reached similar conclusions,¹¹ though there remain

himself, described in *Dial.* 87. The identification of the singular δύναις with the plural “powers” is possible but by no means necessary. The broader context for their readings is informed by the work on angel(omorphic) Christology in *Dial.* 128.2–4, as proposed by Goodenough, *Theology of Justin*, 148–59, and angel(omorphic) pneumatology as proposed by C. Oeyen, “Die Lehre der göttlichen Kräfte bei Justin,” *Studia Patristica* 11 (1972): 215–21. But scholars have already noted that Goodenough’s reading of *Dial.* 128 wrongly attributes to Justin the position of his opponents: Silke-Petra Bergjan, “Qualifying Angel in Justin’s Logos Christology,” *Studia Patristica* 40 (2006): 356–57; Oeyen, “Die Lehre,” 221n2; Eric Osborn, *Justin Martyr*, Beiträge zur historischen Theologie 47 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1973), 31; Oskar Skarsaune, *The Proof from Prophecy: A Study in Justin Martyr’s Proof-Text Tradition*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 56 (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 423n142 (“Goodenough, strange to say, takes *Dial.* 128:3 as expressing Justin’s own view”). For Oeyen’s part, the idea that Justin uses angelomorphic pneumatology rests largely on Justin’s use of κύριος τῶν δυνάμεων where the LXX has κύριος παντοκράτωρ. Oeyen takes Justin’s apparent preference for the former title as indicating his application of angel traditions to Christ and the Spirit. But the more likely explanation is that Justin’s use of κύριος τῶν δυνάμεων simply reflects his well-documented use of the *kaige* textual tradition in each of the passages in question: see Dominique Barthélemy, “Redécouverte d’un chaînon manquant de l’histoire de la Septante,” *Revue bénédictine* 60 (1953): 18–29, and recently James W. Barker, “The Reconstruction of *Kaige/Quinta* Zechariah 9.9,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 126 (2014): 584–88, esp. 586. For the *kaige* text, see Emanuel Tov, *The Greek Minor Prophets Scroll from Nahal Herver (8HevXIIgr)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

- ¹¹ For others who find confusion of the Spirit and Logos, see: A. W. F. Blunt, *The Apologies of Justin Martyr* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), xxvii–ix, at xxviii (“It looks remarkably like a real confusion of Persons”); José Pablo Martín, *El Espíritu Santo en los Orígenes del Cristianismo* (Zürich: Pas, 1971), 186 (who speaks of an “identificación total”); J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 2nd ed. (London: Longmans, 1960), 154, with 146–48; Charles Munier, *Justin: Apologie pour les chrétiens*, Sources chrétiennes 507 (Paris: Cerf, 2006), 219nn2–3; J. E. Morgan-Wynn, “The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience in Justin Martyr,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 38, no. 2 (1984), 174 (“We may well have here that phenomenon observable in the New Testament where in terms of Christian *experience* the risen Christ and the Spirit are identical and interchangeable”); Justin J. Lee, “Origen and ‘Angelomorphic Pneumatology,’” *Vigiliae Christianae* 74, no. 4 (2020): 394–410 (appearing to accept the narrative that Justin confuses the Spirit’s distinctiveness). The position of some scholars is ambivalent. See Osborn, who uses *1 Apol.* 33.6 to speak of the “unity” of the Logos and Spirit in prophecy, where Justin does “not distinguish” them (*Justin*, 88–89; see also 33–34). See also Willy Rordorf, “La Trinité dans les écrits de Justin Martyr,” *Augustinianum* 20, no. 1–2 (1980): 293: “In particular the Holy Spirit is sometimes confused with the Logos,” citing *1 Apol.* 33.6. But compare his more careful discussion later that year in “. . . Qui natus est de Spiritu sancto et Maria virgine,” *Augustinianum* 20, no. 3 (1980): 549. Goodenough has been cited both by Briggman as an example of someone who believed Justin failed “to distinguish the identities and activities of the Spirit and the

many others who deny that Justin's *pneuma*–Logos identification conflates the Logos and the Holy Spirit.¹² In this centuries-old debate, key questions are often left unaddressed by both sides. On one hand, those who see a conflation of the Logos and Holy Spirit rarely demonstrate why the *pneuma* of *1 Apol* 33.6 ought to be read as *the* Holy Spirit, though indeed many insist it should not be so understood. On the other hand, these other scholars have not offered a satisfactory explanation as to why Justin would write, “the *pneuma* is the Logos,” in the first place. As a result, our understanding of the pneumatology of one of the earliest Christian thinkers who has left us a substantial body of literature remains opaque.

This study offers a new reading of *1 Apol*. 33.6 and a fresh evaluation of Justin's broader pneumatology in light of it. Taking *1 Apol*. 33.6 as a test case, it argues that Justin's pneumatology is best understood as driven by apologetic logic operating within a triadic theological framework. Via a

Word in *1 Apol*. 33.6” (*Irenaeus of Lyons*, 25) and by Bucur to support the position that *1 Apol*. 33.6 is not “a case of occasional confusion between the two,”—Justin uses “Spirit” language “independently of any references to the third hypostasis” (*Angelomorphic Pneumatology*, 144–45).

- ¹² In addition to the literature discussed below, some describe the passage as teaching the Logos's self-incarnation without resolving the difficulty: Cullen Story, *The Nature of Truth in “The Gospel of Truth” and in the Writings of Justin Martyr: A Study of the Pattern of Orthodoxy in the Middle of the Second Christian Century*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 25 (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 104; J. Armitage Robinson, *St. Irenaeus, The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* (London: SPCK, 1920), 31–32; Presley, “Reassessing,” 50–51. For appeals to the greater number of passages which distinguish the Logos and Spirit, see Daniel Vigne, “Pneuma Prophetikon: Justin et le prophétisme,” in *Anthropos Laïkos: Mélanges Alexandre Faivre à l'occasion de ses 30 ans d'enseignement*, ed. Marie-Anne Vannier, Otto Wermelinger, and Gregor Wurst (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires Fribourg, 2000), 341; Jörg Ulrich, *Justin Apologien*, Kommentar zu frühchristlichen Apologeten (Freiburg: Herder, 2019), 326–27; Graham Stanton, “The Spirit in the Writings of Justin Martyr,” in *The Holy Spirit and Christian Origins: Essays in Honor of James D. G. Dunn*, ed. Graham N. Stanton, Bruce W. Longenecker, and Stephen C. Barton (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 331. Some reduce *1 Apol*. 33.6 to a confusion of functions: H. B. Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the Ancient Church: A Study of Christian Teaching in the Age of the Fathers* (London: MacMillan, 1912), 38–39; Barnard, *Justin*, 104 (but cf. 118); Stanton, “Spirit,” 331 (“lack of precision concerning the role of the Spirit” in *1 Apol*. 33.6); Lashier, *Irenaeus*, 152. Bernard Pouderon sees confusion in their function, “sinon dans leur être,” because both are said to inspire the prophets (*Les Apologues grecs du IIe siècle* [Paris: Cerf, 2005], 158). For other scholars who deny a conflation of the Holy Spirit and the Logos here, see M. Simonetti, “Note di Cristologia Pneumatica,” *Augustinianum* 12, no. 3 (1972): 220n44; John Behr, *The Way to Nicaea* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 102n3.

critical evaluation of Luke 1:35 and *1 Apol* 33.6 in light of the contexts of Justin's own writings and his broader second-century milieu, the first part demonstrates that it is possible to read *1 Apol* 33.6 as deliberately avoiding reference to the Holy Spirit, in which case Justin would not be explicitly or implicitly breaking the theological framework his own triadic confession implies. The second then substantiates this reading by demonstrating that apologetic reasoning leads Justin to interpret Luke's *pneuma* as the Logos: in so doing, Justin intentionally reads the Holy Spirit out of the text so that Luke's "Spirit" could not be construed by opponents of Christianity as a third distinct figure in the narrative who plays the role of the divine progenitor of Christ. Justin's exegesis, in other words, is designed to break any potential analogy between the Spirit's role in the Synoptic account of Christ's conception and Zeus's role impregnating mortal women in Greek myths. The third and final section briefly outlines the significance of this reading, first by situating it within Justin's broader theological perspective and then by looking at the legacy of Justin's reading in Christian tradition.

Conflation of the Logos and Spirit in *1 Apol*. 33.6?

We will begin with an overview of Justin's *pneuma*–Logos identification. Justin had introduced the doctrine of the Virgin Birth in *1 Apol* 32–33.2 by exegeting Gen 49 and Isa 7:14. In order to interpret Isa 7:14, Justin turns to the Annunciation narrative of Luke 1:26–38, which he paraphrases with language from Matt 1:18–23:

But δύναμις θεοῦ came upon the virgin and overshadowed her, and caused her, though a virgin, to be pregnant. [33.5] And further, the angel of God sent at that time to this virgin announced good news to her, saying, "Behold, you will conceive in the womb ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου and you will bear a son and he shall be called Son of the Most High, and you will call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

A few lines later, Justin interprets the passage:

Moses, the aforementioned prophet, signified that it is not proper to consider τὸ πνεῦμα and τὴν δύναμιν which is from God as anything other than the Logos who is also first-born of God, and this came

upon and overshadowed the virgin and caused her to be pregnant not through intercourse but through power.¹³

Straightforward as Justin's *pneuma*–Logos identification seems to some, the implications of this passage for Justin's understanding of the relationship between the Logos and the Holy Spirit are far from clear. Indeed, the very question of what it means to say that Justin confuses or conflates the Logos and the Holy Spirit has been approached in a variety of ways, but has seldom been subject to scrutiny. The following first defines what it means to suggest that Justin does or does not confuse the Logos and Holy Spirit. Then, it demonstrates that it is possible to understand *1 Apol* 33.6 as avoiding any reference to the Holy Spirit, and in so doing, remaining within the framework of Justin's triadic confession.

Methodological Considerations

In the extensive scholarship on *1 Apol* 33.6 the question of what it means that Justin confuses the Holy Spirit and Logos has been approached in a variety of ways. In some scholarship, the "confusion" seems to be judged in respect to the Trinitarian theologies that became normative in the fourth century,¹⁴ whereas in other accounts Justin has confused the meaning intended in the Gospel of Luke.¹⁵ In both cases the alleged confusion lies in that it does not meet a standard imposed from outside Justin's own theological framework and his broader second-century context. The questions of the relationship of Justin's pneumatology to that of later theologians or Luke's are worth pursuing, but they are a poor starting point for understanding and evaluating Justin's thought.

A more historical approach has been offered recently by Briggman, who sees Justin's *pneuma*–Logos identification as "confused" in the sense that it inverts or obscures a differentiation between the Logos and Spirit that

¹³ I have left key phrases un-translated, since translating would impose an interpretation of the passage that is premature at this point. In particular, English demands either a definite or an indefinite article be supplied here, and the use of either lowercase or capital letters. Most translators supply definite articles to *πνεῦμα* and *δύναμις* in 33.4–5 where the Greek has none. In this essay I use "Holy Spirit" or "Spirit" with a capital to refer to the third object of Christian worship as Justin defines it. When I wish to speak without supposing an interpretation, I use *πνεῦμα* or *pneuma*.

¹⁴ This is implicit in much twentieth century scholarship. See for example Swete, *Holy Spirit*, 38–39.

¹⁵ See, e.g., Lashier, *Irenaeus*, 152: "The Logos even becomes the agent of his own mysterious conception, despite the Gospel of Luke's specification of the Holy Spirit as the agent."

Justin himself habitually makes in other passages. Thus, for Briggman, to say that Justin “fails to differentiate the identities of the Word and Spirit” is to suggest that Justin has not done something that his own writing, above all his “Trinitarian confession,” suggests he should reasonably be expected to have done.¹⁶ In equating Luke’s πνεῦμα ἅγιον with the Logos and “confusing” their functions soon after, Justin has at least momentarily eliminated any way of distinguishing between what he elsewhere treats as distinct.¹⁷ In this reading, Justin has not so much explicitly affirmed that the second and third objects of Christian worship are one so much as he has written in such a way that, in developing his theological account of the Logos, or his “binitarian logic,” he has surrendered any resource he had for affirming their difference. Thus, implicitly, Justin entirely subsumes the Spirit into the Logos, which Briggman judges to be a “confusion” of the theology Justin confesses elsewhere. Accepting this framework, to say that Justin does not “confuse” the Spirit and Logos would be to say that he remains aware of his distinction between the Holy Spirit and the Logos, and furthermore has not broken any of his own exegetical or theological rules in writing, “the *pneuma* is the Logos.” Usually, scholars who maintain this do so by denying that the *pneuma* of *1 Apol.* 33.6 refers to the *pneuma* of Justin’s triadic confession.¹⁸

Put in these terms to ask whether Justin’s identification conflates or confuses the Logos and Holy Spirit is not to ask whether it violates a Trinitarian

¹⁶ Briggman, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 21 (for “Trinitarian confession,” see 11, 31). Cf. Lashier, *Irenaeus*, 152.

¹⁷ Nyström maintains that it is not possible to speak of Justin’s assigning the same function to the Logos and Spirit as “confusion” unless there is first a clear reason why he should not have (*Apology*, 129). This is undoubtedly true—even Irenaeus credits both the Logos and Spirit with giving Scripture in *Adversus haereses* 2.28.2, and scholars rightly decline to criticize him for doing so. But, there is an important caveat: Justin’s assigning the inspiration of prophecy to both the Spirit and Logos can be called a “confusion” of the principles that Justin himself establishes when referring to the Spirit as “the prophetic Spirit” as a proper name on the one hand (on this, see below), and in *1 Apol.* 33.9, where he avers that “those who prophesy are inspired by *nothing other than* divine Logos” (ὅτι δὲ οὐδενὶ ἄλλῳ θεοφοροῦνται οἱ προφητεύοντες εἰ μὴ λόγῳ θεῷ; emphasis mine); cf. 36.1, which passage makes Minns and Parvis’s argument that the “divine Logos” is not the λόγῳ in 33.9 unlikely (*Justin*, 175n5). Considering this, Briggman is correct that Justin does not habitually distinguish between the activities of the Logos and Holy Spirit, and is correct that in the case of inspiration of prophecy that this indicates confusion on Justin’s part. To speak of every instance in which the Logos and Spirit take the same function as “confusion” or a “failure” to distinguish their functions is not, however, justified.

¹⁸ See, e.g., H. A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers: Faith, Trinity, Incarnation*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 237.

theology deemed normative in a later era or a reading of Luke 1 deemed accurate by the critic. It is, rather, to inquire into how Justin himself might have made sense of his identification in light of his triadic confession, or if no such avenue appears available, to explain why Justin ventured outside the framework of his triadic confession. Expanding these parameters, one might also consider whether Justin's identification obfuscates a widely accepted way of reading the passage in his second-century context. Such an approach assumes that Justin, who presented himself as a philosopher, strove for consistency in his own thinking and would not have regarded it as intellectually honest to conflate a Logos and Spirit whom he believed to be distinct for apologetic convenience.

The Ambiguous Pneuma in Luke and Justin

With the terms of the discussion set, one would hope that determining whether Justin's *pneuma*–Logos identification conflates his second- and third-ranked objects of Christian worship would prove as “plain” as Lange once said. This, unfortunately, is not the case. A critical evaluation of Luke 1:35 and *1 Apol.* 33.6 within the contexts of Justin's corpus and second-century interpretations of the Annunciation narrative demonstrates that he can be read as deliberately avoiding reference to the Holy Spirit of his triadic confession as he interprets the Gospel passage. In light of this, neither Justin nor his contemporaries would have seen it as “plain” that Justin had confused the triadic structure of his confession by identifying the *pneuma* of Luke 1:35 as the Logos.

“THE” HOLY SPIRIT, OR “A” HOLY SPIRIT?

Since the ambivalence of Justin's *pneuma*–Logos identification stems from the ambiguity of the source of his language, the Synoptic traditions, it is necessary to begin there. Above all, it is noteworthy that nothing in Luke 1 requires the interpreter to treat its “holy spirit” as a title for the third-ranked Spirit of Justin's confession. In Luke 1, Mary asks how it is that she, a virgin, will conceive. The narrative says of Gabriel, “And answering, the angel said to her, πνεῦμα ἅγιον will come upon you, and δύναμις ὑψίστου will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy, Son of God.”¹⁹ Two points here make it difficult to interpret Luke and, in turn, to interpret Justin. The

¹⁹ Luke 1:35: καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς ὁ ἄγγελος εἶπεν αὐτῇ· πνεῦμα ἅγιον ἐπελεύσεται ἐπὶ σέ καὶ δύναμις ὑψίστου ἐπισκιάσει σοι· διὸ καὶ τὸ γεννώμενον ἅγιον κληθήσεται, υἱὸς θεοῦ (Nestle-Aland 28th ed. [some MSS read τὸ γεννώμενον ἐκ σου]; trans. modified from NRSV). Justin paraphrases the angel's message to Mary with language from Matt 1:20: τὸ γὰρ ἐν αὐτῇ γεννηθὲν ἐκ πνεύματός ἐστιν ἁγίου.

first ambiguity lies in the wide range of beings that can be denoted with the terms πνεῦμα and δύναμις. In the second century, both terms could designate the Logos, the Holy Spirit, and even a broader range of spiritual beings, such as angels and demons.²⁰ The Logos could be considered “spirit” or “a spirit” on the basis that he had a divine, spiritual nature.²¹ The flexibility of Luke’s terminology, then, would allow Justin to interpret Luke’s πνεῦμα as either the Holy Spirit or the Logos.

Scholars have used the ambiguity of *pneuma* and “power” from both sides, some to argue that Justin conflates the Logos with the Holy Spirit and others to argue that he does not.²² Neither conclusion necessarily follows. In particular, it has helpfully been shown that Justin identifies πνεῦμα of Luke with the Logos because he considered the Logos to be a δύναμις, and he found δύναμις equated with the πνεῦμα in Luke’s text.²³ This explanation of Justin’s exegetical rationale for identifying Luke’s *pneuma* as the Logos is compelling. But, while scholars have referenced it in order to substantiate the confusion of the Logos and Spirit in Justin, recognizing the rationale for Justin’s exegesis does not in this case clarify the theological implications of Justin’s exegesis. The ambivalence of Luke’s terminology reveals only *how* Justin could have come to have conflated the Logos and the Holy Spirit. It remains possible that Justin could have followed the same exegetical rationale to identify Luke’s *pneuma* as the Logos without reference to the third-ranked Spirit, and therefore without confusing his triadic theology.

Secondly, the ambiguous use of definite articles in both Luke and Justin makes it possible to maintain that he has intentionally avoided referring to his third-ranked Spirit. Scholars who find no theological confusion in

²⁰ See Bucur, *Angelomorphic Pneumatology*, 144–45, with the literature cited there and Jean Daniélou, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture*, trans. John Austin Baker (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973), 350, who notes that λόγος, πνεῦμα, and δύναμις “are in practice equivalents.”

²¹ See John 4:24; Tertullian, *Adversus Praxean* 26.

²² Jules Lebreton, *Histoire du dogme de la Trinité*, 2 vols. (Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne, 1928), 2:476–77, whom José Antonio de Aldama follows at *María en la patristica de los siglos I y II* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1970), 145; see also Goode-nough, *Theology of Justin*, 235–36; Bucur, *Angelomorphic Pneumatology*, 144–45 (but see too, 154–55) and for the other side, Briggman, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 23–25.

²³ See, for example, Martín, *El Espíritu Santo*, 181, who translates Justin’s reasoning into a formula: λόγος = πρώτη δύναμις (Θεοῦ) in *1 Apol.* 32.10; δύναμις θεοῦ = πνεῦμα (θεοῦ) in Luke 1:35; δύναμις θεοῦ καὶ πνεῦμα = λόγος in *1 Apol.* 33.6. Martín concludes there is an “identificación total” between the Word and Spirit (186). Briggman reaches a similar conclusion via similar reasoning in *Irenaeus*, 23–25. On the understanding of *Dial.* 128 in Briggman’s argument, see note 10 above.

I Apol. 33.6 have often pointed out that the words πνεῦμα ἅγιον in the Synoptic narratives are anarthrous and remain so in Justin's paraphrase at *I Apol.* 33.4–5.²⁴ Thus, it becomes possible for Justin to read the Synoptics, and possible—though not necessary—for us to read Justin as speaking of “a holy spirit” or “a spirit who is holy” rather than *the* Holy Spirit whom Justin classifies as the third-ranked object of Christian worship.²⁵

Valid as this reading is, it has failed to deter scholars such as Briggman from reading *I Apol.* 33.6 as a conflation between *the* third-ranked Spirit and the Logos. The likely reason for this is that the scholars who advance it, including the most recent editors of *I Apology*, have not accounted for the articles that occur in Justin's *pneuma*–Logos identification itself: τὸ πνεῦμα οὖν καὶ τὴν δύναμιν παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐδὲν ἄλλο νοῆσαι θέμις ἢ τὸν λόγον—“*the* spirit therefore and *the* power from God it is not proper to consider as any other than the Logos.”²⁶ Here, the articles could be taken to indicate Justin is thinking of *the* Spirit, his third-ranked object of Christian worship. But alternative interpretations are again possible: the articles in Justin's expressions “the spirit” and “the power” may have a demonstrative force.²⁷ In this reading, Justin would be saying, “the ‘spirit’ and the ‘power’ from God [in Luke's Gospel] it is not proper to consider as any other than the Logos,” in which case Justin would again not be identifying Luke's πνεῦμα with his third-ranked Spirit. He would simply be interpreting an ambiguous phrase that he was free to apply either to the Holy Spirit or to the Logos. In this case it would not be necessary to suppose that Justin's decision was not deliberate and cognizant of his triadic confession.

“HOLY SPIRIT” IN JUSTIN'S CORPUS

A second context that has not been adequately considered in scholarship is Justin's use of *pneuma* throughout his extant writings, which supports the possibility that Justin's *pneuma*–Logos identification did not break from the framework of his triadic confession. In particular, it is noteworthy that *I Apology* does use the Lukan words πνεῦμα ἅγιον as a proper name for the

²⁴ Cf. *Dial.* 78.3 and πνεῦμα κυρίου in *Dial.* 100.5. Text from Philippe Bobichon, *Justin Martyr: Dialogue avec Tryphon*, 2 vols. (Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg, 2003). See Minns and Parvis, *Justin*, 175n5, followed by Hughes, *Trinitarian Testimony*, 30n5. Cf. Goodenough, *Theology of Justin*, 182: “Since the Logos was of course a Spirit and a Power of God, such an identification was perfectly legitimate, and in no way effects the fact that Justin might have believed in another Spirit which was properly *the* Spirit.”

²⁵ πνεῦμα is also anarthrous in iterations of Justin's confession (e.g. *I Apol.* 61.3).

²⁶ See Minns and Parvis, *Justin*, 175n5.

²⁷ This possibility was pointed out in the 1800s by Semisch, *Justin*, 2:211, but has since been forgotten.

third-ranked Spirit. It is well known that in *1 Apology* Justin uses προφητικὸν πνεῦμα to refer to the third-ranked Spirit far more often than πνεῦμα ἅγιον.²⁸ In fact, through the first sixty chapters of *1 Apology* Justin does not often apply the adjective ἅγιον to the Spirit and never does so without adding προφητικός and sometimes additional adjectives.²⁹ It appears, at least for the majority of the book, that “holy” is simply an adjective that can modify “Spirit” rather than a part of the third-ranked Spirit’s proper name. It is true that the liturgical formulae after *1 Apology* 60 do use “holy Spirit” for the third-ranked Spirit,³⁰ and that his later treatise *Dialogue with Trypho* also uses “holy Spirit” with far greater frequency.³¹ But this makes it all the more striking that, in the majority of *1 Apology*, Justin seems to deliberately avoid using πνεῦμα ἅγιον as a title for the third-ranked Spirit. Given Justin’s lack of commitment to “Holy Spirit” as a special title in *1 Apology*, it remains possible to regard Justin’s interpretation of the words πνεῦμα ἅγιον as referring to the Logos rather than the Spirit as a deliberate choice which accords with his broader decision to avoid referring to his third-ranked Spirit as “Holy Spirit.” In this understanding Justin’s *pneuma*–Logos identification would indicate no confusion on his part.

The case can be made, furthermore, that Justin distinguishes between Luke’s πνεῦμα ἅγιον and the third-ranked Spirit within the text of *1 Apol.* 32–33 itself. Immediately surrounding the infamous *pneuma*–Logos identification, Justin refers to the Spirit as the “prophetic Spirit” (33.2; 33.5), “divine Spirit” (32.8), and the “divine, holy, prophetic Spirit” (32.2). It is possible that these adjectives, “prophetic” and “divine,” occur here to differentiate the third-ranked “prophetic Spirit” from the “holy spirit” who is the Logos in Luke 1:35. If this were the case, when Justin chooses to identify Luke’s πνεῦμα ἅγιον with the Logos, he is not introducing a confusion in the sense that he assigns a title or identity to the Logos which the confessions or arguments he has advanced to that point suggest should belong to the third-ranked Spirit.

²⁸ See Nyström, *Apology*, 124; Robert M. Grant, *Greek Apologists of the Second Century* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988), 62–63. Justin’s use of “prophetic Spirit” is unique enough that Stanton has suggested it may be Justin’s own coinage (“Spirit,” 326–27).

²⁹ There is only τοῦ θείου ἁγίου προφητικοῦ πνεύματος in *1 Apol.* 32.2 and τὸ ἅγιον προφητικὸν πνεῦμα in 44.1 and 53.6.

³⁰ See *1 Apol.* 61.3, 61.13, 65.3, 67.2. For the importance of God’s name at baptism and an analysis of the significance of the liturgical material for Justin’s argument in the later chapters of *1 Apology*, see Cullen I. K. Story, “Justin’s *Apology* I. 62–64: Its Importance for the Author’s Treatment of Christian Baptism,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 16 (1962), 172–78, esp. 174–75.

³¹ See Grant, *Greek Apologists*, 63.

LUKE 1:35 IN THE SECOND CENTURY

Lange once said it was “plain” that in *1 Apol.* 33.6 Justin conflated the Spirit and the Logos and modern scholars have not demonstrated that Justin drew or should have drawn a connection between Luke’s *pneuma* and the Holy Spirit of his triadic confession. Yet a survey of second-century witnesses shows that it was far from obvious to Justin’s contemporaries that Luke’s *pneuma* had anything to do with the *pneuma* that was confessed with the Father and Son in Matt 28:19. This lack of consensus, in turn, calls into question the assumption that Justin’s failure—if it can be considered a failure—to identify Luke’s *pneuma* with the Logos must be explained as a moment of confusion or binitarian reasoning.

One of the potentially earliest receptions of the Annunciation scene comes from a Christian section of the *Sibylline Oracles*:

Second, the archangel also addressed the maiden in speech
(φωνῇ):
“Receive God, Virgin, in your immaculate bosom.”
Thus speaking [εἰπὼν], he breathed [ἐμπνευσέ] in the grace of
God, even to one who was always a maiden . . .
Courage also came over her. A word [ἔπος] flew to her womb.
In time it was made flesh and came to life in the womb.³²

Here the *pneuma* is understood as “breath” and is identified with the “word” of the angel on the grounds that both are part of the angel’s speech. So, the “breath” does become incarnate, but not on the rationale that the Holy Spirit and Logos are a single subject. The author did not apparently assume either term should be understood as a proper name, which should give us pause in concluding that it should have been intuitive for Justin to read Luke’s *pneuma* as his third-ranked Spirit.

Another widely known writing, the *Protevangelium of James*, leaves ambiguous the meaning of Luke’s phrase πνεῦμα ἅγιον ἐπελεύσεται ἐπὶ σέ.³³

³² *Sibylline Oracles* 8.460–2, 469–70, trans. J. J. Collins, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James Charlesworth, 2 vols. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009); Greek text from *Die Oracula Sibyllina*, ed. Johannes Geffcken, *Die Christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1902; repr. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016). Cf. *Epistle of the Apostles* 14.7; Osborn refers to both to explain Justin’s doctrine of the Logos’s self-incarnation (*Justin*, 33). For recent commentary, see Francis Watson, *An Apostolic Gospel: The ‘Epistula Apostolorum’ in Literary Context*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 179 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 138–39.

³³ For an overview of the text’s milieu, including its relationship to Justin and apologetics

The Lukan narrative appropriated in *Prot.ev.* 11 omits the phrase πνεῦμα ἅγιον ἐπελεύσεται ἐπὶ σέ.³⁴ It has the angel say instead, “You will conceive a child from his logos” (11.2), and later, “the power of God will overshadow you” (11.3).³⁵ Mark Goodacre has recently shown the care with which the author of *Protevangelium* selects material from the Synoptic accounts, which makes the omission of the phrase πνεῦμα ἅγιον ἐπελεύσεται ἐπὶ σέ potentially revealing.³⁶ It could be the author omitted the phrase due to an inability to account for the Spirit’s role in effecting Mary’s pregnancy. In later passages, *Protevangelium* retains the Matthean phrase “from the Holy Spirit” as a general reference to the miraculous origin of Mary’s pregnancy.³⁷ Though É. de Strycker seems to assume the “Holy Spirit” of the Matthean phrase is identical with the λόγος in 11.2,³⁸ George Zervos has rightly emphasized that the text does not make the connection explicit.³⁹ Even if the identification were deemed likely, it is far from obvious that λόγος in 11.2 is to be understood as the divine Logos, a proper name for what becomes incarnate in Mary’s womb. No such use is attested elsewhere in the text. All this to say, *Protevangelium* does not present a clear interpretation of the identity of Luke’s πνεῦμα, and so we must pause before concluding that it would have been natural for Justin to understand Luke’s *pneuma* as the third-ranked Spirit.

Turning further afield, there continues to be no precedent by which we might deem it natural for a second-century author such as Justin to interpret

pertaining to Mary’s virginity, see Lily C. Vuong, *Gender and Purity in the Protevangelium of James*, WUNT, 2nd ser., 358 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 32–39. Vuong suggests a date of “late second or early third century” (240); cf. Jan N. Bremmer, who offers “the period of 180–90” in “Author, Date and Provenance of the *Protevangelium of James*,” in *The Protevangelium of James*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 2020), 63.

³⁴ See 11.2–3 with 14.2 (cf. Matt 1:20), and 19.1.

³⁵ Συνλήμψη ἐκ λόγου αὐτοῦ . . . δύναμις . . . Θεοῦ ἐπισκιάσει σοι. The text of *Prot.ev.* is from É. de Strycker, *Le Forme la plus ancienne du Protévangile de Jacques*, Subsidia Hagiographica 33 (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1961); trans. modified from *The Apocryphal Gospels: Texts and Translations*, ed. Bart Ehrman and Zlatko Pleše, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). De Strycker notes variant mss which include the Lukan πνα ἁγιον (116).

³⁶ Mark Goodacre, “The *Protevangelium of James* and the Creative Rewriting of *Matthew* and *Luke*,” in *Connecting the Gospels: Beyond the Canonical/Non-Canonical Divide*, ed. Francis Watson and Sarah Parkhouse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 57–76.

³⁷ 14.2: ἐκ πνεύματός ἐστιν ἁγίου—a verbal match with Matt 1:20. Cf. 19.1.

³⁸ De Strycker, *Le Forme*, 415.

³⁹ George Zervos, “Dating the *Protevangelium of James*: The Justin Martyr Connection,” *SBL Seminar Papers* 33 (1994): 422.

Luke's *pneuma* as the Holy Spirit. The pseudonymous Pauline epistle known as 3 Corinthians apparently identifies the "spirit" of the Annunciation narrative with what becomes incarnate in Mary. This text, however, differs from Justin in that it gives no indication elsewhere that the author maintained a triadic confession or theology.⁴⁰ This difference in theological perspective makes it a poor analogue for understanding Justin's writing.

Similarly, the Marcosian Valentinians identified Gabriel, the Holy Spirit, the Power of the Most High, and Mary with the Valentinian tetrad who begat Jesus.⁴¹ Such an interpretation distinguishes the Holy Spirit from the Logos, but not within a theological framework Justin would have used. Finally, in the decades after Justin wrote, Latin exegetes typically identified *spiritus* with that which became incarnate in Mary, but such exegesis did not correspond to whether the author in question maintained a trinitarian or binitarian theology.⁴² All this to say that it was clear in the second century, and even later, neither that Luke's *pneuma* should be interpreted as the Holy Spirit nor that interpreting Luke's *pneuma* as the Logos contradicted the distinction between the Spirit and Son that would have been confessed in many liturgies, including Justin's. In light of this, to take Justin's exegesis as implying binitarian theological reasoning or violating his triadic confession without demonstrating this is unwarranted. Justin offered his exegesis unaware that his interpretation would come to be regarded as aberrating

⁴⁰ "Our Lord Christ Jesus was born from Mary, from the seed of David, when the Holy Spirit was sent from heaven into her by the Father [ΠΙΝΣ ΑΓΕΙΟΥ ΑΠΟ ΟΥΡΑΝΟΥ ΠΑΡΑ ΤΟΥ ΠΙΣ ΑΠΟΣΤΑΛΕΝΤΟΣ ΕΙΣ ΑΥΤΗΝ] . . . since God the Almighty was righteous, and did not wish to abandon his own creation, he sent down the Spirit through fire into Mary the Galilean [ΚΑΤΕΠΙΕΜΣΕ ΠΙΝΑ ΔΙΑ ΠΥΡΟΣ ΕΙΣ ΜΑΡΕΙΑΝ ΤΗΝ ΓΑΛΕΙΛΕΑΝ]." (trans. Bart Ehrman, in *Lost Scriptures: Books That Did Not Make It into the New Testament* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003], 158; text from Michel Testuz, *Papyrus Bodmer X–XII: X: Correspondance apocryphe des Corinthiens et de l'apôtre Paul* (Cologne: Bibliotheca Bodmeriana 1959). For commentary, see A. F. J. Klijn, "The Apocryphal Correspondence between Paul and the Corinthians," *Vigiliae Christianae* 17 (1963): 17.

⁴¹ See Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 1.15.3. Justin rejects Valentinians at *Dial.* 35.6.

⁴² See the exegesis of Tertullian in an anti-modalist passage, *Adversus Praxeum* 26; the exegesis of Victorinus of Pettau (whose Trinitarianism has come under closer scrutiny; for an overview, see Grayden McCashen, "Victorinus of Pettau and Angelomorphic Theological Traditions," *Vigiliae Christianae* 77 [2023]: 257–83) at *De fabrica mundi* 9; and the exegesis of Lactantius, who was accused of denying the Spirit's distinct existence in antiquity (Jerome 84, no. 7; *Commentariorum in Epistolam ad Galatas* 4.6), at *Divine Institutes* 4.12.

from a norm. When he wrote, the implications and interpretation of Luke 1:35 was still a live issue, both to others and to Justin himself.⁴³

Indeed, there is reason to believe Justin's reading of Luke 1:35 reflects a considered response to the very exegetical difficulty documented in the preceding paragraphs. Briggman himself, taking *θέμις* as "according to custom," suggests that Justin's comments imply that his exegesis is traditional, albeit perhaps not unanimous.⁴⁴ That Justin's exegesis may have been traditional suggests it was not seen as violating the triadic confession that was also traditional for Justin. But if Justin indicates his customary exegesis was not unanimous, it must be the case that his interpretation was made with careful consideration. This, in turn, makes it possible to believe he consciously decided against identifying Luke's *πνεῦμα* with the third-ranked Spirit.

1 Apol. 33.6 as *Experimental, Apologetic Exegesis*

The prior section has shown that 1 Apol. 33.6 can be understood as Justin consciously avoiding reference to the third-ranked Spirit of his confession without breaking the theological framework implied by his triadic confession. In light of this, the question becomes why Justin might choose to regard Luke's *pneuma* as the Logos rather than the Holy Spirit of his liturgical confession. This section argues that the answer lies in Justin's apologetic reasoning. It begins by demonstrating that Justin's decision to identify Luke's *pneuma* with the Logos responds to an immediate apologetic need. Then, it demonstrates the apologetic reasoning that underlies Justin's exegetical decision, which, I maintain, provides a satisfactory contextual explanation for why Justin might have been consciously avoiding interpreting *pneuma* in Luke 1:35 as the third-ranked Spirit.

The Apologetic Context of 1 Apol. 33.6

The vast majority of prior scholars have sought to explain Justin's identification with recourse to theological reasoning. Most recently, Briggman suggests that the passage reflects Justin's pre-occupation with developing his Logos theology, or in Briggman's terms, his "binitarian theological account."⁴⁵ Justin's concentration on developing his account of the Logos

⁴³ On Justin's multiple interpretations of the passage, see the second subheading ("1 Apol. 33.6 in Christian Tradition") under the heading "1 Apol. 33.6 in Justin's Pneumatology and Christian Tradition" below.

⁴⁴ Briggman, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 23.

⁴⁵ Briggman, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 21. For earlier scholarship, see Goodenough, *Theology of Justin*, 236 (for criticism, see Briggman, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 25n56); Demetrius Trakatellis, *The Pre-Existence of Christ in Justin Martyr: An Exegetical Study with Reference*

leads him to make a *pneuma*–Logos identification that implicitly conflates the Logos with the Holy Spirit. This, Briggman argues, can be understood as a confusion that occurs as Justin’s tradition struggled to develop a theology that matched its Trinitarian confession.⁴⁶ In this way Briggman explains Justin’s confusion between the Spirit and the Logos with reference to the theological trends in Justin’s writing and in his contemporaries, which is, on the face of it, a plausible and historically justifiable explanation.

The issue with approaching Justin’s *pneuma*–Logos identification as a theological problem requiring a theological explanation is that each of the contexts for *1 Apol.* 33.6—the immediate problem the identification solves, context from Justin’s writings, and intertextual contexts from other second-century witnesses—suggests that the identification should be approached as a piece of apologetic exegesis.

That Justin’s *pneuma*–Logos identification is likely to have an underlying apologetic function and logic is clear from the most proximate context within *1 Apol.* 33 itself, Justin’s remark at 33.3: “But lest some people, not understanding the prophecy we have pointed to, should charge against us the things we charge against the poets, who said that Zeus came to women for the sake of sexual gratification.” With the words “But lest some people should charge” (ὅπως δὲ μὴ τινες . . . ἐγκαλέσωσιν), Justin marks a digression from his offensive project of demonstrating the legitimacy of Christianity from prophecy to a defensive project of defending the Christian God from charges of sexual immortality. “Some,” according to Justin, may accuse Christians of teaching that God impregnated Mary in an act of “sexual gratification,” just as Zeus impregnated women in the myths of the Greeks.⁴⁷ Justin seems to have already sought to preempt the analogy when, drawing a comparison between Jesus and the “sons of Zeus,” Justin carefully qualified the phrase “born of God” (γέννημα τοῦ θεοῦ) with a phrase “without intercourse” (ἄνευ ἐπιμιξίας)⁴⁸—a phrase that is missing from references to the doctrine of the Virgin Birth made in other contexts.⁴⁹

to the Humiliation and Exaltation Christology, Harvard Dissertations in Religion 6 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), 157.

⁴⁶ Briggman, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 21.

⁴⁷ See *Iliad* 14.314–29, where Zeus provides a list of the mortals and goddesses with whom he had fallen in love. Athenagoras would use that list in his own polemic at *Legatio pro Christianis* 21.5.

⁴⁸ *1 Apol.* 21.1; cf. 33.4 (οὐ συνουσιασθεῖσαν) and 33.6 (οὐ διὰ συνουσίας).

⁴⁹ See the passages in Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 73–75. Cf. *1 Apol.* 31.7, 46.5; *Dial* 63.1, 85.2. For the “power and will of God” as a traditional confession, see John A. Adair, “The Power and Will of God: Justin’s Christological Confession,” *Studia Patristica* 45 (2010): 361–65.

Further contextual evidence from elsewhere in Justin's writings demonstrates that differentiating the doctrine of the Virgin Birth and the Annunciation narrative from Zeus's sexual exploits in Greek myths was a persistent apologetic concern of Justin's. Relating what he claims is a conversation between himself and a Jewish man that would have taken place before the composition of *1 Apology*,⁵⁰ Justin puts the following words into the mouth of his interlocutor: "And in the myths of the ones called Greeks, it has been said that Perseus was begotten of Danae, when she was a virgin, the one called among them Zeus having flowed over her in the form of gold [ἐν χρυσοῦ μορφῇ ῥέυσαντος ἐπ' αὐτήν]. And saying things like those, you ought to be ashamed, and rather say that this Jesus was born a human from humans."⁵¹ Here the same charge is made that Justin addresses in *1 Apol.* 33.3: Christians teach that their God impregnated a mortal woman just as the Greeks teach concerning Zeus. In both cases the slander is occasioned by Justin's interpretation of Isa 7:14.

That Justin should twice address, years apart, what seems to be a rather forced slander of Christian teaching may suggest he is merely using the charge that "some" might bring against Christians in order to advance a narrative that has another end. If this were the case it would be justified to approach the *pneuma*–Logos identification as a primarily theological statement. However, a third piece of context, this time coming from outside Justin's corpus, proves that the "charge" of *1 Apol.* 33.3 was appealing to some ancient opponents of Christianity. According to Origen, Celsus wrote: "Then was the mother of Jesus beautiful? And because she was beautiful did God have sexual intercourse with her, although by nature He cannot love a corruptible body?"⁵² Earlier, Origen had reported that Celsus drew analogies between Christ's conception and various episodes from Greek mythology, including Zeus's own sexual exploits and offspring.⁵³ If Celsus

⁵⁰ Minns and Parvis give the range 147–54, with ca. 153 being the most likely, as the date of Justin's *Apologies* (Justin, 44). See also Robert M. Grant, "The Chronology of the Greek Apologists," *Vigiliae Christianae* 9 (1955), 26. Thomas Falls dates *Dialogue* "between 155 and 161" (*The Writings of Justin Martyr*, Fathers of the Church 6 [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1948], 139). Whenever the precise dates, the allusion to *1 Apol.* 26 in *Dial.* 120.6 shows their relative chronology. The setting of the *Dialogue* as near 135 is inferred from its allusion to the Bar Kochba revolt at *Dial.* 1.3.

⁵¹ *Dial.* 67.2 (trans. mine). Presley rightly draws attention to this parallel in "Reassessing," 45.

⁵² Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.39, trans. Henry Chadwick in *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953).

⁵³ Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.37.

did not know Justin's work, then he would serve as independent proof that the slander Justin responds to circulated in the second century. Alternatively, if, as some have maintained, Celsus knew Justin's writings, Celsus's example would still demonstrate that the slander that Justin anticipates in *1 Apol.* 33 appealed to pagan writers who sought to undermine Christian doctrine.⁵⁴ It is likely, therefore, that Justin's hypothetical formula, "lest some . . . should charge" (33.3), is a rhetorical device that introduces a slander of Christianity that Justin and his readers encountered when they engaged hostile critics of Christianity. In light of this, Justin's following identification between Luke's *pneuma* and the Logos should be read as a sincere attempt to clear the Christian God of alleged sexual contact with a mortal woman.

All these factors confirm that, when Justin seeks in *1 Apol.* 33 to eliminate any possibility of comparing Zeus's actions to the role of the Christian God in effecting Mary's conception of Jesus, he is responding to a legitimate challenge to Christian doctrine. He must provide a persuasive rebuttal. In order to do so—and this is crucial—Justin's task is not merely to clarify the meaning of the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, but to exegete specific scriptural passages that his opponents could claim intimate sexual contact between the Christian God and a mortal woman.⁵⁵ He needs, therefore, not an analogy for asexual divine production, which he finds elsewhere in another context in the story of Athena's birth, but something rather more specific: an argument that key Christian texts do not teach that the Christian God engaged in sexual relations with a mortal woman.⁵⁶ Any attempt to understand his *pneuma*–Logos identification must begin with how this identification would have achieved this apologetic task.

Justin's Pneuma–Logos Identification as Apologetic Exegesis

In the years since Briggman's article appeared, at least two scholars have drawn attention to the fact that Justin's identification is part of an apology,

⁵⁴ See Carl Andresen, *Logos und Nomos: Die Polemik des Kelsos wider das Christentum* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1955), 308–400 (pt. 4), whose hypothesis met the approval of no less a scholar than Henry Chadwick ("Justin's Defence of Christianity," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 47 [1965]: 284, including n1). Andresen himself draws attention to the parallel between the narrative of Christ's conception and Greek myth (*Logos und Nomos*, 318n25), as does A. D. Nock's review of *Logos und Nomos* in *Journal of Theological Studies* 7 (1956): 316n4. According to Origen, Celsus puts the slander in the mouth of a Jewish critic (cf. Justin, *Dial.* 67.2).

⁵⁵ In "Reassessing," Presley rightly emphasizes the exegetical nature of Justin's task in *1 Apol.* 33, though he emphasizes the *pneuma*–Logos identification as exegesis of Isa 7:14 rather than Luke 1:35.

⁵⁶ See *1 Apol.* 64.5.

but neither these nor prior scholars have explained how this identification functions to meet the apologetic needs of *1 Apol.* 33.⁵⁷ David Nyström, somewhat oddly, defines the apologetic task of *1 Apol.* 33 as buttressing “the identification of the Logos as Christ” by presenting “the Logos as the agent of his own incarnation” and moves on with little explanation.⁵⁸ Improving upon Nyström, Stephen Presley identifies differentiating the doctrine of the Virgin Birth from pagan myth as one of many exegetical “pressures” that Justin is under as he exegetes Isa 7:14. Presley, however, fails to explain how Justin’s saying, “the *pneuma* is the Logos,” helps him avoid this charge. Rather, Presley uses the fact of Justin’s apologetic “pressure” to insist that Justin’s “reference to the Spirit in the Lukan text is simply not part of his exegetical perspective, nor is it necessary for his apologetic.”⁵⁹ Presley does not explain why, if Luke’s *pneuma* is outside the purview of Justin’s apologetic, Justin mentions the *pneuma* in 33.6, when he could easily have omitted it from his paraphrase there as he does elsewhere.⁶⁰ Moreover, Presley’s claim that it was beyond Justin’s “exegetical perspective” to interpret Luke’s *pneuma* seems to simply be false, for in identifying Luke’s *pneuma* as Logos, Justin does interpret it. So, while Presley’s study is useful in that it points us toward apologetic needs as the key for understanding why Justin identified Luke’s *pneuma* as the Logos in *1 Apol.* 33.6, it fails to offer an explanation for that identification in Justin’s apologetics, much less to account for the identification’s theological implications.

In order to define the apologetic reasoning that leads Justin to interpret Luke’s Spirit as the Logos, it is necessary to trace his apologetic reasoning from the beginning of *1 Apol.* 33. To this end, Justin first addresses Isa 7:14,

⁵⁷ For previous scholarship, see Amié Puech, *Les apologistes grecs du IIe siècle de notre ère* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1912), 324, followed by Lebreton, *Histoire*, 2:477n2. See too Aldama, *María*, 141; Claire Clivaz, “Beyond the Category of ‘Proto-Orthodox Christianity’: An Enquiry into the Multivalence of Lk 1:35,” in *Infancy Gospels: Stories and Identities*, ed. Claire Clivaz et al., WUNT 281 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 174; Osborn, *Justin*, 34; Semisch, *Justin*, 2:210; A. L. Feder, *Justins des Märtyrers Lehr von Jesus Christus: dem Messias und dem menschgewordenen Sohn Gottes* (Freiburg: Herder, 1906), 120. Recent work has recognized Justin’s tendency to suit his theological language to his polemical needs: see, for example, Jeffrey M. Hubbard, “Does Justin Argue with Jews? Reconsidering the Relevance of Philo,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 77, no. 3 (2023): 237–56.

⁵⁸ Nyström, *Apology*, 126.

⁵⁹ Presley, “Reassessing,” 49.

⁶⁰ See Justin’s *Dial.* 100.5, where Justin replaces πνεῦμα ἅγιον, which is in *Dialogue* the primary title for the Holy Spirit, with πνεῦμα κυρίου. As we saw, *Prot. ev.* 11.2 also omits the problematic Lukan phrase.

which occasions his interlocutors' slanders in both *I Apology* and *Dialogue*. Justin presents the text in *I Apol.* 33.1 as, "Behold, the virgin shall conceive in the womb and shall bear a son and they shall call his name 'God with us.'" ⁶¹ The problem for Justin is that the sentence need not mean that a virgin will conceive, as Justin insists, "without intercourse." ⁶² Even if one grants that the word *παρθένος* refers to virginity, it could be maintained that the prophecy demands only that a woman who was a virgin at the time of the prophecy, but not necessarily thereafter, would conceive. ⁶³ Justin avers to the contrary, the text "signifies that the virgin conceived without intercourse, for if she had had intercourse with anyone, she would no longer be a virgin." ⁶⁴ His argument—if it can be called an argument—is weak. In merely stating the text does not mean what his opponent says it means, Justin is not offering a defense that would have been compelling to someone like Celsus who was not already sympathetic to Justin's position.

To buttress his assertion, Justin turns to Luke 1, paraphrased with Matthean language, ⁶⁵ but in so doing, Justin is appealing to yet another ambiguous text—one which his opponents could again exploit: "πνεῦμα ἅγιον ἐπελεύσεται ἐπὶ σὲ καὶ δύναμις ὑψίστου ἐπισκιάσει σοι ["a" or "the" holy spirit will come upon you and "a" or "the" power of the most high will overshadow you]." ⁶⁶ This statement presents a problem for Justin because the verbs "to come upon" (*ἐπέρχομαι*) and "to overshadow" (*ἐπισκιάζω*) are both ambiguous. They are used in the Septuagint and Luke-Acts to refer to God's Spirit or presence coming upon or overshadowing his people, and never are they used in a sexual context. ⁶⁷ It is therefore not usually thought that the verbs intimate a sexual encounter in Luke 1, but neither is their

⁶¹ Ἴδου ἡ παρθένος ἐν γαστρὶ ἔξει καὶ τέξεται υἱόν, καὶ ἐροῦσιν ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ Μεθ' ἡμῶν ὁ θεός.

⁶² See Ken M. Penner, *Isaiah*, Septuagint Commentary Series (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 398–400.

⁶³ Penner, *Isaiah*, 399.

⁶⁴ *I Apol.* 33.4.

⁶⁵ On Justin's combination of the Synoptic accounts see Aldama, *Maria*, 141–46.

⁶⁶ In *I Apol.* 33.4, this statement appears as δύναμις θεοῦ ἐπελθοῦσα τῇ παρθένῳ ἐπεσκίασεν αὐτήν, and the Annunciation of the angel, drawing on Matt 1:20, is phrased in 33.5: συλλήψῃ ἐν γαστρὶ ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου. Justin understands the latter statement to be another way of affirming what is affirmed in the former, and when he equates πνεῦμα and δύναμις in 33.6 he would seem to regard the verbs as being equally the action of the "spirit" and the "power."

⁶⁷ See Acts 1:8; Isa 32:15; Luke 9:34; Exod 40:35. I am not aware of a passage outside of Scripture that uses either verb to denote a sexual encounter, either. See the literature cited in note 69.

meaning—and how the action denoted by them causes Mary to conceive—precise and obvious. The phrase ἐπελεύσεται ἐπὶ σέ, which Justin paraphrases ἐπελθοῦσα τῇ παρθένῳ (33.4), is, in fact, quite close to the expression Justin used to describe Zeus's encounters just before: ἐγγλυθέναι ἐπὶ γυναῖκας (33.3), and Justin appears unable to provide an explanation for either term.⁶⁸ Justin, then, faces a problem in that πνεῦμα ἅγιον and δύναιμι, terms that could denote the Christian deity, are the subjects of the verbs “will come upon” and “will overshadow,” which imply some ill-defined action in respect to a mortal woman that causes her to conceive. Justin's hostile opponents could—or perhaps already had, in Justin's experience—easily claim the verbs are circumlocutions for a sexual act, in which case the analogy between Christ's conception and Zeus's sexual encounters is complete. As Celsus proves, this interpretation would be appealing to a reader who is keen to even the score on Justin by showing the myths of Justin's religion are as explicit as those of his own. It is for this reason that Justin's solution must not include simply a doctrine of the Logos's self-incarnation, but a version of that doctrine that accounts for the role of the πνεῦμα ἅγιον and “power of the Most High” within Luke's narrative.

With the apologetic needs of *1 Apol.* 33.6 in place, we are in a better position to understand the apologetic reasoning underlying Justin's *pneuma*–Logos identification. It is true that it would have been possible for Justin to identify Luke's πνεῦμα ἅγιον with his third-ranked Spirit, who is “the Holy Spirit” in the later chapters of *1 Apology*. We have also seen, however, that, in light of the wide variety of interpretations of Luke 1:35 circulating in the second century and Justin's habit of denoting the third-ranked Spirit with other adjectives in *1 Apology*, it is uncertain that this would have been a “natural” identification. At the very least, even if it would have been natural to Justin in a neutral context, Justin's apologetic situation causes him to pursue an alternate identification, that of identifying Luke's *pneuma* with the Logos. Justin does not explain the exegetical reasoning that justifies his

⁶⁸ Presley observes this parallel (“Reassessing,” 46). See too the parallel between Luke 1 and Plutarch, *Numa* 4.4, adduced by Michael Wolter, *Das Lukasevangelium* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 93. Modern commentators often find it necessary to address whether these verbs are euphemisms for a sexual encounter: see I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 70–71; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (I–IX): Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, Anchor Bible Commentary 28 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 351; Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, vol. 1, *1:1–9:50*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1994), 121–22; François Bovon, *Luke 1*, trans. Christine M. Thomas, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2002), 52; Wolter, *Das Lukasevangelium*, 93–94.

identification, but scholars have already offered a plausible account: Justin knows the Logos as a “power” and finds Luke’s πνεῦμα ἅγιον identified as a “power.” Justin, then, is able to identify the Logos as “spirit” on the grounds that Luke’s “spirit,” like the Logos, is a “power.”⁶⁹

Whatever Justin’s rationale for his *pneuma*–Logos identification, it avoids the apologetic problem that would be present if he interpreted Luke’s πνεῦμα ἅγιον as *the* Holy Spirit. If Justin had chosen to identify Luke’s πνεῦμα ἅγιον with his third-ranked Spirit, the passage could be made to fit the analogy with Zeus: just as Zeus comes upon Danae and causes her to conceive Perseus, the Holy Spirit “comes upon” and “overshadows” Mary, causing her to conceive Jesus. Justin avoids this problem by identifying Luke’s *pneuma* and power with the Logos who becomes incarnate as Mary’s offspring. By casting Luke’s “spirit” in the role of Perseus, Justin’s *pneuma*–Logos identification leaves only the mother and child. There remains no third distinct “Spirit” who could have played the role of Zeus by impregnating Mary through sexual intercourse. In this way, Justin circumvents the slanders to which second-century Christians were exposed by eliminating the Holy Spirit, and with the Spirit any potential divine figure who might be understood to have begotten Christ through intercourse, from the traditional narrative of Christ’s conception. His identification of Luke’s *pneuma* with the Logos, then, is not a case of theological confusion. It is an exegetical decision driven by apologetic reasoning that is not at odds with Justin’s triadic confession.

***1 Apol.* 33.6 in Justin’s Pneumatology and Christian Tradition**

The first two sections of this study have maintained that, in its various contexts, *1 Apol.* 33.6 can be read as a piece of exegesis that deliberately avoids identifying Luke’s *pneuma* with the Holy Spirit and have outlined Justin’s apologetic reasoning in order to explain why Justin would have found this exegesis attractive. This final section offers a revised view of Justin’s pneumatology in light of the foregoing discussion. It disagrees with Briggman that Justin conflates the Logos and Holy Spirit, but neither does it agree with Presley in denying that a “binitarian orientation” underlies *1 Apol.* 33.6. Rather, it proposes a third approach—that Justin’s lack of a “trinitarian logic” allows him the flexibility to pursue his apologetic reasoning without harm to his triadic confession. It concludes by briefly situating *1 Apol.* 33.6 in the development of Christian thought.

⁶⁹ See the literature cited in note 23.

1 Apol. 33.6 in Justin's Pneumatology

Briggman has shown at length that Justin's extant writings evidence little Trinitarian logic, meaning, Justin does not exhibit a developed philosophical or exegetical framework or rationale that requires or explains the existence or functions of a distinct Holy Spirit in addition to the Father and Son.⁷⁰ Justin has only a confession and a tradition that tell him such a Spirit exists. Briggman suggests "binitarian" reasoning ultimately leads Justin to confuse the Spirit and the Logos in 1 Apol. 33.6, but if the above analyses are correct, it is precisely Justin's lack of a developed pneumatology that enables him to pursue his apologetically driven exegesis within the framework of his triadic confession. Justin's apologetic would have been limited, for example, if Luke 1:35 was already incorporated into a network of pneumatological proof texts comparable to the Christological proofs Justin offers throughout 1 *Apology* and *Dialogue*. Since it was not, he was able to experiment with its interpretation. Or, to take another example, since Justin, unlike later theologians, had no rules dictating when the word πνεῦμα should be taken to refer to the Holy Spirit and when it should not, he was free to take the πνεῦμα ἅγιον in Luke and Matthew as the Logos.⁷¹ Finally, if Justin, like many fourth-century theologians, held some form of common or inseparable operations, he would have been compelled to assign the Spirit a clear function in effecting Christ's Incarnation as they often did.⁷² That Justin lacked these or other forms of "Trinitarian logic" allowed him to avoid finding the Holy Spirit in Luke's narrative for apologetic reasons without violating his theological rules. After

⁷⁰ See Briggman, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 14–21. Exceptions are, for example, the role of the Spirit in testifying to the Son and Father. See note 5 above. It may also be possible to see traditional liturgical confession itself as a "logic" by which one might justify belief in the distinction between the Son and Spirit.

⁷¹ Examples of these types of rules—which do not always preclude Justin's reading—can be found in, e.g., Origen, *princ* 1.3.4; Athanasius, *ep Serap* 1.4.2; Didymus the Blind, *Spir* 8 and 73.

⁷² See, e.g., Athanasius' emphasis on the Spirit's presence in the Lukan narrative at *ep Serap* 2.15.2–4. For the doctrine of inseparable operations in Athanasius, see Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 213–14. Discussing inseparable operations, Augustine affirms that the entire "Trinity produced the flesh of Christ": *Sermon* 52.21, trans. Edmund Hill, *Sermons III (51–94) on the New Testament*, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century (New York: New City Press, 1991). See too *trin* 2.5 (8); Lewis Ayres, "Remember That You are Catholic" (serm. 52.5): Augustine on the Unity of the Triune God," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 8 (2000): 39–82. Ambrose, *Spir* 2.10.37–8, with 2.10.101–02, 2.12.142; Niceta of Remesiana, *Spir* 5–6, with 18.

all, one must first have theological or pneumatological rules before one can break them.

1 Apol. 33.6 in Christian Tradition

At the same time, it appears that the narrow, apologetic reasoning that drove Justin's interpretation of Luke 1:35 in *1 Apol.* 33.6 had limitations in terms of producing a satisfying reading of Scripture—in the eyes of both later Christian apologists and even Justin himself. As was mentioned earlier, Justin returns to the slanderous analogy between Christ's conception and Zeus's sexual exploits several years later, in *Dialogue*. In the later text, Justin handles the slander very differently. In response to the slander, his character responds: "Even though you talk worse things in ridicule and in jest, you will not move me from my fixed design; but I shall always adduce from the words which you think can be brought forward [by you] as proof. . . . You are not, however, acting fairly or truthfully in attempting to undo those things in which there has been constantly agreement between us."⁷³ In contrast to *1 Apology*, in *Dialogue* Justin refuses to engage Trypho's slander. Instead, he dismisses the comparison as "ridicule" and "jest" made in bad faith to distract Justin from the exegetical arguments he had been making—quite successfully, Justin thinks. Neither here nor elsewhere in *Dialogue* does Justin offer a positive interpretation of Luke 1 commensurate with the one he advances in *1 Apology*.⁷⁴ Justin abandons the apologetic he experimented with at *1 Apol.* 33.6—perhaps, and here we can only speculate, partly because Justin himself realized his reading of Luke 1 was not wholly satisfying in light of his triadic confession.

Later early Christian exegetes ensured that Justin's experimental apologetic exegesis was to go no further than the experimental phase.⁷⁵ In the following century, in *Contra Celsum*, Origen addresses Celsus's analogy between Zeus's sexual procreation and the Christian doctrine of the Virgin Birth: "I have to reply that these words would be appropriate to a vulgar buffoon and not to a man who takes his professed task seriously."⁷⁶ Content

⁷³ *Dial.* 67.3 (*Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, 4th printing [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004], 231); here Justin responds to the passage from *Dial.* 67.2, quoted above.

⁷⁴ See the paraphrase of Luke 1 in *Dial.* 100.5, which replaces the πνεῦμα ἅγιον, which in *Dialogue* functions as a title for the Holy Spirit, with the phrase πνεῦμα κυρίου.

⁷⁵ Michel René Barnes links Justin's exegesis in *1 Apol.* 33.6 to Tertullian's *Adversus Praxean* 26–27, which he refers to as "traditional since Justin" ("The Beginning and End of Early Christian Pneumatology," *Augustinian Studies* 39, no. 2 [2008]: 181). Tertullian's reading appears independent of Justin's: it follows different reasoning and comes in a different context.

⁷⁶ Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.37.

to ridicule Celsus, Origen moves on. Here Origen mirrors Justin's approach from *Dial.* 67 in so far as he too refuses to dignify the slander with a response. Origen's reply in *Contra Celsum* 1.39 is the same: "I do not think it worth while to combat an argument which he does not put forward seriously, but only as mockery." These passages confirm that Justin's apologetic exegesis was a failed experiment in the sense that it did not prevent later opponents of Christianity from pursuing the analogy between the Christian God, the "holy spirit," and Zeus, and it did not prove useful to later Christian apologists.⁷⁷ In later Christian apologetics, as in Justin's own writings, the experimental exegesis of *1 Apol.* 33.6 was abandoned in favor of a simpler, less involved rejoinder—one matching the attitude of the slanderer.

Conclusion

In modern scholarship, Justin is often identified as "Saint," "Philosopher," and "Martyr." Undoubtedly he was, in addition to these, a theologian, and his writings are essential for understanding the development of Christian doctrine. Today, however, in the three works that remain from his pen, we have access first and foremost to Justin the apologist. His extant treatises present pieces of theology and philosophy and exegesis, but the reasoning guiding the discussion is almost always apologetic. That apologetic reasoning must first be accounted for before one can understand theological ideas he often, to varying degrees, allows the reader to glimpse while advancing his apologies.

Of this rule *1 Apol.* 33.6 is a pristine example. Here we find Justin refuting a slander which we know from outside testimony appealed to second-century critics of Christianity, who likened the virgin's conceiving and bearing a son by the Spirit to mortal women who conceived and bore children by Zeus. In refuting this calumnious understanding of the Virgin Birth Justin found it expedient to equate Luke's πνεῦμα ἅγιον with the Logos in order to destroy the analogy his opponents would seek to draw between that passage and pagan mythology by removing any potential divine progenitor from the narrative of Christ's conception. As generations of interpreters have noticed, the resulting *pneuma*–Logos identification does not seem to be a natural reflection of his confession. It could be the case that he has in the heat of the moment entirely forgotten the distinction between the second and third object of Christian worship, but it is also possible to see his *pneuma*–Logos

⁷⁷ In *Commentarii in evangelium Joannis* 6.67 Origen distinguishes between the πνεῦμα and δόναμις in Luke 1:35.

identification as a conscious effort to claim that the third object of Christian worship is not referenced in the Lukan text, and so cannot have played the role of Zeus in Christ's conception. In so arguing Justin reveals that he had no developed pneumatology which could be called upon to explain the Spirit's role in the conception of Jesus, and so his argument was not apparently very impressive, either to others or to Justin himself. Nonetheless, despite the limitations of his argument, it is an argument that Justin carries out within the framework of his confession of the Father, Son, and a third, distinct Spirit.⁷⁸ N·V

⁷⁸ I thank Isaac T. Soon, Jeffrey Hubbard, and Anthony Briggman for reading and commenting on drafts of this paper, and Anthony Briggman for graciously suffering to hear my opinions on Justin's pneumatology on numerous occasions. The present article is clearer and sharper than it would have been thanks to these scholars' generosity with their time and expertise.