The Paraclete and Prophecy in the Johannine Community

Crinisor Stefan

Introduction

A quick survey of all the studies on the five Paraclete¹ sayings reveals that scholars dedicate just limited space to the treatment of the fifth saying in John 16:13–14. Although they all agree that this is a distinctive saying, they tend to see it as a restatement or an explanation of the second Paraclete saying in John 14:26, where the reader is told that the Paraclete will teach all things and will bring to remembrance all things Jesus taught his disciples. In my view this interpretation fails to explain fully the role of the Paraclete in the believer’s life, because it overlooks a very important function of the Spirit in the Fourth Gospel, namely, the prophetic function.

Although the idea of the Paraclete’s teaching was already introduced in 14:26, the reader of the Gospel should note that in John 16:12–15, the teaching of the Paraclete is no longer oriented toward the past ἡμῶν ἡμῶν, but towards the future (καὶ τὰ ἐφησόμενα ἐνεργεῖς ὑμῖν). The Evangelist points out that the Paraclete is not only an interpreter of the “old revelation” (the words of the earthly Jesus) but that he is also instrumental in disclosing the “things to come.”

Using as the point of departure the statement in John 16:13, where we are told that the Spirit-Paraclete reveals the “things to come,” I will argue in this essay that the Paraclete not only interprets the “old revelation” (the words of the earthly Jesus), but also brings “new revelation,” predicting future events related to the life of the community and individuals, and providing direction for the community in its witnessing ministry. This is one of the major points of departure between me and the majority of scholars, who, in my opinion, overlook the fact that the Gospel of John needs to be read primarily against the Jewish religious background, a background that emphasizes the predictive role of the Spirit-inspired prophecy.

¹ For a survey of the scholarly work on the five Paraclete sayings including a possible background for the term Paraclete see Gary M. Burge, The Anointed Community: The Holy Spirit in the Johannine Tradition (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1987), 3–42.
It is my contention that in the Johannine community all believers were potential prophets. They all had the same anointing; the same Spirit that rested ($\mu\varepsilon\nu\tau\nu\nu\iota\nu\iota\varsigma$) on Jesus, the Prophet, remained in them as well. It seems that for John, prophecy was too important to be left to the prophets alone. Usually scholars have been content to mention briefly that there may have been some prophets in the Johannine community, but they have not attempted to point out who these prophets were, what they did, and how they did it. The Johannine community was a charismatic community in which the exalted Christ was still speaking through the Paraclete to the believers. The Gospel itself may be the product of both the oral tradition and of the prophetic utterances delivered by the Evangelist or some prophets in the community.

According to John, the Paraclete will not only continue Jesus’ revelatory work but will complete it. This seemingly bold affirmation needs further clarification, however. Therefore in this essay I will attempt to explain the way in which the Paraclete continues and completes the revelation brought by Jesus, and how it relates to prophecy. In order to do so, I will examine the work of the Paraclete under three different headings: (1) the Paraclete and prophecy, (2) the Paraclete and “the things to come,” and (3) the Paraclete and the prophets.

### The Paraclete and Prophecy

There is a growing number of Johannine scholars who point to the significance of prophecy in the Johannine community. Although not all of them assign the same importance to it, many acknowledge that the element of prophecy is one of the keys, if not the key, to understanding the community in which the Gospel was written. Thus David Aune says that...