



Köstenberger, Andreas J. and Scott R. Swain.

Father, Son and Spirit: The Trinity and John's Gospel

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Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

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Köstenberger and Swain (hereafter K&S) note a void in New Testament studies, namely the lack of book-length treatments of trinitarian theology in the Gospel of John. They point out that there have been many studies related to “*aspects of John's doctrine of God*” but “*none that summarized and synthesizes what John has to say about God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*” (20) *Father, Son, and Spirit: The Trinity and John's Gospel* is their attempt at filling this void.

They approach the topic of the Trinity in John's Gospel by dividing the book into three sections. In section one (chap. 1) they set the Fourth Gospel in its historical context. In section two (chap. 2-6) they establish the biblical foundation for John's trinitarian theology by examining the various uses of the titles “Father, Son, and Spirit” in John's Gospel. And finally in section three (chap. 7-10) they reflect upon the data presented in section two and examine the trinitarian themes of John's Gospel, with a concluding chapter on practical implications for trinitarian theology.

Historical Context

In the first chapter K&S seek to set John's Gospel in the setting of first-century Jewish monotheism. They draw heavily from the work of Richard Bauckham in his groundbreaking *God Crucified* as well as Larry Hurtado in his magnum opus *Lord Jesus Christ*. For those not familiar with these works, K&S are arguing that first-century believers in Jesus placed him on the ‘divine side of things’ and accorded him the same worship that they accorded God without the slightest reservation that they had violated Jewish monotheism.

Also in this chapter they argue in agreement with Bauckham for the eyewitness testimony of John's Gospel, but contra Bauckham for John the son of Zebedee as the author. Constant appeal was made to a forthcoming article by Köstenberger and S. O. Stout in the *Bulletin for Biblical Research* in which they critique Bauckham's thesis that John the

Elder was the author of the fourth Gospel. I got the impression that the argument for authorship was placed in this book to garner attention to the forthcoming article, and perhaps a book that might come out somewhere down the line. As such, arguments for authorship seem misplaced and dare I say irrelevant in a book that's concerned with Johannine trinitarian theology.

Biblical Foundations

Chapters two through five amount to little more than a collation of data concerning the titles "God" (chap. 2); "Father" (chap. 3); "Son" (chap. 4), and "Spirit" (chap. 5) in John's Gospel. In chapters two, three, and five K&S follow a format in which they examine the uses of these titles in the two major parts of the Gospel, i.e., the Book of Signs (John 1-12) and the Book of Glory (John 13-21). They break from this format in chapter four and choose rather to examine the various uses of the "Son language" (i.e., *monogenes huios*; *son of man*; *son of God*) in John's Gospel. There was nothing too earth shattering about these four chapters. They felt like a semi-technical commentary on John's Gospel. Chapter six was simply a two-and-a-half page summary of the previous four chapters. I question why it was even designated a distinct chapter since it could have easily been tacked on to the end of chapter six.

Theological Reflections

In chapter seven K&S take a look at the sending-sent language of John's Gospel arguing that the Father-Son relationship provides the best paradigm for viewing this relationship, over and above second temple wisdom traditions or the concept of agency via the shaliach. It is also this paternal-filial relationship that best accounts for the equality and subordination that is so evident between the Father and the Son (and subsequently the Spirit) in John's Gospel. They also highlight Jesus' filial identity as it pertains to salvation. The Father's giving of the Son hearkens back to the Akedah of Genesis 22, but whereas Abraham proved his faith through his willingness to sacrifice his 'beloved son' the Father proves his love for the world by actually sacrificing his. It's through the 'gift' of his only begotten Son that we're given the right to become children of God (Jo. 1:12).

K&S open chapter eight by pointing out that they haven't yet proven that John's Christology is a 'trinitarian Christology' because they've focused on the Father and the Son up until this point. The present chapter focuses on the Spirit thus establishing John's 'trinitarian Christology.' They return to the format of earlier chapters by examining the Spirit's relationship to Jesus in both the Book of Signs and the Book of Glory, and show a "*complex but consistent pattern: the Spirit descends from the Father to rest and remain upon the Son so that, through the Son, he may come to rest and remain upon Jesus' disciples as well.*" (136)

Chapter nine highlights John's "mission theology" which K&S believe is "*an integral part of his presentation of Father, Son, and Spirit*" as well as being the foundation of his trinitarian theology (149). They argue that the unity among the persons of the Trinity in mission takes priority of place over any ontological presentation of the Trinity in John's

Gospel. They describe the mission as: “*the Spirit-enabled demonstration to the world that the Father sent the Son, offering the world forgiveness of sins and eternal life upon faith in the Messiah.*” (155) Space limitations prevent me from going into detail concerning their treatment of how the Church is to engage in its mission, but here are the main points that they build upon (158-63):

1. Mission is spiritual warfare.
2. Mission aims at the redemption of creation.
3. Mission proceeds in word and deed.
4. The shape of Jesus’ mission determines the shape of the church’s mission.
5. Pneumatology must not override Christology in the church’s missiology.
6. The Triune God is the Alpha and the Omega of the church’s mission.

In the final chapter K&S attempt to show John’s trinitarian theology by focusing on Jesus’ ‘high priestly prayer’ of John 17. They contend that this prayer “*plots, in seminal form, three great moments of redemptive history.*” (166) They say:

According to this scheme, redemptive history *begins* ‘before the world began’ in the intra-trinitarian plan, a plan concerning the Son’s descent from and ascent to the Father (17:1-5); continues through the apostolic mission as the Father ‘keeps’ and ‘sanctifies’ the apostles in the truth revealed to them by the Son (17:6-19); and reaches its *consummation* as those who receive the apostolic message come to participate in the eternal, glorious love of the Father for the Son (17:20-26). (166)

The chapter is rounded out with a couple of pages on the immanent and economic Trinity. K&S once again return to the Fourth Gospel’s sending language in order to show how this sending distinguishes between the three persons, and sets the stage for later dogmatic formulations of the doctrine of the Trinity. They conclude with these three points (184-85):

1. The Father is the *fons divinitatis*.
2. Jesus is personally distinct from the Father as his one-of-a-kind Son.
3. The Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father as ‘the gift’ rests upon and indwells God’s beloved Son, the one with whom God shares all things.

Conclusion

Father, Son, and Spirit is a good book. Would I read it again? Probably not, but that’s only because I didn’t find much in the book that I haven’t come across before. Would I recommend it to beginning students? Absolutely. I think this would be a great place to start learning about the Trinity. However, this book is not without its faults. I found their argument for Johannine authorship to be wholly unpersuasive and as stated above, unnecessary. There’s also the dubious interpretation of John 14:18 that: “[w]hen the Spirit comes to dwell in believers, it will be as if Jesus himself were to take up residence in them. Thus Jesus is able to the coming of the Spirit by saying, ‘I will come to you’

(14:18).” (97-98) I find it much more probable that Jesus is speaking of his post-resurrection appearance to believers, and not the coming of the Spirit to indwell them. I also found myself less than thrilled with their apologetic for the *pactum salutis* in chapter ten, but both authors are reformed so I can't be too shocked with their arguing that it is more than merely speculative. It just seemed an unnecessary addition to an otherwise focused chapter.

I also have a problem with some of the end-of-book features. There are three indices: (1) Authors, (2) Scriptures, (3) Ancient sources, but no subject index! That's unforgivable in such a work. I also have a gripe with the footnotes. While I appreciate that footnotes were used, they effectively functioned as end notes when citing authors: for example, when they cite Richard Bauckham on p. 44, n. 73 they cite him as “Bauckham 2005: 165.” This forces the reader to go to the bibliography in the back of the book and skim through it to find the specific work from 2005 that they are citing. To compound the problem, on p. 196, the bibliography omitted James D. G. Dunn's name and instead his works are listed under J. A. Du Rand's name. This caused me quite a bit of confusion as I was checking the references to Dunn and kept coming up with nothing. It took a few readings before I recognized the error. I'm sure this will be fixed in subsequent printings, but I doubt that they'll change their referencing system.