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EXEGETICAL INTERPRETATION OF JOHN 14:17

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Abstract

The New Testament text has a number of mysteries which are often difficult to comprehend. Some of these mysteries include the Trinitarian doctrine, Jesus' presence in the celebration of the Eucharist, the virgin birth, incarnation, predestination, and the origin and evolution of man. These mysteries have led biblical and religious scholars to pitch their tents with varied schools of thought with an unending debate. This paper centres on the exegetical interpretation of John 14:17 and seeks to determine the significance of the statement in John 14:17. Who the Holy Spirit is as promised in the text? Does the Holy Spirit as promised by Christ in the text to His disciples means a promise of Himself? What functions would the Holy Spirit play in the life and activities of Christ's disciples? The paper employs the historical-critical method of biblical exegesis and argues that Jesus' own words provide intense clarity for those who still do not understand that He and the Father are one. This paper maintains that Christ's presence is the promised Holy Spirit to His disciples. The paper concludes that needless of much argument about the deity and personality of Christ as the scripture is clear in the dynamics of the Trinitarian doctrine.

Keywords: Exegetical, Holy Spirit, Historical-critical approach, Disciples, Trinitarian Doctrine.

Introduction

Jesus promised His disciples the Holy Spirit during His last discourse with them at the upper room (John 14:17). The promise was made due to His disciples bad feeling about His absence when he had not actually departed. Prior to the promise, Jesus proclaimed to His Disciples His return to the Father, His unity to the Father and His ultimate glorification of the Father (John 14:1-15). Who is the Holy Spirit and what functions would the Holy Spirit play in the life of Christ disciples? Moreover, what is the actual meaning of the whole statement in John 14:17? This paper seeks to reveal the relationship between Christ and the Holy Spirit and to show that what the promised Holy Spirit was to do for the disciples of Christ was a continuation of what Christ had been to them. In other to actualize the said objective, the paper employs the historical-critical method of biblical exegesis and covers the (*Sitzimleben*) life situation in which John 14:17 was written as well as the true meaning of the passage.

Literary setting of St. John

The Gospel of St. John does not reveal the author, but traditional position has it that John the Apostle wrote the gospel (John 21:20, 24). Samuel Ngewa attesting to this fact remakes that it is possible the author is one of the three disciples of Christ who were especially close to Him namely, Peter, James and John (Matt. 17:1; Matt. 26:37; Mark 5:37), in view of the fact that Peter

is always described as being with the beloved disciple (13:23-24; 20:2), it is not possible that he was the author nor can the author be James who was killed by Herod Agrippa 1 not later than AD 44. Hence, the authorship is attributed to John (1251); internal arguments for Johannine authorship shows that he was an eye witness at the crucifixion of Christ (John 19:33-35). John demonstrated real knowledge about the various apostles by recalling the exact words spoken among them (John 4:33, 6:17; 20:25). He must have been a resident of Palestine because of his graphic and accurate description of the area for instance, pool of Bethsaida having five porches (John 5:2) and Bethany measuring only 15 furlongs from Jerusalem (John 11:18).The traditional position is that John wrote the gospel near the end of the first century between AD 85 and 95 in Ephesus (Danny 145). While there is no indication within the gospels of its intended audience, the gospel writer stated the purpose of the book in John 20:31 "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (NKJV). The other purposes as noted by Danny are to supplement the other gospels that were already in circulation and to combat and convince the unbelieving Jews. Besides, it was written to combat the heresy of the early forms of Gnosticism that was beginning to develop in the latter part of the first century (146). This makes it clear that the gospel has an evangelistic intent.

The gospel of John is divided into two sections bracketed by a prologue (John 1:1-8) and an epilogue (John 21:1-25). The first division is called "Books of Signs" (John 2:1-12:50) because it relates seven of Jesus' signs or miracles. The second, known as the "Book of the passion" or the "Book of glory" (John 13:1-20:31), begins with the Last Supper and ends with Christ's crucifixion and resurrection appearance (334-335). The text under consideration (John 14:17) is part of what is known as the upper Room Discourse (John 13-17), which began in the upper Room in Jerusalem on the evening before Jesus' trial and crucifixion (cf. Mark 14:14 and Luke 22:12). The text (Jn. 14:17) centres mainly on the promise of the Holy Spirit by Jesus at His departure to His disciples.

The Text (John 14:17)

τὸΠνεῦμα τῆςἀληθείας, ὃ ὁ κόσμοςοὐδύναται λαβεῖν, ὅτιοὐθεωρεῖ αὐτὸοὐδὲγινώσκει· ὑμεῖςγινώσκετε αὐτό, ὅτι παρ' ὑμῖνμένει καὶ ἐνὑμῖνἔσται.

Translated as

The Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.

Structure of the verse

The Spirit as truth v.17a
The Spirit and the world v. 17b
The Spirit and the disciples v.17c
Knowledge of the spirit v.17d
The presence of the spirit v.17e

Analysis of John 14:17

The Spirit as truth v.17a "the spirit as truth" (NKJV).

The Spirit as truth or the spirit of truth is understood here to reveal what the Holy Spirit will do at arrival on the disciples of Christ. The Spirit as truth means that the Holy Spirit will teach the disciples of Christ, remind them and guide them into all the truth of Jesus' death and resurrection (John 16:13). Moreover, it implies that the Holy Spirit as promised by Christ will

guarantee the disciples the continuing presence of Christ and access to God and as such the Holy Spirit continues the role of Jesus in the disciples lives. The spirit here is to take the place of Jesus (Green, Joel 388). Raymond remarks that the spirit being referred to in John 14:17 is designated as "paraclete" literally the one called alongside. It is a personal designation picturing a spirit called in after Jesus' departure as advocate to defend Christians and comfort them. Just as Jesus received everything from the Father and while on earth is the way to know the father in heaven, so when Jesus goes to heaven, the paraclete who receives everything from Jesus is the way to know Jesus. The paraclete does not become incarnate but dwells in all who love Jesus and keeps His commandments" (14:15-16). F.F. Bruce notes that paraclete is best understood as a verbal adjective with passive force denoting one who is called alongside as a helper or defender, a friend at court. Jesus' mention of another paraclete implies that they already have one, and this can only be himself. In 1John 2:1 indeed, Jesus is called our paraclete with the father; the word is there aptly rendered advocate from the Latin advocatus which is exactly equivalent of Greek *parakletos*. But in 1John 2:1 Jesus advocacy is exercised in the heavenly court; in our verse (John 14:17), it is implied that he had been his disciples advocate on earth. So indeed he had been while he was with them; he had been their champion and helper, the one on whose guidance and support they would rely. But now he was about to leave them. He had been with them for a short time, but the other paraclete would be with them permanently and not only with them but in them. The paraclete or spirit of truth will be available specifically to the disciples to compensate them for the loss of Jesus's visible presence (301-302).Rudolf Bultman remarks that the paraclete is sent by the father (John 14:16), or proceeds from the father (John 15:26), he is not visible to the world, but only to believer (John 14:17), he teaches and leads into the truth (John 14:26; 16:13), he does not speak on his own account (John 16:13), he bears witness to Jesus against the world and convicts the world of sin (John 15:26; 16:8). In all this, he is described as the revealer, like Jesus himself; for Jesus is also sent by God (John 5:30; 8:16) and has gone forth from God (John 8:42; 13:3) as revealer is visible only to believers and not to the world. The paraclete is a parallel figure to Jesus himself (566-567).

Barclay William notes that *parakletos* might be a person called in to give witness in a law court in someone's favour; he might be an advocate called in to plead the cause of someone under a charge which would issue in serious penalty; he might be an expert called in to give advice in some difficult situation; he might be a person called in when, for example, a company of soldiers were depressed and dispirited to put new courage into their minds and hearts. A paraclete is someone called to help in time of need (167). In relation to the disciples of Christ, the Holy Spirit is to guide the disciples and teach them what to do and enable them. Katharine Sakenfeld states that the word paraclete explains the unique formulation that the spirit of truth will not only be in the disciples but remains with them. This means that the spirit will function in Jesus stead. The spirit will get them into all the truth, meaning that the spirit will recall Jesus words and interpret same to the disciples (445). The *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* affirms that the Holy Spirit is to continue the functions of Jesus earthly ministry for the disciples. The Holy Spirit is portrayed as an angel of light opposed to Beliar. The Holy Spirit on arrival will not bring a new teaching to Christ disciples but will expose the teachings of Christ to them (Raymond 975). This is further affirmed by the comment of Black in *Peake's commentary on the Bible* "the paraclete's function is to teach and remind the disciples of Christ, the Holy Spirit does not bring a new truth but applies what Jesus has already said" (752). Andreas J. Kostenberger states that the spirit presence with the disciples will replace Jesus

encouraging and strengthening presence with them while on earth. When the spirit comes to dwell with believers, it is as if Jesus himself takes up residence in them. The spirit role ensures the continuity between Jesus pre and post glorification ministry (437). Moreover, the spirit will bring to remembrance all that Jesus taught his disciples (John 14:26), he will testify regarding Jesus together with his followers (John 15:26), he will convict the world of sin, unrighteousness and judgment (John 16:8-11) and he will guide Jesus disciples in all truth and disclose what is to come (John 16:13). Barnes' notes in addition reveal that the Holy Spirit in John as promised by Christ is to teach the disciples the truth, or would guide them into all truth. The Holy Spirit would keep them from error, and teach them the truth, which, either by writing or preaching they were to communicate to others. Adam Clark's Commentaries notes that the Holy Spirit is to expose falsity, remove error, and teach the knowledge of the true God.

The Spirit and the world v. 17b "whom the world cannot receive"
Christ having made the first assertion "The Spirit of truth**"** which has been carefully analysed above added "whom the world cannot receive". John presents two worlds in His writings, the world above and the world below. "You are from below; I am from above". You are of this world; I am not of this world" (John 8:32). The world below is evil while the world above is good.

The Greek word for world is *kosmos. Kosmos* has three basic meanings in the account of John. Firstly, *kosmos* is the created physical world, the universe, described in the Old Testament as "all things" or "heaven and earth" (Acts 17:25). The world in this sense was made by the Word "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:3), "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him" (John 1:10). It is the same created world being referred to when Jesus speaks of what shall it profit a man to gain the whole world and loss his soul in the process (Matthew 16:26).Secondly, the world being spoken about in John's writings is all of humanity. "Jesus answered him, "I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing" (John.18:20). In John 12:19, the Pharisees complained "You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him". It is in this context of the world as meaning "all humanity" that we could situate "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). The world here is the world of men and women of flesh and blood into which Jesus came when He was born of a human mother (John 11:27). Thirdly, the world being referred to in John's account means those people in the world who live in enmity with God. It further refers to those who follow their own wisdom and live by the light of their own reason, not recognizing the source of all true life and illumination. (Timothy 47-48). "The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil" (John 7:7). Even though Jesus came into the world, "the world did not know Him" (John 1:10). The two dominant characteristics of the world as referred here are pride, born of man's failure to accept his creaturely estate and his dependence on the creator, which leads him to act as though he forsooth were the lord and giver of life; and covetousness, which causes him to desire and possess all that is attractive to his physical senses (1Jn. 2:16) (Douglas 1339). This third definition of the Greek word *kosmos* is best suitable to explain John in 14:17b. Barnes' notes arguing in the line above states that the term world is often used to denote all who are entirely under the influence of the things of

this world which include pride, ambition, and pleasure; all who are not Christians, and especially all who are addicted to gross vices and pursuits, (1 Corinthians 1:21; 11:32; John 12:31; 2 Corinthians 4:4).John14:17b further implies those who are influenced only by the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eye, and the pride of life, 1John 2:16. These cannot receive the Spirit of truth, because they see him not, have no spiritual discernment, attend to nothing but the dictates of their corrupt passions and affections, and will admit of no influence but what can be an object of their senses (Adam's Clarke's Commentary).

Barclay William adds that by the world, Christ meant men who live as though there was no God. They would not receive the spirit of truth or comforter (167). Rudolf Bultman in the gospel of John a commentary states that the statement that the world cannot receive the spirit does not mean that the unbeliever cannot become a believer but rather contrast between the community of believers and the world. The world qua world cannot receive the spirit; to do so it would have to give up its essential nature, that which makes it the world (616).

The Spirit and the disciples v.17c "because it neither sees Him nor knows Him"
Because it neither sees Him - The men of the world are under the influence of the senses. They walk by sight, and not by faith. Hence, what they cannot perceive by their senses, what does not gratify their sight, or taste, or feeling, makes no impression on them. As they cannot see the operations of the Spirit (John 3:8), they judge that all that is said of his influence is delusive, and hence, they cannot receive him. They have an erroneous mode of judging of what is for the welfare of man (Barnes' note Commentary). Nor knows Him - To know, in the Scriptures, often means more than the act of the mind in simply understanding a thing. It denotes every act or emotion of the mind that is requisite in receiving the proper impression of a truth. Hence, it often includes the idea of "approbation," of "love," of "cordial feeling," (Psalm 1:6; Psalm 37:18; Psalm 138:6; Nahum 1:7; 2 Timothy 2:19). In this place it means the approbation of the heart; and as the people of the world do not approve of or desire the aid of the Spirit, so it is said they cannot receive him. They have no love for him, and they reject him. Men often consider his work in the conversion of sinners and in revivals as delusion. They love the world so much that they cannot understand his work or embrace him. Grill's Exposition of the Entire Bible commenting on John 14:17c "because it neither sees Him nor knows Him" states that the world, and the men of it, can neither see him with their bodily eyes, because he is a "spirit"; nor know him with their understandings, because he is the "Spirit of truth", which they are ignorant of, for want of a spiritual discerning (14).

Knowledge of the spirit v.17d "but ye know Him"
The verbs are in the present tense, describing the receptivity of the disciples as opposed to the moral blindness of the world. They had, during our Lord's work and teaching in their midst, exercised and strengthened their spiritual faculties. They had in part received the Spirit, and by that reception were prepared for the fuller gift. They knew Him. He was in their midst. He was then, and therefore should be in the future, a living power, dwelling in their inmost life (Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers). Matthew Henry in his Commentary remarks that the disciples of Christ are here distinguished from the world, for they are chosen and called out of the world that lies in wickedness; they are the children and heirs of another world- the world above. It is the misery of those that are invincibly devoted to the world that they cannot receive the Spirit of truth. The spirit of the world and of God are spoken of as directly contrary the one to the other (1 Corinthians 2:12); for where the spirit of the world has

the ascendant, the Spirit of God is excluded. Even the princes of this world, though, as princes, they had advantages of knowledge, yet, as princes of this world, they laboured under invincible prejudices, so that they knew not the things of the Spirit of God, 1 Corinthians 2:8. Therefore men cannot receive the Spirit of truth because they see him not, neither know him. The comforts of the Spirit are foolishness to them, as much as ever the cross of Christ was, and the great things of the gospel, like those of the law, are counted as a strange thing. These are judgments far above out of their sight. Speak to the children of this world of the operations of the Spirit, and you are as a barbarian to them (1609).

Presence of the Spirit v.17de "for He dwells with you and will be in you"
The word "dwells" means to remain with them. Jesus was to be taken away, but the Spirit would remain. It also implies that they would know his presence, and have assurance that they were under his guidance. Moreover, it implies that the Spirit was in the Apostles already, inhabited their hearts and taken up his residence in them as his temple. This was true of the apostles as inspired men, and it is true of all Christians that by ascertaining that they have the "graces of the Spirit" - joy, peace, long-suffering, etc they know that they are the children of God, (1 John 3:24; 1 John 5:10).The statement of Christ in John 14:17e reveals His constant presence, to compensate His withdrawal. His presence for them was both corporately and individually (Pfeiffer & Harrison 1105). In the words of Matthew on John 14:17e, Christ had dwelt with His disciples, and by their acquaintance with him they could not but know the Spirit of truth. They had themselves been endowed with the Spirit in some measure. What enabled them to leave all to follow Christ, and to continue with him in his temptations? What enabled them to preach the gospel, and work miracles, but the Spirit dwelling in them? The experiences of the saints are the explications of the promises; paradoxes to others are axioms to them. Those that have an experimental acquaintance with the Spirit have a comfortable assurance of his continuance: He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you, for the blessed Spirit doth not use to shift his lodging. Those that know him know how to value him, invite him and bid him welcome; and therefore he shall be in them, as the light in the air, as the sap in the tree, as the soul in the body. Their communion with him shall be intimate, and their union with him inseparable. The gift of the Holy Ghost is a peculiar gift, bestowed upon the disciples of Christ in a distinguishing way—them, and not the world; it is to them hidden manna, and the white stone. No comforts comparable to those which make no show, make no noise. This is the favour God bears to his chosen; it is the heritage of those that fear his name (1609).

Implications of the Holy Spirit in John 14:17 as Christ Presence
The Holy Spirit which is also the presence of Christ, and more importantly Christ himself as established in this paper has myriads of activities to accomplish in the lives of Christ disciples. This includes:

1. The Holy Spirit comes from the Father to stay forever within the disciples (John14:17).
2. The Holy Spirit mediates the life of Christ to the disciples.
3. The Holy Spirit teaches the disciples all things concerning Christ and reminds the disciples of all biblical truth.
4. The Holy Spirit is a revelation of Christ.
5. The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of truth by reason of that which he does, because he inspires the truth into the disciples, because he has the truth in himself.
6. The presence of the Holy Spirit is the presence of Christ, hence, the disciples are not to fear.

7. Christ who was a comforter in the flesh with the disciples would in His resurrection become another comforter, the Spirit of reality, who would be in the disciples. In other words, the first Comforter-Christ in the flesh would become another comforter –Christ as the Spirit of reality, the life giving Spirit (1Cor. 15:45). **"The another"** comforter as written in John 14:16 is Christ Himself in another form. Christ the son as a comforter in the flesh desired to become another comforter, Christ Himself as the Spirit entering into the disciples to live in them (John 14:20).

Conclusion

This paper examined the promise of Christ to His disciples to send the Holy Spirit to them after His ascension to Heaven (John 14:17). It was observed that the promise of the Holy Spirit was made by Christ as a result of the emotional instability by Christ disciples followed by their rigorous questions to Him of what becomes their fate at His departure. Christ being aware that the period used for teaching His disciples the divine mandate and messages from above was short and within the period which is neatly stated as three years, His disciples would not have learnt everything promised them the Holy Spirit who will continue the work that He had begun. The verse exegetically considered (John 14:17) reveals that the Holy Spirit will be a revealer of all truth. That is to say that the Holy Spirit will make known the real meaning, implications of all the messages and statements made by Christ to His disciples. Moreover, the Holy Spirit will reveal all falsehood to His Disciples in order for them not to make mistakes. In as much as the world that is unbelievers who are guided by the principles of the world cannot understand the things of the spirit, the Holy Spirit will not be for them but if they receive Christ, the Holy Spirit functions or acts as promised.

This paper portrays the fact that the Holy Spirit promised by Christ is the presence of Christ which invariably is Christ himself. Christ stated, "but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you" (v.17). This statement reveals Christ presence with His disciples while on earth during His three and half years' ministerial assignment and the futuristic presence of Christ through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit. The promise of the Holy Spirit which is the continual presence of Christ to His disciples brought a sigh of relieve to the myriads of questions and arguments posed by His disciples. This is due to the fact that what Christ is to His Disciples, the Holy Spirit was to replace. There were no differences with the absence of Christ since what Christ does for His disciples, the Holy Spirit was to do. The Holy Spirit is Christ revealed.

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