

*Spirit in the Writings of John: Johannine Pneumatology in Social-scientific Perspective.* JSNTSS 253 by Tricia Gates Brown

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This book is a dissertation written under Professor R. Piper at the University of St Andrews. At the outset, the author acknowledges her debt to scholars such as Elliott and Malina for the method of social-scientific criticism and to Berger and Luckmann for the sociology of knowledge. She also notes her dependence on Philip Esler who believes that both John's Gospel and the Qumran documents are the products of introverted, sectarian communities.

Brown's primary model is that of patron-client relations, which are the subject of the first chapter. According to the author, the 'salient features of the patron-broker-client relationship at various point in John correspond to and illuminate the relationship between God, Jesus, the spirit [*sic*] and the believer' and patronage 'is the background against which it [Johannine pneumatology] functioned meaningfully for the Evangelist and his readers' (24). Chapter 2 summarises and analyses the contributions on Johannine pneumatology by C.H. Dodd, George Johnston, Felix Porsch, and Gary Burge. Chapters 3 and 4 deal with the Spirit in John, and the final chapter rounds out Brown's treatment by considering the Spirit in 1 John and by providing a comparison between the pneumatology of 1 John and John's Gospel.

While I find the work suggestive at points, I have several serious concerns.

First, Brown's presuppositions regarding authorship are inadequately defended and problematic in several respects. There is no overt discussion of authorship until page 19, where the question is dismissed as irrelevant for her study. In my view, however, it is far from irrelevant who is the author of a given document. All pieces of literature have an author, and arguably a plausible reconstruction of the identity of that author will aid in reconstructing his or her purpose for writing and other important aspects related to the meaning and significance of that document.

Second, Brown overstates the distinctive Johannine contribution to NT pneumatology when she casts John's teaching on the Spirit as at odds with the rest of the NT (cf., e.g., her statement that Luke's pneumatology 'comports ill with John's pneumatology', 4). In my view, John's pneumatology is distinctive, as well as more extensive than that of most other NT witnesses, yet it can be shown to be congruent rather than in conflict with that of the other evangelists and the rest of the NT.

Third, the author also overstates the importance of sociological reconstruction within the framework of the overall interpretive task. Not only does Brown's reconstructed life-setting threaten to choke the theological message of John's Gospel, it is far from certain that patronage and brokerage are as central to John's pneumatology as Brown contends. Moreover, by basing her interpretive conclusions squarely on her sociological reconstruction, Brown puts herself in a precarious position, for to the extent that her reconstruction is inaccurate, her theological (or pneumatological) conclusions will be flawed as well.

Fourth, Brown's dependence on a version of the 'Johannine community hypothesis' is of doubtful merit, since this hypothesis has been seriously discredited in recent years, as some of the most pronounced proponents of the hypothesis have ceased holding it (e.g., Robert Kysar) and some of the world's foremost biblical historians (such as Martin Hengel or Richard Bauckham) have come out against it.

Fifth, Brown at times inappropriately sets herself up in judgment over the inspired, canonical text and criticises it from her own modern vantage point. Perhaps

the most egregious example of this is her concluding caution against the ‘caustic tone’ of John’s Gospel and 1 John and her accompanying counsel for readers not to embrace it (267).

Sixth and finally, Brown’s work is largely devoid of any doctrinal point of reference, particularly a trinitarian one. There is hardly any discussion of the personality of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit’s relation to the other persons of the Godhead, or the deity of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is consistently put in lower case as ‘the spirit’, which seems to have the effect (doubtless unintended) of diminishing the Spirit’s stature.

Despite the stimulating discussions that make for a lively reading experience, I find this work therefore seriously flawed and inadequate as a faithful representation of Johannine pneumatology.

Andreas J. Köstenberger  
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