

Jesus and the Counsellor in John's Gospel

In Jesus' farewell speech, recorded in John's Gospel (chapters 13-17) Jesus introduces the disciples to one he calls the Counsellor. This Counsellor (the name itself is an interpretation of the Greek *paraklētōs*, a word used only by John and with no single English equivalent¹), who is traditionally equated with the Holy Spirit, spoken about in other parts of the gospel (eg 3:5f and 20:22f), has specific roles to accomplish. By analysing these roles it is possible to come to an understanding of the relationship between Jesus and the Counsellor, the Spirit.

There have been those who have raised doubts about the identification of the Counsellor in John's gospel and the Holy Spirit seen elsewhere in the Bible, but while it is true that not every function of the Spirit is predicated to the Counsellor in this passage (there is no mention, for example, of the Spirit's work in regeneration, re-creation or forgiving sins), there are no grounds for assuming that Jesus is speaking of a figure distinct from the Spirit. Rather John is presenting the Counsellor as the Holy Spirit in a specific role, that of the personal presence of Jesus in his disciples while Jesus is with the Father.

Like much in his Gospel, John's understanding of Jesus and the Counsellor is grounded in the Old Testament. Of particular interest here are the accounts of the appointment of successors by Moses and Elijah. In these stories one closely patterned on their predecessor is chosen/appointed to carry on the work. In both cases Joshua (Deut 34:9) and Elisha (2 Kings 2:9, 15) are linked with the spirit that rested on Moses and Elijah. On a wider view, in the Old Testament the 'spirit of the LORD' comes to the prophets, giving them the words and the courage to speak them. John seems to understand Jesus as both fulfilling these Old Testament elements of succession and empowerment (and possibly personal presence) and expanding their significance in the life of the Church.

These elements can be seen clearly in the following analysis:

Their coming into the world

Jesus has come into the world:

^{JN 5:43} I have come in my Father's name.

^{JN 16:28} I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father.

^{JN 18:37} For this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.

The Counsellor will come (but only when Jesus departs):

^{JN 15:26} When the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.

^{JN 16:7} I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counsellor will not come to you.

^{JN 16:8} When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.

^{JN 16:13} When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.

¹ *Paraklētōs* mean literally 'one who comes alongside'. However, there is a danger in defining a word by its etymology alone. Several equivalents have been suggested. 'Counsellor' is common (eg NIV), others include 'Advocate' (Leon Morris) or 'Comforter' (the Greek Fathers). Each of these stress a particular aspect of the meaning and role. Some (eg RE Brown) have suggested that the word 'Paraclete' be used.

Jesus came from the Father:

^{JN 8:42} If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me.

The Counsellor goes out from the Father:

^{JN 15:26} When the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.

The Father gave the Son to the world:

^{JN 3:16} For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

The Father will give the Counsellor at Jesus' request:

^{JN 14:16} I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever – ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth.

Jesus was sent by the Father:

^{JN 3:17} God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

^{JN 5:43} I have come in my Father's name.

The Father will send the Counsellor in Jesus' name:

^{JN 14:26} The Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

Also, Jesus, when he goes away, will send the Counsellor from the Father:

^{JN 15:26} When the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.

^{JN 16:7} I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counsellor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.

Who are they?

The Counsellor is called "another"

^{JN 14:16} I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever.

Jesus as the first Counsellor (*paraklētōs*) (in his earthly ministry, not in heaven, cf 1 Jn 2:1)

He is the Spirit of Truth:

^{JN 14:16} I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever – ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth.

^{JN 15:26} When the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.

^{JN 16:13} When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.

Jesus is "the truth":

^{JN 14:6} I am the way and the truth and the life.

He is the Holy Spirit:

^{JN 14:26} The Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

Jesus is the Holy One of God:

^{JN 7:69} We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.

Their role in relation to the disciples:

The disciples know and recognise Jesus:

^{JN 14:7} If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.

^{JN 14:9} Don't you know me, even after I have been among you such a long time?

They also recognise the Counsellor:

^{JN 14:17} The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him.

Jesus is to remain in and with the disciples:

^{JN 14:20} On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.

^{JN 14:23} If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

^{JN 15:4} Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

^{JN 17:23} I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

^{JN 17:26} I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.

The Counsellor will be within the disciples and remain with them:

^{JN 14:17} You know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

Jesus identifies himself as the Messiah who announces or declares all things:

^{JN 4:25} The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he."

The Counsellor will teach the disciples everything:

^{JN 14:26} The Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

Jesus is both the way and the truth:

^{JN 14:6} I am the way and the truth and the life.

The Counsellor will guide the disciples along the way of all truth:

^{JN 16:13} When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.

Jesus also bears witness:

^{JN 8:14} Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going.

He will bear witness on Jesus behalf, and the disciples too must bear witness:

^{JN 15:26} When the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. ²⁷ And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.

John stresses that all the witnessing and teaching of the Counsellor is about Jesus:

He will take what belongs to Jesus and declare it to the disciples:

^{JN 16:14} He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.

He will glorify Jesus:

^{JN 16:14} He will bring glory to me.

He will remind the disciples of all that Jesus told them:

^{JN 14:26} The Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

He will speak only what he hears and nothing of his own:

^{JN 16:13} He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

Jesus has the same role in relation to the Father:

^{JN 8:28} When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.

^{JN 12:27} Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name!

^{JN 14:13} I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father.

^{JN 14:4} I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.

Their role in relation to the world

The world did not accept Jesus:

^{JN 5:43} I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me.

^{JN 12:48} There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day.

So also it cannot accept the Counsellor:

^{JN 14:17} The world cannot accept him.

The world will not recognise Jesus:

^{JN 16:3} They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me.

^{JN 7:28} Then Jesus, still teaching in the temple courts, cried out, "Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from. I am not here on my own, but he who sent me is true. You do not know him, ²⁹ but I know him because I am from him and he sent me."

^{JN 8:14} Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going.

^{JN 8:19} You do not know me or my Father.

^{JN 14:7} If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.

Neither will it see nor recognise the Counsellor;

^{JN 14:17} The world... neither sees him nor knows him.

Jesus bears witness against the world:

^{JN 7:7} The world... hates me because I testify that what it does is evil.

The Counsellor will bear witness to Jesus against the background of the world's hatred for and persecution of the disciples:

^{JN 15:18} If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. ¹⁹ If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. ²⁰ Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.

²¹ They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me. ²² If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin. ²³ He who hates me hates my Father as well.

²⁴ If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin.

But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father.
²⁵ But this is to fulfil what is written in their Law: 'They hated me without reason.'
²⁶ When the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.

The Counsellor will prove the world wrong about sin, justice and judgment:

^{JN 16:8} When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; ¹⁰ in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; ¹¹ and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

That the world is wrong about Jesus is fundamental to John's whole portrait of the ministry of Jesus.

Thus, the one whom John calls "another Counsellor" is another Jesus (cf 1 John 2:1 'If anybody does sin, we have one who speaks in our defence [Gk. *paraklētōs*] to the Father – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One'). Since the Counsellor can come only when Jesus departs, the Counsellor may be seen as the presence of Jesus when Jesus is absent. Jesus' promises to dwell within his disciples are fulfilled in the Counsellor. It is no accident that the first passage containing Jesus' promise of the Counsellor (John 14:16f) is followed immediately by the verse which says, "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you." However, John clearly states that Jesus and the Counsellor have different roles, they are not the same person. John insists that Jesus will be in heaven with the Father while the Counsellor is on earth with the disciples. But John is not so concerned with the distinction between Jesus and the Spirit, rather he is interested in their similarities.

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