



among Christian writers.<sup>8</sup> It is this very strong Christian tradition about the seven spirits resting on the Messiah that functions as Aphrahat's hermeneutical presupposition, allowing him to speak about the seven operations of the Spirit even though his biblical text only mentions six.

#### *The Holy Spirit and the Move From Unity to Multiplicity*

The difference between the Spirit resting on the Messiah and the Spirit present in the prophets is one of degree.<sup>9</sup> More precisely, the Sage seems particularly fond of 'part-to-whole' comparisons: while the Messiah bears the seven-fold Spirit, the prophets only 'received [a portion] from the Spirit of Christ, each one of them as he was able to bear' (*Dem.* 6.12 [1/288]): John the Baptist, the greatest among prophets, still received the Spirit 'according to measure' (*ba-kyāla*). In the new dispensation, at baptism, believers receive the Holy Spirit 'from a little portion of the godhead';<sup>10</sup> at Pentecost, '[a portion] from the Spirit of Christ (*w-men ruhēh tub dīleh da-mšīhā*) is again poured forth today upon all flesh [Joel 3.1]:'<sup>11</sup> Christ overshadows all believers – each of them severally (*mentā mentā*).<sup>12</sup> In his footnotes to the German translation of the *Demonstrations*, Bruns points to the 'exceedingly materialistic' imagery of these expressions.<sup>13</sup> This is why I think it is justified to insert 'portion' in my English rendering of the phrases indicating the presence of the Spirit in the prophets:

Aside from the seven-fold Spirit of Isa. 11.2, Aphrahat also finds another proof-text for the Messiah's full endowment with the Spirit. In 3.34, 'it was not by measure that his Father gave the Spirit unto him.'<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, the partial presence of the Spirit in the prophets is illustrated by recourse to Num. 11.17 (God taking 'from the Spirit' of Moses to endow the seventy elders),<sup>15</sup> as well as by a statement ascribed to

8 For the patristic exegesis of the passage, see Schlütz, *Isaiah 11.2, passim*. Folker Siegert (*Drei hellenistisch-jüdische Predigten: Ps.-Philon, 'Über Jona', 'Über Jona' < Fragment > und 'Über Simson' [WUNT, 61; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992], 2:275) views the homily's use of Isa. 11.2 as a Jewish precursor of the Christian tradition.  
9 So also Ortiz de Urbina, 'Die Gottheit Christi bei Aphrahat', p. 127; Bruns, *Christusbild*, p. 140.  
10 *Dem.* 6.12 (1/288); 10.8 (1/464); 1.19 (1/44); 6.13 (1/288); 6.12 (1/288); 6.10 (1/281); 6.14 (1/293).  
11 *Dem.* 6.12 (1/288).  
12 *Dem.* 6.10 (1/281).  
13 Bruns, *Unterweisungen*, pp. 200 n. 22, 205 n. 26. The passages are *Dem.* 6.10 (1/281) and *Dem.* 6.14 (1/293).  
14 *Dem.* 6.12 (1/285).  
15 On the 'massive presence' of this verse in rabbinic literature, see Pierre, *Exposés*, p. 395 n. 73.*

the apostle Paul: 'God distributed from the Spirit of Christ and sent it into the prophets' (*ā-pāleg ālāhā men ruhā da-mšīhēh w-sāddar ba-nbyē*).<sup>16</sup> Even though scholarship is not unanimous on this point, I find it indisputable that Aphrahat is quoting 'the blessed apostle' according to 3 *Cor.*, an apocryphal text that Aphrahat and Ephrem seem to have regarded as canonical.<sup>17</sup> The relevant verse (3 *Cor.* 2.10) reads as follows: 'For he [God] desired to save the house of Israel. Therefore, distributing from the Spirit of Christ, he sent it into the prophets (*Meptias ovv ato tou pvehiatos tou Xpistou ētrephēv eis tous prophētas*).'<sup>18</sup>

#### *Isaiah 11.2 and Matthew 18.10*

Once it is an established conviction that Isa. 11.2 speaks of the seven-fold Spirit resting on the Messiah, Aphrahat's connection with the seven eyes on the stone in Zech. 3.9 is a natural exegetical development. And given that the language of 'seven-fold' Spirit expresses the 'fullness' of the Spirit, it is, again, not surprising that Aphrahat should refer to the Spirit-endowment of Old Testament prophets and New Testament believers by using the language of 'parts' and 'portions' of Spirit.  
But Aphrahat's exegesis makes yet another, this time more surprising, move. Speaking about the Spirit of the prophets, he says:

This Spirit, which the prophets have received, and which we, too, have received, is not at all times found with those that receive it; rather it sometimes goes to him that sent it, and sometimes it goes to him that received it. Hearken to that which our Lord said, *Do not despise any one of these little ones that believe in me, for their angels in heaven always gaze on the face of my Father*. [Mt. 18.10] Indeed, this Spirit is at all times on the move, and stands before God and beholds his face; and it will accuse before God whomsoever injures the temple in which it dwells.<sup>19</sup>

This passage is part of the *Demonstration* 'On the Sons of the Covenant'. Aphrahat argues here one of the axioms of his ascetic theory, namely that

16 *Dem.* 6.12 (1/285).  
17 On 3 *Cor.*, see Vahan Hovhannessian, *Third Corinthians: Reclaiming Paul for Christian Orthodoxy* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000); Loois, *Theophilus*, pp. 148–53. Pierre ('Introduction', p. 139 n. 73) does not think that Aphrahat's Creed used 3 *Cor.* On the contrary, Bruns (*Christusbild*, p. 187 n. 13) states that Aphrahat is 'very obviously' quoting 3 *Cor.* 3.10. In *Dem.* 23 (11/64) also, where Aphrahat again mentions 'the Apostle who bears witness: Jesus Christ was born of the Holy Spirit by Mary of the house of David', Pierre believes to be an echo of Rom. 1.3–4. Yet, 3 *Cor.* 2.5 offers a closer match: 'Christ Jesus [some mss: Jesus Christ] was born of Mary of the seed of David by the Holy Spirit.'  
18 Greek text in Hovhannessian, *Third Corinthians*, p. 149.  
19 Aphrahat, *Dem.* 6.14–15 (1/293, 296, 297).

the Holy Spirit departs from a sinful person and goes to accuse that person before the throne of God. The above-quoted fragment is preceded by the following remarks:

Anyone who has preserved the Spirit of Christ in purity: when it [the Spirit] goes to him [Christ], it [the Spirit] speaks to him thus: *the body to which I went and which put me on in the waters of baptism, has preserved me in holiness*. And the Holy Spirit entrusts Christ for the resurrection of the body that preserved it in a pure manner. . . . And anyone who receives the Spirit from the waters [of baptism] and wears it: it [the Spirit] departs from that person . . . and goes to its nature, [namely] unto Christ, and accuses that man of having received it.

According to the Sage, Christians receive the Spirit at baptism. If one keeps the Spirit in purity, the latter will advocate for that person before the throne of God; if, on the contrary, one indulges in sinful behaviour, the Spirit leaves the house of the soul – which allows the adversary to break in and occupy it (*Dem.* 6.17) – and goes to accuse the person before God. For Aphrahat, the notion that the Spirit can be present in the believer, and subsequently leave, must have been part of a traditional ascetic theory. Indication that this is an inherited tradition can be found in the striking similarities with the *Shepherd of Hermas*.<sup>20</sup> There are, however, no Syriac manuscripts of the *Shepherd*, and no references to this work among Syriac writers.<sup>21</sup> Nadia Ibrahim-Fredrikson raises the hypothesis of a common source behind both Aphrahat and the *Shepherd*, a source whose views of spiritual dualism and divine indwelling would have been similar to that of the Community Rule at Qumran.<sup>22</sup> What seems to have been overlooked is the fact that Aphrahat describes the work of the Holy Spirit by using unmistakably *angelic* imagery: the

<sup>20</sup> According to the *Shepherd of Hermas*, the *νευρα* inhabits the believer (*Herm. Mand.* 10.2.5) and, under normal circumstances, intercedes *on behalf of* that person. Yet, the *Shepherd* warns that the Holy Spirit is easily grieved and driven away by sadness (*Herm. Mand.* 10.1.3; 10.2.1), in which case he will depart and intercede with God *against* the person (*Herm. Mand.* 10.41.5).

<sup>21</sup> Martin Leuzsch, *Papstfragmente: Hirte des Hermas* (Schriften des Urchristentums, 3; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1998), pp. 120–1; Anton Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur mit Ausschluß der christlich-palästinensischen Texte* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1922), pp. 75–7; Sebastian Brock, 'The Syriac Background to the World of Theodore of Tarsus', in *From Ephrem to Romanos* (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 1999), p. 37.

<sup>22</sup> N. I. Fredrikson, 'L'Esprit Saint et les esprits mauvais dans le pasteur d'Hermas: Sources et prolongements', *VC* 55 (2001): 262–80 (273, 277, 278). For similarities between Aphrahat's ascetic theology and that of the Qumran documents see A. Golitzin, 'Recovering the "Glory of Adam": "Divine Light" Traditions in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Christian Assectical Literature of Fourth-Century Syro-Mesopotamia', in J. R. Davila (ed.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls as Background to Postbiblical Judaism and Early Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 275–308.

Spirit 'is always on the move', he stands before the divine throne, beholds the face of God, entrusts Christ on behalf of the worthy ascetics, accuses the unworthy and so on. It is significant that the action of carrying prayers from earth to the throne of God is sometimes (*Dem.* 4.13) ascribed to the archangel Gabriel. This is again similar to the *Shepherd* (*Herm. Sim.* 8.2.5), where the archangel Michael states that, in addition to the inspection of the believers' good deeds by one of his angelic subordinates, he will personally test every soul again, at the heavenly altar (ἐγὼ αὐτὸν ἐπιτοῦσθαι τοῦ θουοιστοῦ βουκαίου). Both Aphrahat and the *Shepherd* deploy the traditional imagery of angels carrying up the prayer of humans to the heavenly altar.<sup>23</sup> In the case of Aphrahat, the angelomorphic element is even more pronounced, given that the Spirit's toing and froing between earth and heaven, and his intercession before the divine throne, are 'documented' with an unlikely proof-text, namely Mt. 18.10 ('their angels in heaven always behold the face of my Father'). In his commentary on the Diatessaron, Ephrem interprets 'the angels of the little ones' as a metaphor for the prayers of the believers, which reach up to the highest heavens. Later Syriac authors (Jacob of Edessa, Isodad of Merv, Dionysius Bar Salibi) use Mt. 18.10 as a proof-text for the existence of guardian angels.<sup>24</sup> For Aphrahat, however, the angels of Mt. 18.10 illustrate the intercessory activity of the *Holy Spirit*.

### The 'Fragmentary' Gift of the Spirit and Angelomorphic Pneumatology

It may seem that this sort of angelomorphic pneumatology is not necessarily related to the 'fragmentary presence' of the Spirit discussed earlier. Such is not the case, however. In *Dem.* 6.10 (1/277–280), Christians are asked not to *despise* 'the pledge' – that is, the gift of the Holy Spirit – received at baptism:

Our Lord . . . left us a pledge of his own when he ascended . . . it behooves us also to honor that which is his, which we have received . . . let us honor that which is his, according to his own nature. If we honor it, we shall go to him. . . . But if we despise it, he will take away from us that which he has given us; and if we abuse his pledge, he will there take away that which is his, and will deprive us of that which he has promised us.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> For a long list of relevant texts and detailed discussion, see Loren Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology* (WUNT, 70; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994), pp. 173–80; Cornelis Haas, 'Die Pneumatologie des "Hirten des Hermas"', *ANRW* II/27.1 (1993): 552–86 (560, 567 n. 49).

<sup>24</sup> Winfrid Cramer, 'Mt 18.10 in frühysyrischer Deutung', *OrChr* 59 (1975): 130–46.

<sup>25</sup> *Dem.* 6.10 (1/279–280).

It is quite evident that 'the pledge' (*rabhuna*, *ῥαββῶνα*) refers to the Spirit. There is, first, the allusion to 2 Cor. 1.22; 5:5 and Eph. 1.14. There are, then, a number of obvious parallels with statements made elsewhere in the same *Demonstration*, where the same is said in reference to the Holy Spirit.<sup>26</sup> The notion of 'despising' the Spirit is significant here. Aphrahat returns to it later in the same *Demonstration*, also supplying a fitting scriptural proof: 'the Spirit that the prophets received, and which we, too, have received' is indicated by something that our Lord said, *Do not despise any of these little ones that believe in Me, for their angels in heaven always gaze on the face of my Father*.<sup>27</sup>

Aphrahat's notion of 'fragmentary' Spirit-endowment and his angelomorphic pneumatology should be considered jointly. The connection between Zech. 3.9; Isa. 11.1-3 and Mt. 18.10 illustrates very well what Pierre calls a 'network of scriptural traditions', which Aphrahat inherited from earlier Christian tradition.<sup>28</sup> That this is, indeed, the case, is made clear by the occurrence of the same cluster of biblical verses and echoes of angelomorphic pneumatology in Clement of Alexandria.

#### *Aphrahat and Clement of Alexandria*

Clement of Alexandria identifies the 'angels ever contemplating the Face of God' in Mt. 18.10 with the 'thrones' (Col. 1.16) and 'the seven eyes of the Lord' (Zech. 3.9; 4.10; Rev. 5.6), and understands all these passages as descriptions of the seven 'first-born princes of the angels' (*πρωτόγενοι ἀγγέλων ἀρχόντες*), elsewhere called the seven *πρωτόκτιστοι*. These seven *protocists*, however, also carry a definite pneumatological content, since Clement identifies them not only with various types of angels, but

26 In the text just quoted, Christ leaves his pledge upon his ascension, just as in another passage: 'when he went to his Father, he sent to us his Spirit' (*Dem.* 6.10 [I/282]); the exhortation to 'honor the pledge' finds a counterpart in an earlier exhortation, to 'honor the Spirit of Christ, that we may receive grace from Him' (*Dem.* 6.1 [I/241]); the characterization of the pledge as 'that which is of his [Christ's] own nature' is very similar to the statement about the Spirit going 'to its nature, [namely] unto Christ' (*Dem.* 6.14 [I/296]); 'two-way' discourse on the required attitude towards the pledge, corresponds perfectly to the ascetic theory of the same *Demonstration*, which opposes those who 'preserve the Spirit of Christ in purity' and those who defile the Spirit (*Dem.* 6.14-15).

27 *Dem.* 6.14-15 (I/292, 297).  
 28 Some of these traditions were embodied in a series of *testimonia* that might have circulated orally and been transmitted independently from the known biblical text'. As a matter of fact, Aphrahat is 'one of the richest witnesses' to the use of *testimonia*, with *Dem.* 16 furnishing 'the largest collection ever realized by a Father'. See Pierre, 'Introduction', pp. 115, 138, 68. See also Murray, 'Rhetorical Patterns', p. 110; *idem*, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (London and New York: T & T Clark International, 2nd edn, 2004), pp. 289-90; Schütz, *Isaias 11.2*, pp. 33-4, 40, 58.

also with the 'seven spirits resting on the rod that springs from the root of Jesse' (Isa. 11.1-3 LXX): this, for him, is 'the heptad of the Spirit'.<sup>29</sup> The exegesis of Clement of Alexandria and that of Aphrahat offer a surprising convergence. Both writers use the same cluster of biblical verses: 'the seven eyes of the Lord' (Zech. 3.9; 4.10), 'the seven gifts of the Spirit' (Isa. 11.2-3), and 'the angels of the little ones' (Mt. 18.10); both echo the tradition about the highest angelic company; finally,<sup>30</sup> both use angelic imagery to express a definite pneumatological content.

#### *Aphrahat and Justin Martyr*

As for Aphrahat's notion of a fragmentary endowment of the prophets with the gifts of the Spirit, and the comparison of this partial charismatic endowment with the complete possession of the Spirit by the Messiah, a comparable view occurs in Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho*. Justin must respond to an interesting challenge from his Jewish opponent:

The Scripture asserts by Isaiah: . . . and the Spirit of God shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and piety: and the spirit of the fear of the Lord shall fill him (Isa. 11.1-2). I grant you (he said) that these words are spoken of Christ. But you also maintain that he was pre-existent as God . . . Now, how can He be demonstrated to have been pre-existent, since he is filled with the powers of the Holy Spirit, which the Scripture by Isaiah enumerates, as if He were in lack of them?

Trypho suggests that Isa. 11.1-3 deals with the *reception* of the seven 'powers of the Holy Spirit', and therefore excludes Justin's idea of a pre-existent 'Lord', distinct from the Father, and endowed with the 'powers'. Justin responds by interpreting the Isaiah passage as a reference to the Jordan event: the seven powers of the Spirit rested on Jesus Christ when the Spirit 'fluttered down on' him (*ἐπιπτεῖν*, *Dial.* 88.3) at the Jordan baptism.<sup>31</sup> In reaction, most likely, to contrary subordinatist views, Justin insists that Jesus' baptism was a theophany, which did not *create* Christ's identity but *revealed* it to the world (cf. Jn 1.31: *ἵνα φανερωθῆ*).

29 *Strom.* 5.6.35; *Ecl.* 57.1; *Exc.* 10; *Strom.* 5.6.35; *Paed.* 3.12.87.

30 For a detailed treatment of this topic in Clement, see Christian Oeyen, *Eine frühchristliche Engelkneumatologie bei Klemens von Alexandria* (Erweiterter Separatdruck aus der Internationalen Kirchlichen Zeitschrift; Bern, 1966); Bogdan G. Bucur, 'Revisiting Christian Oeyen: "The Other Clement" on Father, Son, and the Angelomorphic Spirit', *VC* 61 (2007): 381-413.

31 The connection between the seven-fold Spirit of Isa. 11.1-3 and the descent of the Spirit at the Jordan baptism also occurs in Irenaeus (*Epid.* 9), who regards it as an element of Church tradition.



Levi the spirit of zeal, and Judah the spirit of discernment. As for Samson, the only received 'the spirit of strength' – which explains his utter lack of wisdom!<sup>40</sup> Despite the fact that 'On Samson' enumerates only six spirits in Isa. 11.2, the resemblance with Justin is obvious.<sup>41</sup>

I now return to the challenge posed by Trypho: how can Justin's claim about a pre-existent Messiah be consistent with the idea that he received the seven powers of the Spirit? I noted earlier that Justin rejects any subordinationist views, and affirms that the Jordan event is, essentially, a revelation of who Jesus Christ is: the pre-existent bearer of the seven powers of the Holy Spirit, or, as he had explained earlier, as 'Lord of the powers'.

This language of *dyvades*, *dyvades* *toy mvevpatoc*, and *kyrios toy dyvadesy*, and the connection between the seven gifts of the Spirit (Isa. 11.2-3) and the 'powers' are not accidental. As has already been documented in scholarship, Justin understands the Old Testament phrase *kyrios toy dyvadesy* such that the 'Lord' is Jesus Christ and the 'powers' are, at the same time, certain angelic beings (*Dial.* 85) and the seven powers of the Spirit' referred to in Isaiah 11 (*Dial.* 87).<sup>42</sup>

## Conclusions

Both Aphrahat and Justin combine Isa. 11.2-3 (the seven gifts of the Spirit) with Joel 3.1 ('I shall pour out my Spirit on all flesh') and Ps. 67 (68).19 ('He ascended on high, he led captivity captive, he gave gifts to the sons of men').<sup>43</sup> Unlike Justin Martyr, who uses Isa. 11.1-3 to contrast the 'partial' outpouring of the Spirit over the prophets and Christ's 'full' and sovereign possession of the Spirit, Aphrahat uses the Isaiah verse only for the Messiah, and never to affirm the partial endowment of prophets and baptized Christians. In other words, Isa. 11.2 serves, in *Dem.* 1, the same role as In 3.34 ('it was not by measure that his Father gave the Spirit unto him') in *Dem.* 6. Like Justin, Aphrahat states that the prophets received only [a portion] from the Spirit of Christ, each one of them as he was able to bear' – but he prefers to use 3 *Cor.* 2.10 rather than Isa. 11.2 in support of this statement.

Both Aphrahat and Clement use the same cluster of biblical verses (Isa.

40 Ps.-Philo, 'On Samson', p. 24.

41 It should be noted that there are no literary connections between the homily and early Christian literature prior to the Armenian translation (Sieger, *Drei hellenistisch-jüdische Predigten*, p. 48; Siegert et al. (eds), *Pseudo-Philon*, pp. 38–9).  
42 Oeyen, 'Die Lehre von den göttlichen Kräften bei Justin', *StPatr* 11 (1972): 214–21; B. G. Bucur, 'The Angelic Spirit in Early Christianity: Justin, the Martyr and Philosopher', *JR* 88 (2008): 190–208.

43 Justin, *Dial.* 87.6.

11.2-3; Zech. 3.9; Mt. 18.10) to express a definite pneumatological content. Nevertheless, since Aphrahat uses Mt 18.10 to illustrate the dynamism of divine indwelling and the intercessory activity of the Spirit, he never connects the angels of the Face with Isa. 11.2, an exegetical move that occurs in Clement of Alexandria.<sup>44</sup>

It is true that this particular arrangement of the proof-texts is determined by the necessities of the discourse, and that, in other contexts, Aphrahat would most likely have furnished a different 'constellation' using the same passages. As the texts stand, however, the scriptural support for Aphrahat's doctrine of 'partial versus complete' possession of the Spirit differs slightly from that of Justin and Clement. By way of consequence, the link between the notion of 'fragmentary Spirit' and angelomorphic pneumatology is also less clear than it is in these authors. Even though no literary connection exists between these two Greek-speaking writers and the Persian Sage, the exegesis of Isa. 11.2 and the 'midrashic' connections with other biblical passages are strikingly similar. There are, in fact, several other convergences between Aphrahat and earlier writers in the West, which, as I have stated earlier, cannot be explained by direct literary connection.<sup>45</sup> Gilles Quispel was convinced that behind both Clement and Aphrahat lies a tradition that goes back to Jewish Christian missionaries 'who brought the new religion to Mesopotamia',<sup>46</sup> and were also 'the founding fathers of the church in Alexandria'.<sup>46</sup> Be that as it may, the comparison between Aphrahat, Justin and Clement suggests the existence of a primitive Christian tradition that used Isa. 11.2 to compare the Spirit-endowment of prophets with that of the Messiah.

44 In Aphrahat, Mt. 18.10 is instead linked to other texts such as 2 *Cor.* 1.22; 5.5; Eph. 1.14; 3 *Cor.* 2.10; Num. 11.17; 2 Sam. 16.14-23 (the evil spirit sent to Saul).

45 I have already mentioned the resemblance with the *Shepherd of Hermas*. Another case refers to the striking resemblance between the exegesis of Judg. 7.4-8 by Aphrahat (*Dem.* 7.19-21) and Origen (*Hom. Judic.* 9.2). R. H. Connolly ('Aphraates and Monasticism', *JTS* 6 [1905]: 538-9) hypothesized that the sage might have read Origen. In response, Looft (*Theophilus*, pp. 258-9) stated that a common source is a far more likely explanation.  
46 Quispel, 'Genius and Spirit', 160, 164. See also Schütz, *Isaias 11.2*, pp. 33-4. A fresh and compelling view has been proposed recently by April DeConick, *Recovering the Original Gospel of Thomas: A History of The Gospel And Its Growth* (LNTS, 286; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2005), pp. 236-41.

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