

# Spirit and Atonement in John

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The Spirit texts in the Fourth Gospel fall into two subsets, the first speaking of the “spirit”, and the second speaking of the “Spirit of Truth” or the “Holy Spirit”, also identified as the “Paraclete” or Advocate. I find that the alliance of Spirit with blood at the end of First John is a clue that uncovers a similar Spirit-Atonement connection in the Gospel. I will demonstrate that the first subset of “spirit” passages in John are regularly supplemented or framed with Atonement material, while the Paraclete texts have no such supplements, and that this phenomenon reflects a process of doctrinal modification.

## Atonement and Spirit in First John

First John describes the removal of sins in connection with Jesus’ death using concrete metaphors of “flesh” and “blood”, as well as the abstract concepts of his being “sent”, or his “coming”. This writer then ties all of these together with, and validates them by, the witness of the “spirit”.

We find forgiveness of sins explicitly attributed to the blood or death of Jesus in 1 John 1:7, “and the blood of Jesus his son cleanses us from all sin”; in 2:2, “and he himself is atonement for our sins”; and finally in 4:10, “God ... sent his son as atonement for our sins”. In regard to Jesus’ mission, 4:2 asserts that Jesus “came ... in flesh,” while 5:8 emphatically asserts that Jesus “came ... in the water and in the blood”.

These last two statements both use the full title “Jesus Christ”, and both respond polemically to opposing doctrinal positions:

*Every spirit which confesses Jesus Christ having come in flesh is of God, and every spirit not confessing this (τὸν) Jesus is not of God ... (1 John 4:2-3a)*

*This is he who came through water and blood, Jesus Christ; not in the water alone, but in the water and in the blood. (1 John 5:6)*

Thus, 1 John affirms that Jesus came “in flesh” (ἐν σαρκί), “in the water” (ἐν τῷ ὕδατι), and “in the blood” (ἐν τῷ αἵματι). The writer has no confessional issue with Jesus’ coming “in water”, but he<sup>1</sup> emphatically condemns any who would not confess that Jesus came “in flesh” or “in the blood”, presumably because such a confession would fall short of the atonement efficacy noted in 1 John 1:7.

Looking again at these selections, we see that 1 John enlists the “spirit” to legitimize both “flesh” and “blood”:

*In this we know the **spirit** of God, every **spirit** that confesses Jesus Christ having come in flesh is of God, and every **spirit** not confessing this Jesus is not of God. (1 John 4:2-3a)*

*This is he who came through water and **blood**, Jesus Christ; not in the water alone but in the water and in the **blood**. And the **spirit** is that which witnesses, for the **spirit** is true. For those who witness are three, the **spirit** and the water and the **blood**; and the **three** are become the one. (1 John 5:6-8)*

These passages exhibit similar rhetorical strategy, each one using the phrase “the/every spirit” (τὸ/πᾶν πνεῦμα) three times. In the second, we see a double parallel with three mentions of “spirit”, three mentions of “blood”, and “three” itself used twice.

Starting from a core agreement with his audience that the Spirit is “that which witnesses, for the spirit is true”, 1 John adds the mutually accepted element of “coming in water”. Next, he moves to widen the argument by including “coming in blood”, while also broadening the “witness” function, originally confined to the “spirit”, to include both “water and blood”, so the final assertion can be made that these “three” witnesses are indeed “one”. Subtle support for 1 John’s position also arises in that the words for all three witnesses are neuter gender, disyllabic nouns (τὸ πνεῦμα, τὸ ὕδωρ, τὸ αἷμα), a likeness which would not work with the feminine gender monosyllabic “flesh” (ἡ σὰρξ).<sup>2</sup>

Thus, 1 John presents us with an emphatic and polemic joining of the Spirit with the blood of Jesus, and less emphatically with his flesh. The writer has already made Jesus’ blood synonymous with atonement for sins. 1 John’s audience was likely prepared for a joining of Spirit and water by Old Testament prophecy and contemporary Judaism (e.g., Isaiah 44:3, Ezekiel 36:25-27, 1QS 3:6-9), but not for a Spirit-blood alliance. We will now look for evidence of this new and polemical alliance of Spirit with blood, that is, with Jesus’ death as atonement for sins, in the Fourth Gospel.

### **Spirit and Atonement Texts in John**

Omitting the synoptically parallel identification of Jesus as “he who baptizes in the Holy Spirit” (John 1:33), the 27 verses of Spirit material in John divide naturally into two subsets. The first subset of 12 verses speak of an unqualified “spirit”, and the second subset of 15 verses identify the “Spirit of Truth” or “Holy Spirit” as the “Paraclete”.<sup>3</sup> For this study I define “atonement” as that which expresses one or more facets of the salvific nature of Jesus’ death. Not all texts referencing Jesus’ death are related to Atonement. Using this definition I recognize 24 verses in John with Atonement elements.<sup>4</sup>

Looking at these sets of data, we see that the distribution of Atonement material in the Gospel is not random but follows a marked pattern. Reading through John from start to finish, the canonical text naturally falls into four distinct regions based on the presence or absence of Spirit and/or Atonement texts. In the first region, chapters 1-7, we find all but two of John’s “spirit” texts, along with 15 Atonement verses. In the second region, chapters 8-12, we find seven Atonement verses but no Spirit texts at all. In the third region, chapters 13-17 (roughly, the Farewell Discourse), we find all four of John’s Paraclete-Spirit passages, but no Atonement or “spirit” texts. In the last region, chapters

19-21 (roughly, the Passion Narrative), we have the final two “spirit” texts and the last two Atonement verses.

In the next section I will show that all the Atonement passages in both the first and fourth regions, comprising 71% of the Atonement material in John, are antithetically joined with a “spirit” text as doctrinal supplements, while the other 29% are bundled in middle of the book (chapters 8-12) where neither “spirit” nor Paraclete are to be found.<sup>5</sup>

### First Subset: “Spirit” texts

Now we will survey the “spirit” texts. Except for some details to be noted below, I accept as a working basis Von Wahlde’s identification of three editorial layers in the Gospel, and I will hereafter reference the three editions as “1E”, “2E”, and “3E”. My translations below will reflect his analysis, with his First Edition (1E) in normal font, Second Edition (2E) in *italics*, and Third Edition (3E) in Small Caps.<sup>6</sup> With one exception that I will discuss at the end of this section, Von Wahlde classifies all the “spirit” texts as 2E material, and all the Paraclete and Atonement texts as from 3E.

While 1 John frequently mentions forgiveness of sins by the atoning death of Jesus, the Gospel mentions “forgiveness” or “taking away” of sins only twice, and both are connected in the text of John with the first and last “spirit” passages, respectively:

1. **John 1:29-36** *On the morrow, John sees Jesus coming toward him and he says, "LOOK, THE LAMB OF GOD THAT TAKES AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD. (30) THIS-ONE IS HE ABOUT WHOM I SAID, 'AFTER ME COMES A MAN WHO BECAME AHEAD OF ME, BECAUSE HE WAS BEFORE ME. (31) AND I did not know him, but so that this-one be revealed to Israel, I came baptizing in water'". (32) And John witnessed, saying that, "I have seen the spirit descending as a dove out of heaven AND IT REMAINED ON HIM. (33) AND I DID NOT KNOW HIM, BUT HE WHO SENT ME TO BAPTIZE IN WATER, THAT-ONE SAID TO ME, 'ON WHOMEVER YOU SEE THE SPIRIT DESCEND AND REMAIN ON HIM, THIS IS HE WHO BAPTIZES IN THE HOLY SPIRIT.'* (34) *And I have seen and have witnessed that this-one is the son of God."* (35) *On the morrow* again stood John and two of his disciples. (36) And seeing Jesus walking he says, "LOOK, THE LAMB OF GOD".

The phrase “taking-away the sin” (*αἴρων τὴν ἁμαρτίαν*) in 1:29 is the same language used of Jesus in 1 John 3:5, that he appeared “to take-away the sins” (*τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἄρη*), thus making an explicit connection of “Lamb of God” with Atonement. “Lamb” is the only animal imagery applied to Jesus in John, perhaps inserted here to balance the animal image of “dove” applied to the Spirit. John will likewise later apply the phrase “descending from heaven” to Jesus as Son of Man (3:13, 6:51-58).

John the Baptist here calls Jesus “Lamb of God” twice, creating a frame at the beginning and the end of this paragraph (1:29, 36). Additional doublets of “I did not know him” and “see the spirit descend (and remain) on him”, plus parallel indirect speech structures in verses 30 and 33, all suggest interpolative activity. Reading only the 2E italicized text in verses 29, 31-32, and 34, without the 3E material, yields a well sequenced narrative.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, the 2E “spirit descending as a dove out of heaven” has here been framed and supplemented by later 3E material teaching the superiority of Jesus to John and, especially, the Atonement nature of Jesus’ mission (“Lamb of God”). This whole selection shows evidence of artistic and chiasmic shaping by the 3E editor.<sup>8</sup> Now for the sister text where Jesus gives the “spirit” to the disciples:

- 2. John 20:19-23** *When it had become evening on that day, the first of the week, and the doors were locked where the disciples were because of the fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst and he says to them, "Peace to you."* (20) AND HAVING SAID THIS HE SHOWED HIS HANDS AND HIS SIDE TO THEM. THEREFORE THE DISCIPLES REJOICED, HAVING SEEN THE LORD. (21) THEREFORE JESUS SAID TO THEM AGAIN, "PEACE TO YOU. JUST AS THE FATHER HAS SENT ME, I ALSO SEND YOU." (22) *And having said this he breathed on and said to them, "Receive (the) HOLY Spirit. (23) OF WHOMEVER YOU FORGIVE THE SINS, THEY HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN THEM; OF WHOMEVER YOU RETAIN, THEY HAVE BEEN RETAINED."*

This text closes the Spirit-Atonement inclusio begun in the previous text. There, Jesus received the “spirit” descending from heaven; here the disciples receive the “spirit” from Jesus<sup>9</sup>. There Jesus was the “Lamb of God taking away sins”; here Jesus gives his disciples authority to “forgive/retain sins” – and, these are the only two references to removal or forgiveness of sins in the entire Fourth Gospel. In both selections, all activity concerning the Spirit and removal of sins takes place not in narration but in direct or reported speech, there by John the Baptist, and here by Jesus.

As before, we have a 2E “spirit” text, “Receive the spirit” (20:22), immediately supplemented by later 3E Atonement elements, “forgive/retain the sins” (20:23). Forgiving sins in 20:23 is not a stand-alone issue, unrelated to Atonement, when we see it in the context of closing the inclusio. The disciples’ reception of the “spirit” and their consequent authorization to forgive sins closes the circle begun by Jesus’ reception of the same “spirit” and his consequent mission as Lamb of God to remove the sins of the world. Sequentially, the Lamb of God “taking away the sins of the world”, and Jesus’ or his disciples’ action to “forgive/retain sins” comprise the two key consecutive steps in John’s process of salvation by Atonement.<sup>10</sup> But, once again, a 2E “spirit” text has been supplemented by 3E Atonement elements.

- 3a. John 2:23-3:8** As he was in Jerusalem in the Passover in the feast, many believed into his name, seeing his signs which he was doing. (24) *But Jesus himself was not believing himself to them for the reason that he knew all things, (25) and because he did not have need that anyone witness about the man, for he himself knew what was in the man. (3:1) But, there was a man of the Pharisees, Nicodemus his name, a ruler of the Jews. (2) This-one came to him at night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that from God you have come a teacher. For, no one is able to do these signs which you are doing unless God be with him." (3) Answered Jesus and said to him, "Amen amen I say to you, unless someone is born from above he is not able to see THE KINGDOM OF GOD." (4) Says to him Nicodemus, "How is a human able to be born, being old? He is not able into the womb of his mother a second time to enter and be born is he?" (5) Answered Jesus, "Amen amen I say to you, unless someone is born of WATER AND spirit, he*

*is not able to enter into THE KINGDOM OF GOD. (6) What is born of the flesh is flesh and what is born of the spirit is spirit. (7) DO NOT MARVEL THAT I SAID TO YOU-PL, 'IT IS NECESSARY THAT YOU-PL BE BORN FROM ABOVE.' (8) The spirit blows where it wills, and its voice you hear but you do not know where it comes and where it goes. Thus is everyone who is born of the spirit."*

Disregarding the small amount of 3E text here, the editorial seams between 1E and 2E material seem fairly evident. The pessimistic assessment of 2:24-25 is interruptive with respect to the optimistic 1E narrative of 2:23. However, 2:23 leads quite smoothly into the also positive 3:1-2, repeating similar terminology ("signs" in 2:23 and 3:2), as well as positive reactions to Jesus' signs ("many believe" in 2:23, and commendations that Jesus is "from God" and God is "with him" in 3:2).<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, Jesus' reply in the 2E text of 3:3-8 is out of sync with Nicodemus' positive 1E statements in 3:1-2, introducing an unrelated and negatively stated theme, with three consecutive "not able" statements in 3:3-5, about birth from above and of Spirit. It does, however, build on 2:24-25, continuing a pessimistic critique of the widespread positive faith in Jesus' "signs" in 2:23 and 3:1-2.<sup>12</sup> That faith is deficient, according to 3:3-8, precisely because it lacks the birth "from above", or, "of the spirit", that is essential to see or enter eternal life.

The 2E text of 3:3-8 also introduces a new and absolute contrast between "spirit" and "flesh" (3:5), and a mysterious unpredictability about how and where the Spirit will move (3:8). The Spirit/flesh contrast will appear in later texts, but not the Spirit's unpredictability. So far, we see no Atonement material or even faith in Jesus, but now consider the immediately following paragraph, consisting almost entirely of 3E text:

**3b. John 3:9-18** *Nicodemus answered and said to him, "How can these things come to be?" (10) Jesus answered and said to him, "You are the teacher of Israel and these things you do not know? (11) AMEN AMEN I SAY TO YOU THAT WHAT WE KNOW WE SPEAK, AND WHAT WE HAVE SEEN WE WITNESS, AND OUR WITNESS YOU-PL DO NOT RECEIVE. (12) IF I SAID TO YOU-PL THE EARTHLY THINGS AND YOU-PL DO NOT BELIEVE, HOW WILL YOU-PL BELIEVE IF I SAY TO YOU-PL THE HEAVENLY THINGS? (13) AND NOBODY HAS ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN EXCEPT HE WHO DESCENDED FROM HEAVEN, THE SON OF MAN; (14) AND JUST AS MOSES RAISED THE SNAKE IN THE DESERT, SO ALSO MUST BE RAISED THE SON OF MAN, (15) SO THAT EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM MAY HAVE LIFE ETERNAL. (16) FOR THUS GOD LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE THE ONLY-BORN SON, SO THAT EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES INTO HIM MAY NOT PERISH BUT HAVE LIFE ETERNAL. (17) FOR, GOD DID NOT SEND THE SON INTO THE WORLD IN ORDER TO JUDGE THE WORLD, BUT THAT THE WORLD BE SAVED THROUGH HIM. (18) THE ONE BELIEVING INTO HIM IS NOT JUDGED. BUT, THE ONE NOT BELIEVING HAS ALREADY BEEN JUDGED, BECAUSE HE HAS NOT BELIEVED INTO THE NAME OF THE ONLY-BORN SON OF GOD.*

I have included the plural pronouns in my translation above, used here four times each for first-person plural "we" and second-person plural "you". This feature is one of several indicators that 3:11-18 is a later interpolation by the 3E editor, as it begins a new perspective beyond a private conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus.<sup>13</sup>

More importantly, 3:11 begins a critique of the “birth of the spirit” that Jesus had just been explaining to Nicodemus, moving the reader to a yet higher level of doctrine. In Jesus’ negative statement in 3:12, the 3E editor clearly designates the prior teaching about the new birth to be “earthly things”. Just as the 2E editor critiqued the earlier signs faith to be deficient and in need of supplementation by his “birth of the spirit” teaching, so now the later 3E editor critiques that very same “spirit” teaching as deficient and in need of supplementation by his “heavenly things” doctrine.<sup>14</sup>

Some of the 3E “heavenly things” teachings are here promulgated by Jesus: the Son of Man descended from heaven (3:13), superseding the previous descent of the Spirit from heaven (1:32); the Son of Man “lifted up”, a figure of Jesus’ crucifixion (3:14); all who believe in the “lifted up” Son of Man who is also God’s only-born son “given” to die will have eternal life (3:15-16); and, anyone not believing in this only-born Son of God has already been judged, without needing to await a future verdict (3:17-18).

The language of being “lifted up” and “given” both point to Jesus’ crucifixion, and thus establish an implicit Atonement connection<sup>15</sup>. Moreover, this new teaching demands even greater “faith” than the prior “birth of the spirit” teaching, as Jesus polemically states in 3:12, “if ... you do not believe” the earthly things I just told you about, “how will you believe” if I now tell you about heavenly things.

Thus, we see three levels of believing successively put forward in 2:23-3:18, each new level supplanting and correcting a deficiency in the one preceding. First was the relatively easy 1E faith based on Jesus’ signs (2:23, 3:1-2). The 1E signs faith is supplanted by the more complex and mysterious 2E faith based on birth by the powerful and unpredictable Spirit (2:24-25, 3:3-8). But, then that “earthly” Spirit teaching is overlaid by the even more difficult 3E teaching of Jesus as Son of Man crucified and the only-born Son of God given to die. In the end, faith in the crucified and atoning Son supplants birth by the Spirit as the one and only essential prerequisite to eternal life.

**4a. John 4:10-24** *Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you 'give to me to drink', you would have asked him and he would have given to you living water." . . . (13) Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again. (14) But whoever drinks of the water which I will give him will not thirst to eternity, but the water which I will give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up to life eternal." . . . (21) Jesus says to her, "Believe me woman, that an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you-pl worship the Father. (22) You-pl worship what you-pl do not know. We worship what we know, for the salvation is from the Jews. (23) But an hour is coming and now is when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for also the Father seeks such as these worshipping him. (24) God is spirit, and it is necessary for those worshipping him to worship in spirit and truth."*

The “living water” given by Jesus here in 4:10-14 is later explicitly identified as the “spirit” by the 2E editor in 7:38-39 (see #6 below). The conversation with the Samaritan woman about “living water” seems analogous to the preceding dialogue with Nicodemus, and we see that quite soon in 4:23-24 Jesus indeed turns to the same “spirit” topos about which he just preached in 3:3-8. Another parallel is the contrast drawn here

between worship “in spirit” and worshipping in any geographical holy place (4:21), corresponding to a parallel contrast drawn there between “spirit” and “flesh” (3:5).

I question Von Wahlde’s classification of 4:21-24 as entirely 2E text, especially with the presence of opposing first and second person plural pronouns, “we know” but “you-pl do not know”.<sup>16</sup> So far we encounter no Atonement supplementation, until we reach this final coda to the Samaritan narrative, echoing the same “we know” language:

**4b. John 4:39-43** Out of that city many of the Samaritans believed into him on account of the word of the woman she was witnessing that "He said to me everything that I did." (40) SO THEREFORE THE SAMARITANS CAME TO HIM ASKING HIM TO REMAIN WITH THEM, AND HE REMAINED THERE TWO DAYS, (41) AND A GREAT MANY BELIEVED ON ACCOUNT OF HIS WORD. (42) AND, TO THE WOMAN THEY WERE SAYING THAT "NO LONGER ON ACCOUNT OF YOUR SPEAKING DO WE BELIEVE, FOR WE OURSELVES HAVE HEARD AND KNOW THAT THIS-ONE IS TRULY THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD." (43) BUT, AFTER THE TWO DAYS he went out from there into the Galilee.

The 3E text of 4:40-4:43a shows surface signs of interpolation in the doublet of “two days” and “after the two days” in 4:40 and 43a, and in the consecutive narrative that is retained when the end of 4:39 is read with 4:43b without the intervening 3E text.<sup>17</sup> The text of 4:40-43a also contains an implicit Atonement reference in the phrase “Savior of the world” (ὁ σωτήρ τοῦ κόσμου) in 4:42.<sup>18</sup> This phrase echoes the atonement theme of the prior 3E text of 3:16-17 (see 3b above) as well as 12:47 (“I have come ... to save the world”), and elsewhere in 1 John 2:2 (“and he is atonement for the sins of ... the whole world”) and 4:14 (“... the Father sent the Son as Savior of the world”).

Although the 3E editor does not here criticize and supplant the 2E “spirit” as “living water” in the heavy handed way that he critiqued the birth of the Spirit in 3:9-18, we may nevertheless detect a differentiation between two stages of the Samaritans’ “believing”. Their initial 1E belief in Jesus in 4:39 is a “signs” faith based on Jesus’ miraculous knowledge of the woman’s past. However, after they hear Jesus himself, they say in the 3E text of 4:42, “we no longer believe” because of your report, but we now believe because “we have heard and we know that this-one is truly the Savior of the world”.<sup>19</sup> The Samaritan converts now echo the perspective of an inside group, who twice before have said “we know” (οἶδαμεν - 3:11, 4:22), echoing six uses in 1 John.<sup>20</sup> I suggest that the 3E editor presents this speech of the Samaritan converts in part as a paradigm of believers who have successfully advanced from the earliest 1E level of “signs” faith all the way to the 3E faith based on the salvific and atoning death of Jesus.

**5a. John 6:59-65** *These things he said in synagogue, teaching in Capernaum.* (60) *Many therefore of those of his disciples who heard said, "Severe is this word. Who is able to hear it?"* (61) *But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, he said to them, "DOES THIS SCANDALIZE YOU? (62) (WHAT) IF THEN YOU SEE THE SON OF MAN ASCENDING TO WHERE HE WAS BEFORE? (63) The spirit is the one making-alive, the flesh does not benefit anything. The words that I have spoken to you, spirit they are and life they are. (64) But there are some of you who are not believing." For Jesus knew from (the) beginning who they are who are not believing and who is the one that is*

*betraying him. (65) And he was saying, "Because of this I had said to you that 'Nobody is able to come to me unless it has been given to him of the Father.' "*  
(66) BECAUSE OF THIS MANY OF HIS DISCIPLES WENT AWAY BACKWARDS AND NO LONGER WALKED WITH HIM.

We come now to the aftermath of the Galilean synagogogue homily presented in chapter six. The 3E text of 6:61c-62 is evidently an out of sync insertion into earlier text. Omitting 6:61c-62, 6:61b ("... he said to them") connects naturally with 6:63a ("The spirit is ..."), while the phrase "the words that I have spoken" in 6:63b answers the complaint of the disciples in 6:60 about the "word" of Jesus, having nothing to do with 6:61c-62.<sup>21</sup>

The contrast drawn between Spirit and flesh in 6:63 is again absolute and leaves no middle ground; the use of asyndeton to join the two clauses nicely emphasizes the contrast. This 2E teaching is on the same doctrinal vector as the prior 2E text of 3:6, "what is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the spirit is spirit", but 6:63 goes further to negatively distinguish "flesh" as "useless" from the "life-giving" Spirit. However, the 2E editor does not cast his disparagement of "flesh" in ethical terms, as if "flesh" were evil, but only that it is powerless in comparison to the "spirit". On the 3E side, more echoes of the Nicodemus discourse are evident in 6:61c-62 where "... the Son of Man ascending to where he was before" continues the same thought of 3:13, "nobody has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man".

I suggest we may now infer something about the 3E editor's authorial strategy. The 2E statements of 3:6 and 8, and 6:63 are memorable, pithy statements, almost proverbial. This suggests that these sayings were so well known in the John churches they could not be simply cut out and discarded from the text. The 3E editor follows an alternate strategy of inserting Atonement teachings in or around "spirit" texts. He follows the same course when, for example, he corrects a text stating that Jesus "was baptizing" (3:22-23); he did not remove it, but simply inserted a contrary statement that "Jesus himself was not baptizing" (4:2). And, now see the same strategy repeated here:

**5b. John 6:51-58** "I AM THE LIVING BREAD WHICH HAS DESCENDED FROM HEAVEN. IF ANYONE EATS OF THIS BREAD HE WILL LIVE TO ETERNITY, BUT EVEN THE BREAD WHICH I WILL GIVE IS MY FLESH FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD." (52) THE JEWS WERE FIGHTING WITH EACH OTHER SAYING, "HOW CAN THIS-ONE GIVE TO US HIS FLESH TO EAT?" (53) SAID THEREFORE JESUS TO THEM, "AMEN AMEN I SAY TO YOU, UNLESS YOU EAT THE FLESH OF THE SON OF MAN AND DRINK HIS BLOOD, YOU DO NOT HAVE LIFE IN YOURSELVES. (54) HE WHO CHEWS MY FLESH AND DRINKS MY BLOOD HAS LIFE ETERNAL, AND I, I WILL RAISE HIM UP ON THE LAST DAY. (6:55) FOR MY FLESH IS TRUE FOOD AND MY BLOOD IS TRUE DRINK. (56) HE WHO CHEWS MY FLESH AND DRINKS MY BLOOD REMAINS IN ME AND I IN HIM. (57) JUST AS THE LIVING FATHER SENT ME, AND I LIVE THROUGH THE FATHER, SO ALSO HE WHO CHEWS ME, THAT-ONE WILL LIVE THROUGH ME. (58) THIS IS THE BREAD WHICH DESCENDED FROM HEAVEN, NOT AS THE FATHERS ATE AND DIED. HE WHO CHEWS THIS BREAD WILL LIVE TO ETERNITY."

Just as 2E Spirit teaching of 3:3-8 is followed by an extended 3E Atonement text in 3:11-18, so here the 2E Spirit teaching of 6:63 and context is immediately preceded by the most sustained and intensive Atonement preaching in John. It is difficult to imagine a stronger contrast with "the flesh is useless" in 6:63 than this text about eating the "flesh"

of the Son of Man. Six times his “flesh” is presented as food, four times along his “blood” as drink. Three times we are invited to “eat” (ἐσθίω) and four times to “chew” or “gnaw” (τρώγω) this “true food”, and three times to “drink” (πίνω) this “true drink”. It goes without saying that this is intensely graphic Atonement teaching about Jesus’ death.

Note how this Atonement teaching creates “fighting” (ἐμάχοντο) among the Jews (6:52), as well as a stumbling block for “many of his disciples” (6:60), who withdraw and no longer follow Jesus (6:66). The emphatic exclusivity of 6:53 that anyone who does not “eat the flesh ... and drink the blood” of the Son of Man has “no life” at all, and the resulting defection of “many disciples” may reflect a historical memory of contention between opposing parties in the John churches over Atonement and Eucharist teaching. Whatever the case, it is clear that a reader or hearer with all the polemical volume of 6:51-59 still ringing in their ears will hardly notice the short and quiet proverbial saying in 6:63 that “flesh is useless”. Thus, by skillful insertion and supplementation, the 3E editor rhetorically leads that reader to conclude, of course, that the 2E text of 6:63 was speaking of something other than the “flesh” of Jesus.

- 6. John 7:37-39** *In the last day, the great one, of the feast, stood Jesus and cried out saying, "If anyone thirsts let him come to me and let him drink. (38) The one who believes into me, just as the scripture said, 'Rivers from THE BELLY of him will flow, of living water.'" (39) But this he said about the spirit, which they who believed into him were about to receive, for not yet was the spirit because Jesus was not yet glorified.*

Von Wahlde proposes that the 3E editor inserted only the words “the belly” (τῆς κοιλίας) into an otherwise 2E text that in 7:38b originally read “Rivers of living water will flow from him”, and that the purpose for the insertion was to connect this prediction of Jesus with its 3E fulfillment in John 19:34-35, where “blood and water” are there witnessed coming out of Jesus’ pierced side.<sup>22</sup> The statement here in 7:38 cited as scripture is probably a paraphrased quotation from the Psalms, but the exact source is uncertain, perhaps a conflation of Psalm 104:41 (LXX) and Psalm 77:16-20 (LXX).<sup>23</sup>

A critical interpretive question here is: what is the source from which the “rivers of living water” will flow, from Jesus or from the “believer”? I am convinced that the referent of the pronoun “him” (αὐτοῦ, or ἐξ αὐτοῦ when τῆς κοιλίας is omitted) is the preceding hanging nominative “He who believes in me” at the beginning of this same verse 38. That would conform to Johannine usage of hanging nominatives elsewhere.<sup>24</sup>

The contrary interpretation, offered, for example, by Menken and Von Wahlde, that the rivers flow from Jesus, is overly complex.<sup>25</sup> Once the 3E insertion of “of the belly” (τῆς κοιλίας) is removed, the link to the blood and water from Jesus’ side in 19:34 also disappears. But that uncovers the 3E editor’s strategy: “the belly” was inserted precisely to lead the reader to connect the source of the rivers with the crucified Jesus, and away from the more immediate connection with “the one who believes”, a strategy of emphasizing the uniqueness of Jesus vis-a-vis the believer, which, according to Von Wahlde’s own analysis, the 3E editor has frequently employed elsewhere.<sup>26</sup>

In any case, that “from the belly” is a rhetorical pointer to the water gushing out, along with blood, from the lanced side of the crucified Jesus in 19:34, has been proposed

at least since Joachim Jeremias in 1926.<sup>27</sup> These two words τῆς κοιλίας, suggestively redirecting the reader to the Atonement teaching present in the context of 19:34, show a much lighter editorial touch than the weighty Atonement supplementation we saw above in 3:11-18 and 6:51-58. And, now we come to the final “spirit” text, 19:34 itself.

**7. John 19:28-37** *After this, Jesus* KNOWING THAT ALREADY ALL THINGS WERE COMPLETED, SO THAT THE SCRIPTURE BE COMPLETED, HE SAYS, "I THIRST." (29) A CONTAINER WAS SITTING FULL OF SOUR-WINE, THEREFORE A SPONGE FULL OF THE SOUR-WINE PLACED ON HYSSOP THEY BROUGHT UP TO HIS MOUTH. (30) WHEN THEREFORE HE HAD TAKEN THE SOUR WINE, JESUS *said, "It is finished", and inclining the head he gave-over the spirit.* (31) The Jews therefore, since it was preparation (day), so that the bodies not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath, for great was that day of the sabbath, they asked Pilate that THEIR LEGS BE BROKEN AND they be taken away. (32) CAME THEREFORE THE SOLDIERS AND BROKE THE LEGS OF THE FIRST AND OF THE OTHER WHO WAS CRUCIFIED WITH HIM. (33) BUT COMING TO JESUS, AS THEY SAW THAT ALREADY HE HAD DIED, THEY DID NOT BREAK HIS LEGS. (34) HOWEVER, ONE OF THE SOLDIERS PIERCED HIS SIDE WITH A LANCE AND AT ONCE OUT CAME BLOOD AND WATER. (35) AND THE ONE WHO HAS SEEN (IT) HAS WITNESSED, AND TRUE IS HIS WITNESS, AND THAT ONE KNOWS THAT HE SAYS (WHAT IS) TRUTHFUL, SO THAT YOU ALSO BELIEVE. (36) FOR THESE THINGS HAPPENED THAT THE SCRIPTURE BE FULFILLED, "HIS BONE WAS NOT BROKEN," (37) AND AGAIN ANOTHER SCRIPTURE SAYS, "THEY WILL LOOK ON HIM WHOM THEY PIERCED."

Most editions and translations, including Von Wahlde's, mark a paragraph break between vv. 28-30 and vv. 31-37.<sup>28</sup> I suggest, however, that the 3E editor of John intended 19:28-37 to be read as a single unit, because of several closely parallel elements that he has built into the beginning of the first segment and the end of the second.

First, we have a “scripture fulfilled” or “completed” (τελειωθῆ in 19:28, πληρωθῆ in 19:36) in both the first and second segments. Second, in both segments a marked person (first Jesus, then “the one who has seen it”) is said to “know” (εἰδώς in 19:28, οἶδεν in 19:35) certain described things. Third, both cases of “knowing” result in a “so that” (ὅνα) plus subjunctive verb clause: “so that the scripture be completed” in the first (19:28), and “so that you also believe” in the second (19:35). Fourth, these marked persons who “know” are the primary and secondary heroic figures of the narrative (Jesus and the Beloved Disciple). Fifth, both segments contain two quoted statements: “I thirst” and “It is finished” in the first segment (19:28, 30), and “A bone will not ...” and “they will look on ...” in the second (19:36-37). Finally, both sets of quoted statements are from a single speaker, Jesus in the first segment and “scripture” in the second.

And now we see, wrapped together between these sets of parallel elements, the exact same “three witnesses” that we saw become “one” in 1 John 5:6-8: the Spirit, the water, and the blood, only now in order of “blood and water”. The 2E text of 19:30 has “inclining the head he [Jesus] gave-over the spirit”, and then the 3E text of 19:34 adds “out at once [from Jesus’ side] came blood and water”. Thus, we have yet another striking example of a 2E “spirit” passage textually supplemented and qualified by atonement (“blood”) material in its immediate context by the final 3E editor.

That completes the survey of the first subset, containing unqualified “spirit” texts in John. I have excluded only one such text, the remark in John 3:34, “for not of measure does he give the spirit” (οὐ γὰρ ἐκ μέτρου δίδωσιν τὸ πνεῦμα). This is the only “spirit” text classified by Von Wahlde as originating from the final 3E editor.<sup>29</sup> Following the preceding analysis, I believe it is no accident that this particular text contains no direct or indirect elements of Atonement teaching anywhere in its immediate context.

### **Second Subset: “Paraclete” texts**

Now I briefly examine the second subset of Spirit texts in John, the “Paraclete” passages in the Farewell Discourse. Due to space limitations I will only offer a limited analysis of these texts as a group, rather than text by text. Here are the four selections:

- 8. John 14:15-17** IF YOU LOVE ME, KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS. (16) AND, I WILL ASK THE FATHER AND ANOTHER PARACLETE HE WILL GIVE TO YOU SO THAT HE MAY BE WITH YOU TO ETERNITY, (17) THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH WHICH THE WORLD CANNOT RECEIVE BECAUSE IT DOES NOT SEE OR KNOW IT. YOU KNOW IT, BECAUSE IT REMAINS WITH YOU AND WILL BE IN YOU.
- 9. John 14:25-26** THESE THINGS I HAVE SPOKEN TO YOU WHILE REMAINING WITH YOU. (26) BUT, THE PARACLETE, THE HOLY SPIRIT WHICH THE FATHER WILL SEND IN MY NAME, THAT-ONE WILL TEACH YOU ALL THINGS AND WILL REMIND YOU OF ALL THINGS I SAID TO YOU.
- 10. John 15:26-27** WHENEVER THE PARACLETE COMES, WHOM I WILL SEND TO YOU FROM THE FATHER, THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH, WHICH COMES OUT FROM THE FATHER, THAT-ONE WILL WITNESS ABOUT ME. (27) BUT YOU ALSO ARE WITNESSING, FOR FROM THE BEGINNING YOU ARE WITH ME.
- 11. John 16:7-15** BUT I AM SAYING THE TRUTH TO YOU, IT BENEFITS YOU THAT I GO AWAY; FOR, IF I DO NOT GO AWAY, THE PARACLETE WILL NOT COME TO YOU. BUT, IF I GO, I WILL SEND HIM TO YOU. (8) AND, WHEN THAT-ONE HAS COME HE WILL CONVICT THE WORLD ABOUT SIN AND ABOUT RIGHTEOUSNESS AND ABOUT JUDGMENT. (9) ABOUT SIN, BECAUSE THEY DO NOT BELIEVE INTO ME; (10) ABOUT RIGHTEOUSNESS, BECAUSE I GO TO THE FATHER AND YOU WILL NO LONGER SEE ME; (11) ABOUT JUDGMENT, BECAUSE THE RULER OF THIS WORLD HAS BEEN JUDGED. (12) I HAVE YET MANY THINGS TO SAY TO YOU, BUT YOU CANNOT BEAR THEM NOW. (13) BUT WHENEVER THAT-ONE COMES, THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH, HE WILL GUIDE YOU IN ALL THE TRUTH, FOR HE WILL NOT SPEAK FROM HIMSELF BUT WHATEVER HE HEARS HE WILL SPEAK, AND THE COMING THINGS HE WILL PROCLAIM TO YOU. (14) THAT-ONE WILL GLORIFY ME BECAUSE HE WILL TAKE OF MY THINGS AND PROCLAIM TO YOU. (15) ALL THINGS WHATEVER THE FATHER HAS ARE MINE; ON THIS ACCOUNT I SAID THAT OF MY THINGS HE TAKES AND WILL PROCLAIM TO YOU.

In these texts, all from Von Wahlde’s third edition in their entirety, we observe three new and distinctive features that are given prominence by the 3E writer, and a vital fourth feature that now becomes conspicuous by its absence.

First, a new title, “Paraclete” (παράκλητος = “Advocate”) is given to the Spirit throughout these four passages. Second, in these texts we no longer read of an unqualified “spirit” as in the first subset of texts, but always of a qualified “Spirit of Truth” or the “Holy Spirit”. Third, the Paraclete’s function is not to give life as wind or living water, but always and only to act as advocate and witness for Jesus to his followers and to the world. Fourth, in contrast to the prior “spirit” texts, we hear nothing of Atonement or the removal of sins throughout the entire Farewell Discourse region.

Von Wahlde’s three-edition division of the text of John helps us to understand these last two phenomena. All of these Paraclete texts are from the 3E writer himself, and represent his own view of the Spirit as Advocate and Witness for Jesus, and the editor no longer needs to supplement these texts with Atonement related insertions or framings as he did with the 2E “spirit” texts. Thus, the confluence in this third region (chapters 13-17) of a complete lack of Atonement teaching, along with the Spirit’s new role as the one reminding the disciples of Jesus’ words and revealing to them Jesus’ ongoing wishes, makes perfect sense.

I conclude that the evidence here assembled points to an intentional and antithetical attachment of Atonement elements to each of the “spirit” texts, and a corresponding separation of all Atonement elements from the Paraclete-Spirit passages. Von Wahlde’s independent classification of Atonement features as Third Edition (3E) material and “spirit” texts as from the Second Edition (2E) provides a complimentary tool for explaining this phenomenon of deliberate editorial distribution of Atonement and Spirit texts in John. I propose that the 3E editor purposely targeted the existing “spirit” texts in 2E for theological supplementation and correction, by insertions or frames of Atonement elements in and around each “spirit” text.

Moreover, the fact that only the subset of “spirit” texts were consistently targeted for Atonement supplementation, rather than some other strand, such as the “signs”, or feasts, or controversies with the Jews, suggests that these texts represented an important doctrinal weave that the 3E editor wanted to retain, but needed to modify with new teaching. A next step would now be to isolate as far as possible the distinctive teaching of this subset of “spirit” texts in John, and relate those results to the pneumatic experience and teachings evident elsewhere in the New Testament and in early Christianity.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> References to a biblical author as “he” are not intended to be gender descriptive.

<sup>2</sup> Without touching on the Johannine Comma question, I note that the three neuter nouns in 5:8 (τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ τὸ ὕδωρ καὶ τὸ αἶμα) are referenced both before and after by masculine plural forms in 5:7 and 5:8 (τρῆεις ... οἱ μαρτυροῦντες and οἱ τρεῖς).

<sup>3</sup> The 15 “spirit” verses are: John 1:32, 3:5-6, 3:8, 4:10, 4:13-14, 4:23-24, 6:63, 7:37-39, 19:30, and 20:22. The 12 Paraclete-Spirit verses are: John 14:16-17, 14:26, 15:26, 16:7-11, and 16:13-15.

<sup>4</sup> The 24 Atonement verses are: John 1:29, 1:36, 3:14, 3:16-17, 4:42, 6:51-58, 7:38 (two words only), 10:11, 10:15, 11:50-52, 12:24, 12:32, 19:34, and 20:23.

<sup>5</sup> These percentages are based on character (Greek letter) counts. By my count, the 24 Atonement texts comprise a total of 444 words containing 1920 characters, not counting spaces. The 17 verses attached to “spirit” texts have 320 words with 1363 characters. Thus, 1363 is 70.9% of 1920, and the remaining 557 characters comes out to 29.0% of 1920.

<sup>6</sup> U. C. Von Wahlde, The Gospel and Letters of John (3 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Von Wahlde, 2:47-51 and 2:67-68. My brief observations here and elsewhere in this paper on text development simply summarize Von Wahlde’s complete analysis. See also Von Wahlde, 1:57-393 for a comprehensive introduction to his classification criteria.

<sup>8</sup> John 1:29-36 exhibits a natural chiasmic structure: A=1:29 and A’=1:35-36; B=1:30 and B’=1:34; C=1:31 and C’=1:33; D=1:32 (crux). It is also the first member of a global inclusio, along with 20:19-23, analyzed below. Another speech attributed to John the Baptist in 3:29-36 likewise shows evidence of intentional artistry, displaying an anaphoric structure with 11 of its 13/14 sentences beginning with homophonic ὁ or ὁ/ὄν.

<sup>9</sup> The word “Holy” (ἅγιον) at the end of 20:22 was marked marked by Von Wahlde as 2E text; however, he has agreed with me that it should have been marked as 3E, which he confirmed by private communication to me dated Jan 12, 2012.

<sup>10</sup> My view is that the first step in the Johannine process of salvation is Jesus’ atoning death, which gives him sole ownership and control of all the sins of the world (John 1:29, 1 John 2:2). Actualizing atonement as forgiveness for any individual’s sins is the second step of the process, and that can only be granted by Jesus himself, or by the disciples whom he here authorizes to dispense forgiveness. His human emissaries may also “retain” sins, as we see Jesus himself doing when he declares of some that their “sins remain” (John 9:41) or that they will “die in their sins” (John 8:21-24).

<sup>11</sup> Von Wahlde, 2:120-125.

<sup>12</sup> Von Wahlde, 2:122-123.

<sup>13</sup> Von Wahlde, 2:139-141.

<sup>14</sup> Von Wahlde, wrongly in my opinion, avoids drawing this conclusion.

<sup>15</sup> John uses “lift(ed) up” (ὑψόω) here in 3:14, and 8:28, 12:32, and 12:34 (Von Wahlde, 1:347). The parallel expression in 3:16, the Father “gave” (δίδωμι) the son appears elsewhere in 6:32 of the “true bread” that the Father gives from heaven, which is in turn identified by 3E in 6:51 as “my flesh that I give for the life of the world”.

<sup>16</sup> My reservations are: First, Jesus speaks using first and second person plural pronouns (21-22); second, the text distinguishes what “we know” from what “you do not know”; third, there is a superfluous use of “worship”, προσκυνέω and its cognate προσκυνητής, nine times in a span of less than 100 words; and fourth, there is a suspicious doublet of worshipping the Father “in spirit and truth”. Elsewhere Von Wahlde finds such features to be indicative of 3E text, but not here. He also asserts the phrase ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ to be a hendiadys, or equivalent to “the Spirit which is the truth” (Von Wahlde, 2:176). Thus, he locks in a bond of “spirit” with “the truth” in 2E, but I question his attribution of hendiadys, based on similar cases elsewhere (ἐν ἀληθείᾳ καὶ ἀγάπῃ in 2 John 3, and ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος in John 3:5) which he does not so classify. I also question an equation of “spirit” = “truth” in 2E, which on his reckoning would be prior to the polemic, τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν ἡ ἀλήθεια, in 1 John 5:6.

<sup>17</sup> Von Wahlde, 2:190, 2:192, and 2:202

<sup>18</sup> Von Wahlde, 2:192.

<sup>19</sup> The first-person plural perfect form “we have heard” (ἀκηκόαμεν) is used only here in John, but is used three times in the opening paragraph of 1 John (1:1, 1:3, 1:5).

<sup>20</sup> 1 John 3:2, 3:14, 5:15, 5:18, 5:19, and 5:20.

<sup>21</sup> Von Wahlde, 2:329-332.

<sup>22</sup> Von Wahlde, 2:371-372, and more comprehensively in 3:299-303.

<sup>23</sup> Von Wahlde, 3:199-301; see also Maarten J. J. Menken, “The Origin of the Old Testament Quotation in John 7:38,” *NovT* 38:2 (1996) 167-175.

<sup>24</sup> For example, John 1:12, 3:26, 5:37, 6:39, and 7:18, as well as 1 John 3:17.

<sup>25</sup> Von Wahlde, 3:301-302, and especially Menken, 165-166.

<sup>26</sup> Von Wahlde, 1:423, 1:452-453, and 1:535-538.

<sup>27</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971) 303. Translation of *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (4th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1964).

<sup>28</sup> Von Wahlde, 2:815-823.

<sup>29</sup> Von Wahlde, 3:159.