



“Another Paraclete”: The Holy Spirit in John 14–17

In John’s Gospel, a group of five passages refer to the Holy Spirit as “Paraclete” or “Spirit of truth” (14:16, 17, 25, 26; 15:26, 27; 16:7–11, 13–15). Besides their distinct terminology, what sets these passages apart is that (1) all occur in the “Farewell Discourses” (chaps. 14–17); (2) they deal with the coming of the Spirit; and (3) they describe functions completely different from the ones found in the Gospel’s narrative sections (chaps. 1–13, 18–21). While in those sections the Holy Spirit is mostly a life-giving power through which God regenerates and transforms those who believe in Him (3:3, 5, 6; 6:63; 7:37, 38), the predominant idea in the Farewell Discourses features that of an Instructor, a Witness, and a Guide—concepts that go way beyond the impression of an impersonal Power. In fact, those five passages “provide the strongest evidence for conceiving of the Spirit as a distinct figure, an independent agent or actor”¹ and are among the ones that greatly contributed to the development of the Christian doctrine of the Spirit.

The meaning of *paraklētos*

The meaning of *paraklētos* is disputed. From the linguistic standpoint, *paraklētos* relates to the verb *parakaleō*, which means only “called

to one’s side.” When used as a noun, the word involves the idea of legal assistance. In Latin, the equivalent term was *advocatus* (“advocate”), and this shows how *paraklētos* was understood by ancient Christian Latin writers and translators. Under the influence of the noun *paraklēsis* (“consolation, comfort”), some translators and Greek fathers came to understand *paraklētos* as a comforter or counselor, a meaning also preferred by Wycliffe, Tyndale, and Luther, among others. The point, however, is that none of these is fully appropriate to John’s *paraklētos*, except 1 John 2:1 in which this refers to Jesus (though not as a title) and certainly means “advocate” (“intercessor,” “mediator”). John Ashton rightly says that “the problem of the meaning of *paraklētos* cannot be solved linguistically,”² and this may explain why, in his Latin Vulgate, Jerome (c. 347–420) used the transliteration *Paracletus* rather than a translation. In 1 John 2:1, he translated it correctly as *advocatus*.³

Several scholars believe that John’s *paraklētos* is related to the Aramaic *Praqliṭā*, itself a transliteration of the Greek word. *Praqliṭā* appears several times in rabbinic literature in reference to someone who intercedes for another. It was also used in the Targums to convey the meaning of the Hebrew *mēliš*, a term that was

associated both in the Old Testament (Job 33:23; cf. 16:20) and in the Dead Sea Scrolls (1QH 10.13; 14.13) with notions of intercession and instruction.⁴ Both notions are present in the Johannine Paraclete passages (John 14:16, 17, 25, 26; 15:26, 27; 16:7–11, 13–15). In Jewish thought, therefore, there are several precedents that combine forensic and pedagogical functions in a way that resembles the role assigned to the Paraclete in the Fourth Gospel. And it is precisely that role, not so much the linguistic or historical origin of the term, that should receive our closest attention, especially if we want to have a clearer understanding of the Spirit’s function.

The Spirit as a person

Among the functions ascribed to the Spirit in the Paraclete passages are the following: teaching (John 14:26), reminding of everything that Jesus said when He was here (v. 26), and guiding into all the truth, announcing the things that are to come (16:13). The Spirit speaks; hears (16:13); glorifies (v. 14); testifies (15:26); and convicts concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment (16:8). The Spirit also has been described as “another Paraclete” (14:16), who comes to take Jesus’ place (16:7), suggesting not only that Jesus Himself was a Paraclete to the disciples, but also that the

Spirit would perform a role similar to the role of Jesus, with the difference that His presence should be even more appreciated than that of Jesus Himself (14:28). The Spirit would also be free from time limitations, as He would be with the disciples *forever* (v.16). In addition, the Spirit comes from God (15:26; 16:7); that is, He is sent by God (14:26) as John the Baptist (1:6; 3:28) and Jesus Himself were (3:34; 6:29, 57; 7:29; etc.). The Spirit can also be known and

least the time when the Gospel was written) or a few post-Resurrection appearances during the interval of only 40 days (Acts 1:3) could solve the disciples' orphanhood. It seems more natural, therefore, to interpret Jesus' promise in connection to the coming of the Spirit.⁸ Even so, Jesus and the Spirit cannot be the same Person, for Jesus refers to the Spirit as another Paraclete (John 14:16), which preserves the personal distinction between Both, and, at the

for the personality of the Spirit is based on grammar. In Greek, *Spirit* (*pneuma*) is neuter, and several times in the Paraclete passages this word is accompanied by masculine pronouns, in addition to some neuter pronouns, as it would be expected according to the rules of grammatical agreement.⁹ The typical argument can be found in George E. Ladd when John correctly uses neuter pronouns in connection to *pneuma*: there is no implication "either for or against the

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received (14:17; cf. 7:39) as Jesus could (1:12; 6:69; 10:14; 13:20).⁵

All of this points to a distinct, independent, and personal Figure who, at the same time, shows some divine characteristics, such as the capacity to transcend space and time. While it is true that in John 14:18 Jesus talks about the coming of the Paraclete (cf. vv. 16, 17), He promises that He Himself will return to the disciples, which has already been taken to mean that the Paraclete is the glorified Christ Himself, who comes back to the disciples in a spiritual, invisible form.⁶ Several commentators see this return of Jesus in connection to the Parousia (cf. vv. 1–3) or to His appearances after the Resurrection, particularly the one in John 20:19–23, when He breathes the Spirit on the disciples.⁷ However, by saying that He would not leave the disciples as orphans, Jesus was more likely referring to the coming of the Spirit, for we find it difficult to see how the distant Parousia (considering at

same time, points to the similarity of roles. The same personal distinction is present in other passages where Jesus and the Spirit are mentioned side by side (1:32, 33; 7:39; 14:26; 15:26; 20:22). In fact, by saying that He would come back to the disciples in the person of the Spirit, Jesus was (perhaps) only evoking the same concept when He said, " 'Whoever has seen me has seen the Father' " (14:9, ESV). That is, as the Father can be seen in the Son, the Son can come back in the Spirit. It is difficult not to conclude that the same Oneness that exists between the Son and the Father (10:30) also exists between the Son and the Spirit. *Oneness*, however, should never be confused with *sameness*. As the Son is not the Father, the Spirit is not the Son.

The Spirit and grammar

In John's Gospel, the Spirit is a Person, as much as the Father and the Son are. Since the Reformation, one of the most recurrent arguments

personality of the Holy Spirit. But where pronouns that have *pneuma* for their immediate antecedent are found in the masculine, we can only conclude that the personality of the Spirit is meant to be suggested."¹⁰

The argument, however, is not correct. The question is relatively simple. What is said means that where masculine pronouns are used, the closest noun is *pneuma*, thus being its antecedent. But the antecedent of a pronoun must be determined by syntax, not by proximity; and when masculine pronouns are used, the syntactical antecedent is always *paraklētos*, not *pneuma*, which stands only in apposition to *paraklētos*.¹¹ For this reason, sometimes John uses neuter pronouns in the same passages. He does so always when the syntactical antecedent is *pneuma*. This means that there is absolutely nothing abnormal or meaningful in John's use of pronouns in the contexts that refer to the Spirit. Also, the fact that *paraklētos* is masculine does not have any implication regarding the personality

(much less the masculinity) of the Spirit. The gender of *paraklētos*, as well as that of *pneuma*, is nothing more than a linguistic accident, and no theological conclusion should be derived from it.¹²


Another well-known argument tries to deduce not only the personality, but also the divinity, of the Spirit from the Greek adjective *allos* (“another”) used in John 14:16. Spiros Zodhiates, for example, says, “Christ designates the Holy Spirit as ‘Paraclete’ . . . and He calls Him *allos* . . . ‘another,’ which means another of equal quality (and not *heteros*, another of a different quality). Therefore, Jesus Christ designates the Holy Spirit as equal with Himself, God.”¹³ This argument is even more erroneous than the other, to the extent that it confuses activity, or at most, personality with divinity.¹⁴ By referring to the Spirit as another Paraclete, Jesus, no doubt, was calling attention to the fact that the Spirit would continue the work that He Himself had initiated and would be with the disciples “forever.” The term may also contain an allusion to the personality of the Spirit as He would come to replace Jesus, but to take it ontologically as a reference to the likeness of nature between Jesus and the Spirit goes far beyond the evidence.

The argument makes a rather basic linguistic mistake: the one of concluding that because *heteros* usually involves a qualitative distinction,¹⁵ *allos* also does. The fundamental notion of *allos*, however, is merely quantitative (for example, “another parable” in Matt. 13:24, 31, 33), unless used in opposition to *heteros*, which is the word that eventually stresses the qualitative differentiation anyway. For instance, this occurs in Galatians 1:6, 7, where Paul says that the false gospel preached to the Galatians in his absence was not *allos*, but *heteros*.¹⁶ Joseph H. Thayer defines the question: “*Allos* as compared with *heteros* denotes numerical in distinction from qualitative

difference; *allos* adds (‘one besides’), *heteros* distinguishes (‘one of two’); every *heteros* is an *allos*, but not every *allos* is a *heteros*; *allos* generally ‘denotes simply distinction of individuals, *heteros* involves the secondary idea of difference of kind.’”¹⁷

Conclusion

In John’s Farewell Discourses, the Holy Spirit is not merely an impersonal power but an Agent of God who comes to replace Jesus, the first Paraclete (14:26), and continues the work initiated by Him. This means that the Paraclete compares to Jesus in personality and activity. Also, the Paraclete is not the glorified Jesus Himself, but the Oneness between Both, which is similar to the Oneness that exists between the Father and the Son (10:30; 14:9), and Jesus’ attested the statement that He Himself would come back in the person of the Paraclete (14:18). So, “the Paraclete is the presence of Jesus when Jesus is absent.”¹⁸

The cumulative evidence of Scripture indicates that the Holy Spirit is a divine Person. Remember, however, that the emphasis, even in John’s Gospel, does not rest on His personality or divine nature but on His work, and there we should put our emphasis as well—all the more so because God was pleased to make us participants in this work (20:21–23). In fact, the historical realization of the Spirit’s work depends entirely on us. That is, it is not but through us that the Spirit fulfills His mission in the world. This stands as a great privilege. But more than that, this becomes a sacred vocation, to be the instruments through which the Spirit advances Jesus’ work on earth (15:26, 27). 

1 Marianne M. Thompson, *The God of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 149.

2 John Ashton, “Paraclete,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 5:152.

3 See also the New Vulgate (1979) and the Jerusalem Bible.

4 For more references and assessment, see A. R. C. Leaney, “The Johannine Paraclete and the Qumran Scrolls,” in *John and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 38–61; Lochlan Shelfer, “The Legal

Precision of the Term ‘Paraklētos,’” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 32, no. 2 (2009): 131–150.

5 Gary M. Burge lists 16 similarities between Jesus and the Paraclete; see *The Anointed Community: The Holy Spirit in the Johannine Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 141.

6 See, e.g., George B. Stevens, *The Theology of the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1906), 214–220; Ernest F. Scott, *The Fourth Gospel: Its Purpose and Theology*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1908), 343–349; Ian Simpson, “The Holy Spirit in the Fourth Gospel,” *Expositor* 4 (1925): 292–299.

7 Barnabas Lindars (*The Gospel of John*, The New Century Bible [London: Oliphants, 1972], 480), for example, prefers to see here a reference to the Parousia, while Craig S. Keener (*The Gospel of John: A Commentary* [Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003], 2:973), among others, understands it in connection to the post-Resurrection appearances.

C. K. Barrett does the same, though he thinks that the text has a double meaning and can also apply to the Parousia (*The Gospel According to St. John*, 2nd ed. [Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1978], 464).

8 See, e.g., James D. G. Dunn, *Pneumatology*, vol. 2 of *The Christ and the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 214; J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 785.

9 The passages and the respective masculine pronouns are the following: John 14:26 (*ekeinos*); 15:26 (*hos, ekeinos*); 16:7, 8 (*autos, ekeinos*); 13, 14 (*ekeinos* [twice], *heautou*). In the same passages, there are four occurrences of neuter pronouns in connection to *pneuma*: 14:17 (*ho, auto*), 26 (*ho*); 15:26 (*ho*). The same happens in 7:39 (*ho*).

10 George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 331.

11 As Daniel B. Wallace declares, “The use of *ekeinos* here [John 14–16] is frequently regarded by students of the NT to be an affirmation of the personality of the Spirit. Such an approach is based on the assumption that the antecedent of *ekeinos* is *pneuma*. . . . But this is erroneous. In all these Johannine passages, *pneuma* is appositional to a masculine noun. The gender of *ekeinos* thus has nothing to do with the natural gender of *pneuma*. The antecedent of *ekeinos*, in each case, is *paraklētos*, not *pneuma*.” *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 331, 332. For a more detailed treatment including other passages in which *pneuma* is supposedly followed by masculine grammatical elements (Eph. 1:14; 2 Thess. 2:6; 7; 1 John 5:7), see Daniel B. Wallace, “Greek Grammar and the Personality of the Holy Spirit,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 13, no. 1 (2003): 97–125.

12 Note that in Hebrew the word *spirit* (*rūah*) is feminine, while in German, French, and Spanish, e.g., it is masculine.

13 Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study New Testament: Bringing the Original Text to Life*, Word Study Series (Chattanooga, TN: AMG, 1991), 944. See also Arnold V. Wallenkampf, *New by the Spirit* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1978), 14.

14 The argument seems to have been first employed by Gregory of Nazianzus, one of the main defenders of the doctrine of the Trinity in the fourth century, who used to say that *allos* in John 14:16 points to the coequality and consubstantiality between the Spirit and Christ (*Oratio in laudem Basilii* 41.12).

15 See, e.g., Acts 4:12 (also mentions *allos*); Rom. 7:23; 1 Cor. 14:21; 2 Cor. 11:4 (also mentions *allos*); Heb. 7:11, 13, 15; Jude 7.

16 “*Allos* and *heteros* are here, as in Acts 4:12: not interchangeable; *allos* bears an additive connotation, while *heteros* has an adversative nuance.” K. Haacker, “*Heteros*,” in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990–1993), 2:66.

17 Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 4th ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 29.

18 Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I–XII*, Anchor Bible Series (New York: Doubleday, 1966–1970), 1:1141.

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