

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Irish Biblical Studies* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_ibs-01.php

"The Holy Spirit in the Fourth Gospel"(1)

Some observations

E.A. Russell

In this investigation we propose to clarify our understanding in relation to the terminology of the Holy Spirit in the Fourth Gospel and, in particular, to that of the Farewell Discourse.

It is notable that the term 'Spirit' by itself (=pneuma) is more typical of Johannine usage /1/ than 'Holy Spirit' which is only used on three occasions in this Gospel, i.e., 1.33; 14.26; 20.22. That there are only three such occurrences raises the question for us as to whether there is a certain reserve in the use of the phrase 'Holy Spirit'. In the first occurrence it is part of the traditional Gospel phrase, 'This is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit' (1.33). In the tradition represented by Mark, the Baptist proclaims one who is to baptize with the Holy Spirit, the Coming One(1.8). The tradition behind the Q source is somewhat different with the addition 'and of fire' (Mt. 3.11; Lk 3.16). In Acts, too, the traditional phrase is echoed, 'baptize with the Holy Spirit' (1.5; 11.16). Such a phrase is all the more noticeable as absent from the rest of the NT. Is the Johannine usage connected with the fact that the phrase has a firm place in the Gospel tradition and part of it is the fuller phrase 'Holy Spirit'? That it is more primitive is suggested by the fact that the phrase is found in the OT (Cf. 'take not your Holy Spirit from me', Psalm 51.11), in Qumran, in the Marcan tradition where the 'Holy' of 'Holy Spirit' can be set over against the 'unclean spirit', a description of demons found often in Mark, and is found in the primitive tradition of Q. Gradually as the church became more familiar with the concept of 'Holy Spirit', the need to define 'Spirit' as holy would be less felt.

If the writer then is reserved in his use of the phrase 'Holy Spirit' as a traditional phrase, the three occasions on which he uses it, could be of special significance within the Gospel.

In the first passage John's Gospel is true to the tradition of Marcan terminology by saying the 'Spirit descends on Jesus' (Mk 1.10; John 1.32). Where he differs however is in making the phrase part of the Baptist's testimony, 'I saw the Spirit descend like a dove and it rested on him'. The Baptist has been told that the one on whom the Spirit descends and 'rests' ('rests' represents the characteristic 'meno' of the Fourth Gospel) is the one who is to baptize with the Holy Spirit. We may note some of the features of the Johannine presentation that are peculiar to his theology: to him the Baptist is the witness to Jesus par excellence (1.6ff) whose witness speaks of the Lamb of God bearing away the sin of the world and results in two of his disciples following Jesus. It is in keeping with this that he should bear witness to the descent of the Spirit on Jesus. The addition to the familiar tradition of the descent of the Holy Spirit on Jesus lies in the word 'rest'. It is characteristic of Johannine soteriology. Here it stresses the point, a quite valid one, that the Spirit was Jesus' abiding possession and that Jesus was the one who would baptize with the 'Holy Spirit'. Such a stress was important to his presentation of the teaching on the Holy Spirit.

It is obvious that there are many distinctive elements here that belong to what we might call 'redaction'. Yet for all the newness of a language which is closely bound up with his theology, the writer does not abandon the traditional phrase. Familiar phrases from the tradition appear throughout his distinctive theology. Is there an attempt to assure his readers by the use of the familiar phrase that he is not as revolutionary as might have been thought? Is it by way of confirmation here and there throughout the Gospel that he is loyal to the tradition and yet loyal to the Holy Spirit who leads into all truth?

We are told then that Jesus is the one who is to baptize with the 'Holy Spirit' and this can project our thoughts to the future moment when it is due to take

place. This expectation is sustained by the use at intervals of what is called Jesus' 'hour'. It is the hour of death, whether described as 'going' or 'being lifted up' or 'being glorified' and it is bound up closely with the bestowal of the Spirit. This bestowal of the Spirit is related to another of the three uses of the phrase 'Holy Spirit'. Toward the end of the Gospel, Jesus as risen Lord says to the disciples 'Receive the Holy Spirit' (20.22). It is to be the final reference to the Spirit. It is the handing over of Jesus' mission to the disciples - as the Father had sent him, so he sends the disciples. As he possessed the Spirit, they now possess it. As he pronounced forgiveness, so now they are empowered to pronounce forgiveness.

We may note again the link of 'Holy Spirit' in a traditional phrase. Previously it was linked with the word 'baptize' to form the phrase 'He it is who shall baptize with the Holy Spirit'. Now it is linked up with the word 'receive'. The phrase 'receive (= lambano) the Holy Spirit' is traditional. We are told for example that Jesus, when exalted, 'had received the Holy Spirit' (Acts 2.33). The disciples of the Baptist are asked by Paul at Ephesus, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?' (Acts 19. 2; cf. Rom 8.15). The bestowal of authority on the leaders of the church as its representatives is traditional as we can see in the parallel tradition in Matthew (16.19; cf.18.18) though the phrasing is different(John 20.23)

On the other hand we have distinctive or redactional elements: Jesus, the Logos by whom all things were made including man, 'breathed' (= 'enephusen') on the disciples (20.22). The term recalls the Genesis story of creation. Are we being told of a new creation, the church commissioned to proclaim forgiveness to the world? /2/ The form of the so-called 'Great Commission' varies in the traditions /3/ but its language and form here and its positioning are Johannine: the form ('As the Father sent me, so do I send you') can be compared to that in the Farewell Discourse, 'As you

have sent me into the world, so have I sent them also into the world' (17.18); the greeting 'Peace be unto you', repeated in this passage (20.19,21) and thus made emphatic, recalls the tradition of a resurrection appearance in Luke (24.36) - not however in Matthew and Mark - but the extent of its development in the Fourth Gospel is distinctive e.g., 'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you' (14.27); again the Fourth Gospel has a remarkable frequency in its use of the words for 'send' ('pempo' and 'apostello'). /4/

Thus again in another instance of the use of the phrase 'Holy Spirit' this time with the traditional verb 'receive', we also have many distinctive elements expressive of Johannine thought and interpretation which we can describe as redactional. The link of the familiar with the unfamiliar is striking.

A third occurrence (second in order in the Gospel) of the phrase 'Holy Spirit' is to be found in the Farewell Discourse (14.26), and is of course the only example in the Discourse. The description 'Paraklētōs' is distinctive in the Gospel for the Holy Spirit and is confined to the Farewell Discourse, occurring on four occasions (14.16,26; 15.26; 16.7 cf 1 John 2.1). /5/ But 'Paraclete' is not the only description of the Holy Spirit that is distinctive here. There is the explanatory expansion 'Spirit of Truth' /6/, perhaps included as a kind of apologetic to those who question whether the writer or his community possess the true Holy Spirit. /7/ It comes in by way of a guarantee of the valid operation of the Paraclete who reveals the Word of Jesus i.e., the 'truth'.

We may note the juxtaposition of 'Holy Spirit' with the exceptional term 'Paraclete', 'The Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name' (14.26). Is the phrase 'Holy Spirit' along with the phrase 'Spirit of Truth' an explanatory or reassuring expansion of 'Paraclete'? It must be admitted that all references of whatever form to the Holy Spirit in the Farewell Discourse are dominated by the initial reference which comes in abruptly and without

explanation, 'He will give you another Paraclete' (14.16). We are told for the first time that Jesus is a 'Paraclete' and that the Holy Spirit is 'another Paraclete'. That Jesus can be called a 'Paraclete' could be taken in itself as a type of reassurance for the meaning given it in connection with the Holy Spirit. It is the authentic Spirit who represents Jesus and is identified with him. By his insertion of the phrase 'Holy Spirit' is the writer deliberately combining the familiar, the traditional, with the new? By itself the phrase 'Holy Spirit' would hardly be noticed. But when due attention is paid to the fact that the phrase only occurs on three occasions in the Gospel, it may not here be incidental. Is it a phrase which belongs to a way of teaching that to the writer is outmoded? Is he looking for more and adventurous ways of expressing the truth as it is in Jesus and only with reluctance does he hold on to archaic methods of expression? This is an alternative explanation to the one suggested above and may suggest that the reserve is perhaps not so deliberate but that the writer slips into making links with former usage and this is evident in the occasional emergence of the phrase 'Holy Spirit', especially in stock or frozen or stereotyped phrases.

If the reserve in the use of the phrase 'Holy Spirit' is deliberate, then it serves to bind together (i) the initial assertion that Jesus, on whom the Spirit rested, is to baptize with the Holy Spirit; (ii) the promise as fulfilled in the last reference to the 'Holy Spirit'; and (iii) the Paraclete who is to come when Jesus goes. The bestowal of the Holy Spirit is thus bound up with Jesus' 'going', with his hour of glorification.

As already suggested, the reference to Jesus as the one to baptize with the Holy Spirit would point us forward to the occasion on which it takes place. In Mark's Gospel such an expectation is not fulfilled and we are left with the unresolved promise 'He shall baptize with the Holy Spirit'. This is not to say that Mark does not presume that the

bestowal of the Spirit has taken place - that he retains the prophecy implies its fulfilment - yet he does not, as John's Gospel does, keep pointing us forward in an integrated and sustained way to the moment of the conferring of the Spirit.

The impression given us at times in the Fourth Gospel with its concentration on the person of Jesus is that the Spirit is almost irrelevant. There is no mention of the Spirit in the Prologue with its hymn to the Logos. The man who believes on Jesus has eternal life now (3.16). The man who follows Jesus, the Light of the world, does not walk in darkness now (8.12); though he is dead, yet shall he live (11.25). The Gospel expresses the convictions and the experiences of the church it addresses who share fellowship with Christ in the here and now.

Yet alongside stress on the immediacy of the believers' experience of Christ now, there is a constant pointing forward to the coming of the Spirit. We are told that the Spirit was not given as yet since Jesus was not glorified, and that those who believed in him were about to receive the Spirit (7.38,39). In the Farewell Discourse, the Spirit will only come after Jesus' death. The tenses are regularly future: 'he will give you another Paraclete' (14.16), 'will teach....bring to your remembrance' (14.26), 'will bear witness to me' (15.26), 'will guide you into all truth' (16.13).

There is little or no diminishing of the future emphasis. There is not for example in relation to these future promises the use of the confessional or ecclesiastical 'We' as we have in the sentence, 'We beheld his glory, glory as of the unique son of the Father' (1.14) or the sentence, 'We speak what we know and testify what we have seen' (3.11). It is never said by way of confirmation of the promise that the Paraclete will teach all things, 'We know that he is teaching us now' nor are we told, 'We know that he is leading us into all truth'.

There is one possible exception to this future emphasis, 'You know him for he dwells with you' (14.17). Here is one point where the immediacy of the exper-

iences of the believing community may constrain the writer to break with his literary and theological structure. On the other hand, the use of the term for an abiding relationship ('dwells'='menō') along with the phrase 'is in you', reminds us of the terms used of the believer's relationship in Christ. Is Christ, the Paraclete, rather meant? The parallel functions between Jesus and the Holy Spirit have often been mentioned e.g., both are sent by the Father, are spoken of as 'coming', as bearing witness to Jesus, as not speaking of themselves, as rejected by the world. /8/ It is possible that such a close identity emerges here. On the other hand, the present 'dwells' can be interpreted rather as future (there is only a difference in accent between the present and future of 'menēi') and the 'know' as a futuristic present i.e., 'you are to know him'. Insofar however as they know Jesus, they may be said to know the Paraclete. Insofar as Jesus abides in them, so the Holy Spirit will abide in them. Yet it may be here that the present reality of the experience breaks in and this is one point where the constant pointing forward to the coming of the Paraclete wavers. The main forward emphasis still remains.

Why this pointing forward? It is bound up with the 'going' of Jesus. The coming of the Spirit is bound up with Jesus' death. This is something which cannot be treated lightly. The Holy Spirit does not operate as if there was no necessity for the death of Jesus. The historic death of Jesus has to take place first. The future sayings are a recognition of the necessity of history, and a movement within time. It is a fact that Jesus must 'go' to the Father. Otherwise the Spirit cannot come (16.7). The Spirit cannot impinge on the work of Jesus. It may be related to the fact that he is the one on whom the Spirit 'rests'. In any case apart from resting on Jesus, the Paraclete has no function to fulfil until Jesus is glorified (cf. 7.39). The dependence of the operation of the Spirit on the work of Jesus could hardly be more completely emphasized.

Parallel to this looking forward to the coming of the Holy Spirit which receives special emphasis naturally in the Farewell Discourse, there is also within the earlier part of the Gospel the movement forward to Jesus' death. It is expressed in the terminology referred to above of the 'hour'. He reveals to his mother who asks for help when the wine is run out at a wedding celebration, 'My hour has not as yet come' (2.4; cf. 8.20) which in the context suggests that the transformation of the water, representing Judaism, into the new wine of the kingdom will take place then. The effect of this early saying is to focus attention on the 'hour'. It is not unrelated to the forward suggestion in the words, 'Behold the Lamb of God who bears away ('is to bear away'?) the sin of the world', or in the words, 'Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it remains alone' (12.24) . It can be applied to many aspects of the Christian life described in the Gospel e.g., the 'hour' to be born from above (3.5) or in which worship of the Father in spirit and in truth will be possible (4.23), 'The hour is coming and now is when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth'. It is the hour of resurrection, 'The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they who hear, shall live'.

This looking forward to the 'hour' of Jesus' death is paralleled in emphasis with the repeated announcement in a different tense and extending throughout the Farewell Discourse, 'The hour has come' (12.23; 13.1; 17.1). Finally to mark the completion of the 'hour', Jesus said on the Cross, 'It is finished' (= 'tetelestai') and 'gave up his spirit'. The suggestion that Jesus is here yielding up his spirit to be poured out upon the church continues to receive support. /9/ It can explain why the Spirit cannot come until Jesus goes away, and whatever we may think of this suggestion, it does justice to the close association of Jesus' death and the pouring out of the Spirit in the Gospel. There are thus two focal points within the Gospel, the 'hour' when Jesus is to die

and the coming of the Paraclete. Since the latter is closely bound up with Jesus' death and the description of Jesus' death can suggest 'exaltation' as well, (cf. hupsoō = 'lift up' or 'exalt'), it is not out of place to suggest that 'tetelestai' can be the key to the whole Gospel's theology. Corell, for example, claims that the whole of the Fourth Gospel is the story of the death of Jesus viewed as an eschatological fact.

/10/

There is then a pointing forward to Jesus' death in the earlier part of the Gospel. It is not, as we have seen, a sombre presentation. Such a death is described as a lifting up, an exaltation. The verb 'hupsoō' is regularly used for the exaltation of Jesus e.g. " 'exalted' to the right hand of the Father " (Acts.2.33; cf. 5.31; 13.17). It is a 'glorification' (12.23). Even before it takes place, Jesus can speak of himself as the 'Resurrection and the Life' (11.25) It would appear that the evangelist can hardly speak of the death of Jesus without seeing it in the context of triumph or of glory. In the struggle between light and darkness, life and death, Christ and Satan, there can be only one result. This is not to say that it is not a real death Jesus undergoes. There is nothing that is docetic here. He was 'crucified' as the two others were (19.18). He felt the pangs of thirst (19.28) and when they pierced his side blood and water came out (19.34). /11/ But the exaltation comes thrusting through the Farewell Discourse and is especially evident in the terms that are used for Jesus' departure whether 'hupagoō' (14.4,5,28) or 'poreuomai' (14.2,3,12,28). The final emphasis before the death itself is in the lengthy Farewell Discourse but, within this emphasis, there is the other, that of the coming of the Paraclete. Whatever may be the implications of Jesus' work for the church, it cannot be separated from the continuing activity of the Holy Spirit. In the Lucan presentation Jesus ascends to God before the Holy Spirit descends. It is then Peter proclaims Jesus crucified and risen through whom forgiveness is offered. Similarly in our Gospel, the mission of the church after the pattern of Jesus in proclaiming

forgiveness can only take place after Jesus' work is ended.

It would appear then if our interpretation is correct the evangelist makes it clear in his own distinctive language and thought that he has in mind the conferring of the Spirit from the very beginning. To soften what perhaps might seem to some too novel or too revolutionary an approach, he makes a judicious blend of traditional material with his own redactional interpretations. This approach is not of course restricted to the sayings on the Holy Spirit and is at one with what we find in other areas of comparison within the Gospel. The future character of the sayings on the Paraclete can be paralleled with the sayings that point forward to the Passion of Jesus, especially those relating to the 'hour'. The close link of the Paraclete sayings with the context of farewell, shows that the coming of the Spirit is linked solidly with the work of Christ so that one is inseparable from the other. The historical sequence must be maintained and both the glorification and the coming of the Spirit can be seen as two closely related aspects of salvation history. Cullmann can write, "The whole perspective of the Gospel puts the historical life of Jesus in its place as the decisive mid-point of history more emphatically than any other Gospel does." /12/ This is especially true of the glorification of Jesus but it is also true of the related concept of the coming of the Paraclete which is bound up in an inner necessity with the historic Jesus.

Notes

1. The occurrences of 'Spirit' by itself are 1.32,33;3.5, 6, 8(2),34; 4.23, 24(2); 6.63(2); 7.39(2).
2. Cf. B.Lindars, The Gospel of John, London, 1972,
3. The passages are Mk 16.15,16; Mt 28.19f; Acts 1.8
4. The occurrences in the order of the Gospels are: 'pempō', 4/1/10/32; 'apostellō', 22/20/25/28. The two terms are barely distinguishable in meaning in the Fourth Gospel

5. H. Windisch, 'The Spirit-Paraclete in the Fourth Gospel', Philadelphia, 1968(ET), p.3 considers that the five Paraclete sayings do not belong to the original text of the farewell discourses. The passages are: 14.15-17; 14.25-26; 15.26-27; 16.5-11; 16.12-15.
6. Cf. Franz Müssner, 'The Historical Jesus in the Gospel of St. John', London, 1967, p.59-67.
7. op.cit. p.63f.
8. The passages are: being sent by the Father (14.16; 5.30;), both spoken of as 'coming' (15.26 and 1.9), bearing witness to Jesus (15.26 and 8.14), not speaking of themselves (16.13 and 7.16f); cf. also the discussion in G. Bornkamm, 'Geschichte und Glaube, I, Munich, 1968, p.69.
9. Cf. commentaries by Bernard, Sanders/Mastin, Lindars.
10. Consummatum Est, London, 1958, p.106
11. E. Käsemann, 'The Testament of Jesus', London, 1968 (ET) speaks of an unreflected or naive docetism in the Johannine portrait of Jesus (pp 66,70).
12. O. Cullmann, 'Salvation in History', London, 1967 (ET), p.290.

Union Theological College,
Belfast.

E.A.Russell