

Unit 8

The Spirit-Paraclete in John's Gospel

Jesus Bears and Bestows the Spirit

A brief perusal through the text of John's Gospel reveals that its author places far less emphasis on the Spirit (*pneuma*) at work in Jesus' ministry as compared to the Synoptic Gospels. No reference is made to Jesus being led by the Spirit into the wilderness nor to him casting out demons and performing miracles by the power of the Spirit. And yet, it would be misleading to claim that the Spirit is absent from Jesus' ministry. The Spirit is in fact already mentioned in the first narrative section after the Prologue. John chooses not to narrate Jesus' baptism, but this event is recalled in 1:32-33 through the testimony of the Baptist: 'And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him"'. God's Spirit is therefore bestowed on Jesus, and the distinctive reference to its abiding on Jesus expresses the permanence of their relationship, as well as preparing for the Baptist's identification of Jesus as the one who will himself 'baptize with the Holy Spirit' (1:33) and who is the Son of God (1:34). The alternative reading 'Chosen One of God' (*ho eklektos tou theou*) establishes an even closer link with the reference to Jesus being bestowed with the Spirit, as it recalls the opening lines of the first Servant Song of Second Isaiah ('Behold, my servant whom I uphold, my Chosen One in whom my soul delights'), the one upon whom God places his Spirit. The description of Jesus as the bearer and bestower of the heavenly gift of the Spirit is then taken up again in John 3:31-36, where Jesus, as the authoritative agent of God, is said to have received the Spirit 'without measure' (3:34), following his dialogue with Nicodemus about the new birth in Spirit offered to those who believe in him (3:5-6).

At what point, according to John, is the Spirit bestowed upon believers? Jesus tells the Samaritan woman, 'The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship with the Father in Spirit and truth' (4:23). Does this suggest that the Spirit is already beginning to transform believers during Jesus' earthly ministry? Certainly John's

eschatological terminology depicts Jesus and his ministry as the critical eschatological event ('is now here'), in that true worship in Spirit and truth is available to all who believe in him as the giver of living water. However, the bestowal of the Spirit and the possibility of new birth are the forthcoming consequences of that event ('is coming').

This interpretation is confirmed by other passages, because John, at various points in the Gospel, stresses that the giving of the Spirit is an event that will take place at the time of the glorification of Jesus, his death and resurrection. In John 7:37-39 the motif of water emerges once again when Jesus invites people to drink of the living water: 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, "Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water"'. Despite the textual variant which punctuates the verse in a way that makes the water flow from the believer (placing a full stop after 'let him drink' rather than after 'the one who believes in me'), the evidence elsewhere in the Gospel strongly suggests that the water flows from Jesus, particularly in view of the subsequent comment: 'Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified' (7:39). Jesus' glorification (his death and resurrection) is the prerequisite for the Spirit to be made available to believers. For this reason John 7:38-39 anticipates the crucifixion scene in chapter 19 in which blood and water flow from the side of the one who has submitted himself to death. The water is the living water that represents the Holy Spirit. At one level, the remark in John 19:30 that Jesus 'gave up the spirit' could refer to his yielding of his human spirit, but it may also point to the release of the divine Spirit through his death; John's literary techniques elsewhere suggests that there may be deliberate ambiguity at play here.

If the Spirit is made available or *released* on the occasion of Jesus' death, it is *bestowed* upon others through his resurrection. When the risen Christ appears to the disciples, John states that 'he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (20:22). In this scene, in which Easter and Pentecost are brought together, the breathing of the Spirit on the disciples recalls Genesis 2:7 where God *breathes* life into the first human being. The

verbal resemblance in the Greek is sufficiently striking to lead one to conclude that the God who bestowed humanity with life in creation now bestows new life through Jesus' death and resurrection to empower his followers to undertake a mission likened to his own (20:21). This recalls the earlier reference to the life-giving role of the Spirit in 6:63: 'It is the Spirit that gives life', and it fulfils the promise made by John the Baptist that Jesus will baptize others with the Spirit. This above all else, is what accounts for the relative absence of the Spirit in John's narration of Jesus' public ministry.

The Spirit-Paraclete in the Farewell Discourses

The Spirit features prominently in the Farewell Discourses (John 13-17), whose central theme is the preparation of those addressed (the disciples) to deal with Jesus' approaching absence. The message addressed to the disciples is at the same time a message for John's community of believers, since John's Gospel, more so than any of the other canonical gospels, consciously and explicitly sets out its relationship to the community of its readers. John notes to them his reasons for writing (20:30-31) and promises the future presence of Jesus among his followers after his death (cf. 14:25-33; 15:1-11). The needs of the disciples after Jesus' imminent departure are therefore coalesced with those belonging to John's community (however defined).

Through a complex interweaving of themes, many of which recur in varying patterns, the Johannine Jesus speaks from the perspective of one who is about to return to his heavenly dwelling-place to prepare a place for his followers. It reflects the concerns of believers belonging to a subsequent generation who are wrestling with the pastoral issues raised by Jesus' death and departure, by the death of apostolic witnesses, and by the delay in the eschatological hope of the *parousia*. How can they experience Jesus' presence? The Johannine Farewell Discourses offer assurance to believers that their relationship with Jesus continues; the Holy Spirit will remain with believers, providing access to God when Jesus is no longer physically present (communion with the Father and Son, the promise of eternal life). The temporal differentiation between Jesus' pre- and post-glorification, as set

out in 7:38-39 and described in the crucifixion and resurrection narratives, is paralleled in John 16:7 where Jesus explains that his going away is the condition for the Spirit's coming to his followers. The scene in John 20, where the Spirit is breathed on the disciple, is therefore intended as the enactment of the coming of the Spirit earlier promised by Jesus in the context of his Farewell Discourses.

The unusual title used by John to describe the function of the Spirit after his departure is 'Paraclete' (*paraklētos*). Its only other occurrence in the New Testament is in I John 2:1 where it is applied to Jesus who acts as an advocate or intercessor on behalf of believers before the Father in heaven. In John's Gospel this term occurs in five groups of sayings, confined to the Farewell Discourses (chs. 14-16), and in each case the title is applied by Jesus to a figure other than himself, the Spirit (14:15-17; 14:26; 15:26-27; 16:7-11; 16:12-14).

But why is the title *paraklētos* used in these contexts and what is the term intended to convey? The term is evidently derived from the verb *parakaleō*, literally 'to call alongside', and it is attested in secular Greek to refer to a person called to give assistance, occasionally with the derivative meaning 'comfort'. This accounts for the only example of the term in the Septuagint, because in Job 16:2 it denotes those who give assistance to Job (rendered in the NRSV as 'comforters'). The verb *parakaleō*, but not the form *paraklētos*, is frequently used in LXX Isaiah to express God's promise of salvation (to translate the Hebrew *naham*). Consequently older Bible translations (such as the AV) translate the application of this term for the Spirit in John's Gospel as 'Comforter'. The notion of consolation is certainly important in the Farewell Discourses which, in certain cases, seek to address the concerns of the disciples and believers in the face of the world's hostility, but the rendering 'comforter' does not adequately convey the multifaceted character and role of the Paraclete as depicted by John.

A more widespread interpretation is to locate the term and its Johannine application within a forensic or legal context, in the sense of one 'called alongside to help' in a court to speak in favour of a person or cause by providing advocacy ('advocate'). The forensic

connotation of the term is favoured in particular by those who give prominence to the trial motif in John's Gospel. Andrew Lincoln's study, *Truth on Trial*, provides a detailed and convincing case in favour of reading John's Gospel as a cosmic trial between God and the world. Lincoln draws attention to the prevalence of the language of witness, judgement and truth in the Gospel's narratives and discourses, and to the distinctive presentation of Jesus as one involved not only in a literal trial before Pilate but also an extended trial before the Jews. Jesus is presented as the authorized witness and judge, for whom others (including the Baptist, the Scriptures, the signs) offer testimony in a trial provoking decision and judgement. Thus, 'It is a narrative that asserts that the truth about God, Christ and life is to be seen in terms of the metaphor of a cosmic lawsuit and its displays this assertion by making its discourse and plot have Jesus on trial, a trial in which the other characters (and, by extension, the readers) have to come to a verdict and are invited to become witnesses' (*Truth on Trial*, 170).

The trial continues after Jesus' departure, and it is described in John 13-17 (as an extension of Jesus' trial), when the disciples are called to be his witnesses and the Spirit as their defendant in the face of the world's hostility. This recalls other New Testament passages where the Spirit appears in defence of believers placed on trial (Mt. 10:19-20: 'When they deliver you up, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you') and as a witness to the truth (cf. Acts 5:32: 'And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him'). The case of Jesus and God must still be defended. Thus in the same way as Jesus gave testimony and defended or advocated his own case during his earthly life, in the trial of truth with the world the Spirit continues this forensic role after the glorification of Jesus. The Paraclete, as 'advocate', as we will see, defends the cause of Jesus (truth) and his disciples as witnesses and also fulfils the role of prosecuting counsel in relation to the world (cf. 16:8-11). In this respect the Spirit-Paraclete continues the work of Jesus who both defends the truth and judges the world.

The rendering ‘Advocate’ (cf. NRSV) therefore reflects a key role of the Spirit in the Farewell Discourses, although the application of the term does not only possess legal connotations for the Paraclete also acts as guide, teacher and interpreter. The term ‘Paraclete’ conveys the multifaceted nature and function of the Spirit following Jesus’ departure, and its adoption as a technical term can be defended on the basis of a Jewish precedent of using it as a loan-word; the Greek word *paraklētos* is transliterated into Hebrew rather than translated (cf. Mishnah Abot 4:11: ‘He that performs one precept gets for himself one *peraqḷīt* (advocate/defender); but he that commits one transgression gets for himself one accuser’). However, as this Jewish tradition itself indicates, it cannot be denied that the rendering ‘advocate’, favoured by many translations and studies as an accessible English term, captures decisive aspects of the Spirit’s role in the passages under consideration.

A related issue concerns the search for a possible conceptual background to the term *paraklētos* as applied to the Spirit in John 14-16. In view of the text already noted which points to the Jewish custom of transliterating the term, could this imply that even the *concept* has no Jewish counterpart? Rudolf Bultmann proposed, for example, that the relevant background is to be sought in proto-Mandean Gnostic sources (*The Gospel of John*, 566-72) with their depiction of helpers coming down from heaven to help earthly souls. Even if the term itself is rare in Jewish sources (despite its transliterated form), a variety of elements from the Jewish Scriptures and Second Temple Judaism could have contributed to the ways in which John describes the Spirit-Paraclete.

- i) Attention can be paid to the significance of the ‘tandem relationship’ in scriptural tradition, in which one figure dies and another continues his work and interprets his message (e.g., Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha). Particularly significant is the transfer of the divine spirit in these relationships as described in testamentary discourses (Deut. 34:9: ‘And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands upon him’; II Kings 2:9: ‘Elijah said to

Elisha, “Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you”. And Elisha said, “I pray you, let me inherit a double share of your spirit”).

- ii) Another possible factor is the significance attached to the Hebrew word *mēlits* used in Job 33:23 to signify ‘mediator’: ‘If there be for him an angel, a mediator, one of the thousand, to declare a mean what is right for him’. In the later Targum of Job (on 16:19 and 19:25) the Aramaic loan-word *perakleta* appears, although this targum in its present form only goes back to the medieval period. *Mēlits* also appears in Qumran texts with the meaning ‘mediator’: ‘And among them shall be no mediator...’ (Hymns of Thanksgiving/ IQH 6:13) and also as interpreter of knowledge or teacher (IQH 2:13).
- iii) The influence of Jewish angelology could have contributed to the image of the Johannine Paraclete. In Qumran the ‘Spirit of truth’, an angelic presence, leads the community members in their struggle against the forces of evil, guiding them against their adversaries. There is also the notion that angelic spirits lead people and guide them to the truth (IQS 3:6-7 speaks of them being cleansed by God’s spirit which unites them in truth: ‘For it is through the spirit of true counsel concerning the ways of man that all his sins shall be expiated that he may contemplate the light of life. He shall be cleansed from all his sins by the spirit of holiness uniting him to his truth, and his iniquity shall be expiated by the spirit of uprightness and humility’).

There can be no doubt that these various texts offer illuminating parallels to John’s portrayal of the Paraclete, particularly with regard to his role as witness, teacher, guide and accuser, but there is evidently no one figure in Second Temple Judaism that provides a direct parallel. John’s treatment is unique in his distinct affirmation that, in the coming of the Paraclete, Jesus’ work on earth is continued and completed.

John 14:15-26

The first section about the Spirit in the Farewell Discourses sets out the Paraclete's task of providing the disciples/believers with assurance of continued divine presence (give, receive, see, know, abide; note also the use of three different prepositions in 14:16-17: *meta, para, en*) and of giving instruction to the disciples due to their awareness of all that they still do not understand (teach, remind). This forms a continuation of Jesus' reflection on how followers are to further his 'works' after he returns to the Father who sent him (14:12). Jesus has been with the disciples but for a short time, while the Paraclete will remain with them forever (14:16).

The emphasis on continuity is expressed in Jesus' promise of the coming of 'another Paraclete' (14:15), thereby implying that he has already performed this role (advocate for the defence and/or prosecution, teacher, guide) during his earthly ministry (cf. I John 2:1). Their oneness may even account for the use of the first-person singular in John 14:18 ('I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you'). This promise may originally have referred to Jesus' post-resurrection appearances or to traditional expectation of his return at the *parousia* (cf. 14:2: 'I will come again and will take you to myself'), but reinterpreted in the Farewell Discourses as a promise by Jesus that he will continue his work and fellowship with the disciples in the person of the Spirit (cf. also 14:23: 'and we [Jesus and the Father] will come to them and make our home with them').

The unity of the Father and Son is a consistent theme in John's Gospel. Certainly the striking parallels between the Johannine presentation of Jesus and the Paraclete confirm the role of the Spirit as the authorized agent following Jesus' departure. Both are emissaries 'sent' from God (cf. 3:16-17; 5:24; cf. 14:26; 15:26; 16:7), are 'given' by the Father (3:16; cf. 14:16) and both come into the world from God (5:43; cf. 15:26) speaking what they have heard 'above' (7:17; 8:26-28; cf. 16:13). Both are 'holy' (Jesus is 'the Holy One of God': 6:69; Holy Spirit: 14:26) and are identified with the truth ('I am the truth': 14:6; cf. 1:17; Spirit of truth: 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). Both Jesus and the Paraclete teach (7:14-15; 14:26), give testimony (5:31-38; 15:26), reveal and proclaim (*anangellō*: 4:25; 16:13-15).

On the other hand, the Paraclete, like the divine Logos (1:10-11), is not recognized in the world (14:17). The similarity between the language used for the Paraclete and for Jesus demonstrates their close relationship in terms of nature and activity.

If this section opens with the promise of the permanent indwelling of Jesus in his followers through the Paraclete (14:16: ‘to be with you forever’; 14:17: ‘abides with you, and he will be in you’), this means that they are granted the privilege of doing that which is impossible for the unbelieving world – receiving, seeing and knowing the Spirit. For this reason they will benefit from the role of the Paraclete as teacher and guide. Since the disciples are aware of their inability to understand fully and interpret Jesus’ acts and words, the Paraclete is described in 14:26 as follows: ‘The Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you’. The reference to ‘everything’ (*panta*) connotes the idea of that which Jesus has said in their presence (14:25: ‘I have said these things to you while I am still with you’). It does not necessarily point to the Paraclete as only repeating that which the disciples have heard from the earthly Jesus, but may also indicate new things which the Paraclete hears from the glorified Jesus; this would complement Jesus’ statement in 16:13 that the Spirit of truth will now speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears.

Similarly the characteristically Johannine theme of remembrance in the clause ‘and remind you of all (*panta*) that I have said to you’ does not simply involve a reproduction of Jesus’ words (‘all that I have said to you’), but an interpretative unfolding of, and a greater insight into, the significance of his words in the light of the new situation of faith after Jesus’ departure (continuing inspiration). In other words, it is the kind of remembering that brings together and establishes continuity between tradition and interpretation in the light of the community’s situation (an advocate of Jesus in the sense that the Paraclete recalls the significance of Jesus and enables human beings to come to a realization of what they have or are experiencing). It also relates to the notion of remembering after Jesus’ glorification, particularly in relation to Scripture, as highlighted at various junctures in the narrative (2:17-22; 12:16; 14:25; 20:9). Thus, as illustrated in John 2:17-22 the disciples

are said to have remembered after Jesus' resurrection (with the aid of the Paraclete?) his words about raising the temple in three days (2:22). Remembering in 12:16 also involves a deeper understanding of the events (in this case the entry into Jerusalem) and their scriptural significance than was possible before Jesus' death and resurrection.

John 15:26-16:15

The second major section concerning the Paraclete elaborates on what was briefly outlined in the first, namely the refusal of the world to see and recognize the Paraclete (14:17). Such warnings about the world's opposition to Jesus have been expressed earlier in the Gospel (cf. 7:7: 'The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify against it that its works are evil'), but now, in the Farewell Discourses, Jesus' followers are warned that they, like Jesus, will be rejected and are warned that they may experience a similar fate. The world refuses to receive the Paraclete (14:17) in the same way as it refuses to receive Jesus. The followers' experience of the world's opposition is described in 15:18-25, and in a particularly graphic way in 16:2-3: 'They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, an hour is coming when those who kill you will think that, by doing so, they are offering worship to God. And they will do this because they have not known the Father or me'. This is the context for the extended second section concerning the Paraclete in John's Gospel, and the forensic connotations of the work of the Spirit is made explicit.

The first response to this is to emphasize the role of the Paraclete as advocate for the disciples, providing direct testimony to Jesus who is no longer in the world (15:26) and enabling Jesus' followers to testify concerning the one in whom they believe (15:27). How does this take place? John gives no explicit explanation, but since it is stated that the world cannot perceive the Spirit (14:17) the witness of the Paraclete must occur in the testimony of the disciples (cf. 14:17: 'and he will be in you'). As an extension of Jesus' trial with the world there is a need for witnesses, a joint witness in accordance with Deuteronomy 17:6. Thus, as Andrew Lincoln in particular has emphasized, whereas the Father and the Son bear witness together (as Jesus frequently emphasizes), the Spirit and the disciples are now

depicted as bearing joint witness to the truth.

This is elaborated in 16:7-15, a passage that describes the mission of the Spirit-Paraclete towards 'the world' (16:7-11) and among Jesus' followers (16:12-15). The Paraclete will bear witness to Jesus against the background of the world's hatred and persecution of the disciples and will convict (*elenchō*) the world, in the sense of persuading it of its errors and basic assumptions, about sin, justice and judgement. The Paraclete will prove it wrong with respect to unbelief about Jesus (16:9), since sin is here defined as the world's refusal to believe in Jesus as God's agent. Similarly the Paraclete will demonstrate to the world its failure to perceive the true significance of Jesus' mission; the world will be proved wrong in its unlawful condemnation of Jesus, for Jesus will return to the Father (16:10-11). The effect of that mission, as the Paraclete will bring to light, is that true judgement is shown not to be that undertaken by the world, but God's judgement on the world (cf. 12:31: 'the ruler of the world has been judged'). The Paraclete thus overturns the world's criteria of judgement, for Jesus in fact has overcome the world (cf. 16:33).

In 16:12 the focus shifts back to the disciples and their readiness to act as witnesses. Jesus now explicitly distinguishes between what he was able to convey to them (16:12) and the fuller disclosure that the Paraclete will give: the task of the 'Spirit of truth' is to instruct the disciples and lead them into all truth (16:13-15). The Spirit's close relationship to Jesus enables him, like Jesus himself before him, to take what belongs to Jesus and declare it to the disciples (emphasis on 'everything' and 'all' indicates that the revelation mediated by the Spirit is unsurpassable). The emphasis, once again, is on the continuity between the Jesus tradition in its Johannine form and the present. They then become his authorized agents and successors as witnesses to the truth. Thus, after the events of Jesus' death and resurrection the Spirit will interpret the meaning of Jesus' coming and mission as 'truth'. He will also show them 'the things to come' (16:13), possibly pointing to continuity with Jesus' predictive activity, giving insight into the future (13:19; 14:29). Certainly Jesus has earlier been speaking of things to come in this part of the discourse, particularly what will happen to the community (15:18-16:13; cf. 16:12: 'I still have many things to say to you'),

and the Spirit will complete the interpretative disclosure of these future events.

Conclusion

In the post-resurrection context of the Farewell Discourses the figure of the Paraclete is used by John to emphasize that the believer is not isolated from Jesus, because the Spirit-Paraclete dwells with members of the community just as Jesus and the Paraclete dwelt among the first generation. This is John's attempt at explaining the ever-increasing time gap between the earthly ministry of Jesus (bound to a particular time and place, through the incarnation) and the later community of believers. Evidently the question was posed: how can the relevance of this revelation be appreciated in a later period? John's response is to bridge the gap between the historical revelation of Jesus and the living experience of that revelation in the community by highlighting the nature and activity of the Paraclete. He mediates the original revelation to those who belong to a later generation. The Johannine Paraclete therefore provides a christocentric understanding of the Spirit. Jesus is a perpetual presence among the Christian believers, although he will also return to call them to resurrection at the time of the *parousia* (5:28-29). And it is precisely in order to stress that the Paraclete represents the presence of Jesus that they are presented in such strikingly similar terms.

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