GLOSSA
(The) Life-giving Spirit

So also it is written, "The first man, Adam, became a living soul"; the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit. (1 Cor. 15:45)

According to the original Greek the above verse can be translated into English in three different ways, depending upon whether the phrase *life-giving Spirit* is preceded by a definite, an indefinite, or no article, i.e., the last Adam became *the* life-giving Spirit, *a* life-giving Spirit, or life-giving Spirit.

In the Greek of 1 Corinthians 15:45, the two complements, "living soul" and "life-giving Spirit," are anarthrous (i.e., without a definite article).[1] Because Greek lacks an indefinite article, one possible way of understanding an anarthrous noun phrase in Greek is that the noun is indefinite. However, in a structure such as is found in 1 Corinthians 15:45, where two nouns or noun phrases are linked by a copula verb such as the verb "to be" or "to become," the absence of the definite article usually indicates which of the two nouns is the complement. In a language like Greek, where word order is more flexible, this distinction is necessary to determine the complement or predicate and the subject. In a verse such as John 1:1, the anarthrous predicate *theos* (God) precedes the subject *ho logos* (the Word), and it is only through this rule that we can understand what is the subject and what is the predicate. So also in 1 Corinthians 15:45, it is better to understand that the primary reason for the two complements "living soul" and "life-giving Spirit" being anarthrous is to distinguish the predicates from the subjects "the first man, Adam" and "the last Adam."

Therefore, if we understand that "a living soul" and "a life-giving Spirit" are anarthrous because they are functioning as complements, how should we render this verse into English? Anarthrous complements can be rendered into English with an indefinite article, e.g., Jonah became *a* sign (Luke 11:30); or with an anarthrous complement, e.g., the Word became flesh (John 1:14); or with a definite article, Christ became *the* source of eternal salvation (Heb. 5:9). The complement "life-giving Spirit" in 1 Corinthians 15:45 can be translated in these three different ways, each of which has a particular sense.

In terms of the parallel structure of the first part of the verse, we could say that the translation, "the last Adam became *a* life-giving Spirit" seems the most appropriate. In fact this is the standard way that most English versions of the New Testament render this verse. It is important that we understand the function of the indefinite article here. The indefinite article in English is frequently used to indicate a member of a class. For example, in the sentence "He wanted to buy a table," "a table" refers to a member of a class of entities called tables. The clause "the first man, Adam, became a living soul" indicates that Adam became a member of the class of soulish beings or even living souls. However, at the time of creation Adam was the only member of the class of living souls. So at that time we could have translated this clause "the first man, Adam, became the living soul," even though soon after his creation the class of living souls increased to more than one member, thus constraining the use of the indefinite article in translation. Applying this consideration to the second part of the verse, "the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit," the last Adam should be regarded as becoming a member of the class of spiritual beings or spirits, even life-giving spirits. The addition of an adjective, however, usually reduces the size of the class. The adjective *life-giving* raises the questions of how many belong to the class of life-giving spirits and to whom should the quality of life-giving be attributed? In the New Testament the quality of life-giving is attributed only to the Son (John 5:21; 6:27; 17:2) and the Spirit (6:63; 2 Cor. 3:6). However, we should not understand that there is a class of life-giving Spirits with the last Adam becoming one life-giving Spirit and the Holy Spirit another life-giving Spirit. This would bring us into the error of having two life-giving Spirits! The attribute "life-giving" is an attribute that belongs to the Triune God alone; He is the unique life-giving One. The life-giving Spirit is a class of one.

If Paul had used the adjective "living" with Spirit as a parallel to "living soul," perhaps we could have had a class of more than one member, but the fact that he used the adjective "life-giving" limits this class to having one member. Christ became *a* member of the class of spiritual beings through His resurrection, but He alone as the Spirit is *the* unique *life-giving* member of this class. The uniqueness of this title should be indicated by the capitalization of "Spirit." This convention, however, is not

followed in many English translations of the New Testament.

An anarthrous predicate in English usually refers to the essence or quality of a substance. For example, "the wood became stone," where "stone" reflects the essence of the material. By translating this verse "the last Adam became life-giving Spirit" we get a reference to the essence of Christ's being after His resurrection (cf. Rom. 1:4). He is now life-giving Spirit. The humanity of the last Adam has now become Spirit, the same in essence as the Triune God Himself (John 4:24) and the same in essence as the Spirit with whom He shares the attribute of life-giving (6:63; 2 Cor. 3:6). Through Christ's process of incarnation, death, and resurrection, there is now the way for God to extend His attribute of life-giving to the fallen descendants of the first man Adam. Through His humanity, His flesh, which is now Spirit, the divine *zöë* life is made available, is given, for the life of the world (John 6:51, 53, 63). He became life-giving Spirit to impart the divine, eternal life into us. This translation of 1 Corinthians 15:45, along with John 1:14, is the biblical equivalent of Athanasius's aphorism: "For He became human that we might become divine." This emphasizes the essence which the last Adam became so that essentially there is no difference among the three of the Trinity and even Christ's humanity, which has been knit into the Godhead.

Translating this verse with a definite article in English, i.e., "the last Adam became *the* life-giving Spirit" emphasizes the uniqueness of the life-giving Spirit. The last Adam became the unique life-giving Spirit who is the same as the Holy Spirit who also gives life.

All of these three ways of translating this verse result in the economical identification of the second of the Trinity with the third (cf. 2 Cor. 3:17-18). Although this may seem problematic to traditional theology, in terms of the utterance of the Bible this is actually the soundest way to understand this verse. Rather than stripping the life-giving Spirit of hypostatic meaning, we should see this verse from the perspective of the economical aspect of the Trinity.

> In His doing the Trinity is unitary, not triple.…any operation of the Trinity is one operation, and hence when one acts, the other two are identified with the one.

> In the life-giving Spirit…Christ personally comes to the believers to apply the virtue of His resurrection.…He [Christ] does not cease to be the second of the Trinity, but in that the third of the Trinity now applies the person and accomplishments of the second, the second, from this economic perspective, has become the third. (Robichaux 48-49)

James Dunn in his article on 1 Corinthians 15:45 also states:

> Paul identifies the risen Jesus with this life-giving Spirit; Jesus himself is the source of these experiences of Spirit, or to put it the other way, the experience of life-giving Spirit is experience of the risen Jesus.…In the believer's experience there is *no* distinction between Christ and Spirit. This does not mean of course that Paul makes no distinction between Christ and Spirit. But it does mean that later Trinitarian dogma cannot readily look to Paul for support at this point. (132-133,139)

While it is valid to translate 1 Corinthians 15:45 with either the presence or absence of the articles, all three possibilities have subtle distinctions: The last Adam became a life-giving Spirit, identifying Him as a member of the class of life-giving Spirits of which there is only one; the last Adam became life-giving Spirit, referring to His essence which is identical to that of the Triune God; and the last Adam became the life-giving Spirit, indicating the uniqueness of the life-giving Spirit. In terms of the economy of the Triune God, the believers' experience, and Greek grammar, perhaps the clearest utterance is simply to say that the last Adam became *the* life-giving Spirit, which clarifies the uniqueness of His person, the essence of His being, and the economical identification of the second of the Trinity with the third.

by Roger Good

Notes

[1]Some might argue that if you look more closely at the Greek text of 1 Corinthians 15:45 the complements are both preceded by a preposition *eis,* and so there is no need for them to be anarthrous to distinguish them from the subject. The presence of the preposition *eis* preceding a complement is unusual in Greek and here reflects the LXX translation of the Hebrew of Genesis 2:7 which underlies the first part of the verse. In Hebrew the copula verb is frequently accompanied by a preposition when it carries the meaning "become." Genesis 2:7 is an example of this structure and the LXX translators translated the Hebrew preposition with *eis.* However, in Greek, prepositional phrases are also very commonly anarthrous, and the presence of the preposition *eis* does not really affect the rule of Greek syntax outlined above.

Works Cited

Dunn, James D. G. "1 Corinthians 15:45—last Adam, life-giving spirit." *Christ and the Spirit in the New Testament.* Ed. Barnabas Lindars and Stephen Smalley. Cambridge University Press, 1973. 127-141.

Robichaux, Kerry S. "Some Biblical Trinitarian Conundrums." *Affirmation & Critique* 1 (1996): 46-49.