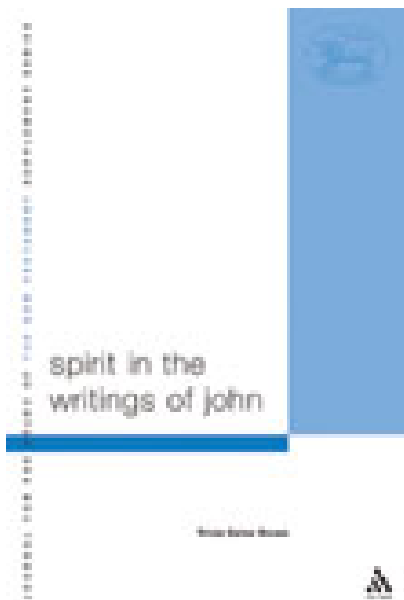


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Brown, Tricia Gates

***Spirit in the Writings of John: Johannine
Pneumatology in Social-Scientific Perspective***

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Alluding of course to Clement of Alexandria, Tricia Gates Brown proposes to study the “spirit-ual” Gospel of John as well as the letter of 1 John. She argues that her study is important since John’s Spirit passages hint at the experiences of the author and audience and that an understanding of those passages will necessarily bring us closer to the historical context of the Gospel itself. She further proposes to investigate the development in pneumatology between John and 1 John, paying particular attention to what that development might imply about the community behind those documents. Ultimately she wants to understand why the Spirit was important for this author and community and why they conceived of the Spirit in the ways in which they did. Still, Brown’s goal is not to create a detailed social history of the community (she acknowledges that our knowledge of the specific historical situation behind the documents is too limited); instead, she offers “an explanation of the pneumatology of John based on what we can know about the socio-cultural world of the Gospel,” that is, the broader cultural context of the “Circum-Mediterranean” (6).

After a rather brief defense of her use of social-scientific criticism, Brown addresses several preliminary matters. She takes a middle road between the “consensus” and the view recently espoused by Bauckham and others; thus she maintains that the author had

both a specific audience and an indefinite audience in mind as he wrote (14). She delves into both the pioneering sociolinguistic work of Michael Halliday and the sociology of Bryan Wilson (particularly as they have been fleshed out in John by Malina and Rohrbaugh on the one hand and Philip Esler on the other) to maintain that the Johannine community is a profoundly alienated introversionist sect within the Israelite religion. Finally, she details one of her working hypotheses: John and 1 John are related documents not necessarily from the same author.

Brown finds the “social-scientific model of ‘patron-client relations’, particularly the variation of patron-client relations known as ‘brokerage’, to be a fitting and useful model for the study of Johannine pneumatology” (24). That is, the features of that relationship in antiquity “correspond to and illuminate the relationship between God, Jesus, the spirit and the believer” in John (24). Brown’s first task, of course, is to define the distinctive features of that relationship. For example, they are reciprocal, mutually beneficial, asymmetrical, extend over long periods of time, and so forth. The form of patron-client relationship called brokerage is usually found in highly segmented societies where the powerful few control virtually everything and where the vast majority have nothing and no means of getting the attention of the elite. Brokers in such societies function as mediators between both groups. Success depends on the broker’s ability to represent the interests of both groups; hence, while the broker does not seek to replace the patron, to the client the broker acts as patron.

Several social factors gave rise to patron-client relationships in the ancient world. First and foremost was internal, systemic weakness in the society itself. The society simply did not have available structures to create a better balance. The elite exercised just enough control to maintain their status, and the weak had too little real power to change the dynamics of their social situation. Such societies are more interested in “plundering, rather than developing,” and such abuse is manifest at every level of the society (34). Also, these societies typically assume the inherent justice of the configuration based on cosmic or social order.

Patronage arrangements flourished in Rome particularly after the transition from republic to empire. Incredible taxation rates only heightened the importance of patrons for the urban poor. At the same time, aristocrats needed clients to build their honor rating and reputation, in turn creating a favorable impression for the emperor whose imprimatur was especially important for their ultimate success: elections were mere pretence—senators were selected by the senate with the approval of the emperor.

Because the Greeks did not have a vocabulary for patron-client relationships, Brown discusses the topic from the perspective of the incredible urban growth characteristic of

Imperial Greece and Asia Minor and the perspective of the Greek notion of “ritualized friendship.” The latter exists between individuals from different families and manifests itself in terms of an exchange of goods and services. Spatial and vertical (i.e., societal) distance typically characterizes such arrangements, but not necessarily so. That is, they are not all between unequal parties. Therefore, not all ritualized friendships are patron-client relationships. Such relationships were especially common in premonetary times, but even in a monetary system there are some things that money cannot buy. These things are instead “purchased” through ritualized friendship (e.g., bankers, lawyers, hospitality, insurance).

After a section discussing the practice of patronage among Jews in Palestine during Roman times, Brown notes the pervasive nature of the practice in modern day Middle Eastern cultures in general and Israel in particular. She concludes the section by demonstrating that the factors favoring patron-client relationships as they have been described by sociologists were all too common in Imperial Rome, Greece, Asia Minor, and Palestine.

Having laid the groundwork, Brown turns her attention to John. Irrespective of the actual author’s and audience’s location, patron-client relationships would have been a known reality for them. Taking that for granted, then, there is one dominant theme in the pneumatology of John: the Spirit, which Jesus provides to those who are his own, becomes the means of access to the Father. But the Paraclete of the Farewell Discourses provides access to Jesus also. The community’s access to God serves to legitimate their existence—they claim to know God because they have access to God’s patronage via the brokerage of Jesus and the Paraclete. (She notes and discusses at length later that *παράκλητος* was a term in use at the time for patrons and brokers.) Since Israel understood God as the ultimate patron, providing as he did the covenant, law, protection, guidance, and so forth, and since Israel had a long line of brokers through whom these blessings came (Abraham, Moses, etc.), John’s audience would naturally see God and Jesus in those dual roles: God as the patron and Jesus as the mediator, the broker who comes from above and grants access to the Father.

The dilemma for Johannine Christians was to rely on Jesus as broker even in his absence. Hence the Farewell Discourses, and the repeated emphasis there on the Paraclete, the one who grants continued access to Jesus.

Chapter 2 briefly examines in turn the approaches of C. H. Dodd, G. Johnston, F. Porsch, and G. Burge to Johannine pneumatology. These succinct summaries are quite helpful.

Brown devotes the longest section of the book to an exegesis of the Spirit passages in John outside of the Farewell Discourses. With an understanding of God as patron, she finds that the Spirit functions to associate Jesus with the realm of God and therefore to give him authority and credibility as God's broker. Jesus confers the benefit of the Spirit on those who believe in him, and those who receive the Spirit are born anew as children of God and because of that status receive his patronage. Because Jesus is the true representative of the spiritual realm, he alone has the ability to broker for others access to that realm. Finally, she argues that outside of the Farewell Discourses it is fundamentally a mistake to equate Jesus and the Spirit. The Spirit in these passages is the divine Spirit, given by God, which rests on Jesus legitimating his mission as broker.

Brown's study of the Farewell Discourses focuses on the meaning of the word παράκλητος. She begins by discussing the use of the term in pre-Johannine usage. Her wide-ranging study examines the use of the word in Job 16:2 (LXX), Demosthenes, Bion Borysthene, Heraclitus, Dionysius Halicarnassus, and Philo. Her study reveals that the term usually carries a connotation of a mediator or broker (the only exceptions are Job 16:2 and Philo *Opif.* 23). In several texts the παράκλητος stands between two parties. Because the element of the inequality is to the fore in many of the passages, the παράκλητος serves to bridge the gap between the weak and the strong. Of import also is the fact that nowhere does the term carry a forensic meaning such as "advocate." Even in texts that are explicitly forensic the meaning is more general; that is, παράκλητοι seek to persuade jurors to decide for their client before a trial even begins; they do not play a formal forensic role in the trial itself.

Because the Farewell Discourses reflect a period when the Johannine community was concerned about Jesus' apparent absence, the Discourses themselves emphasize Jesus' return to the community as well as the presence of *another* broker who can provide access to God in his absence. Despite the fact that there are many correspondences between the brokerage of Jesus and the παράκλητος, they are nevertheless not simply identical. In fact, the παράκλητος brokers the presence of Jesus in his absence. "In other words, the Paraclete makes it possible for Jesus to continue to be 'the way' to the Father" (233). Such an understanding ties the text to its historical context. If followers of Jesus believe that in his absence they cannot have access to their patron, they will not be so quick to sever their ties with the synagogue. They should sever those ties in any case, however, for if the Spirit-Paraclete is the Spirit of Truth, then the competing claims of the brokers in the synagogue are to be rejected.

Brown's final chapter investigates the role of the Spirit in 1 John. After the Gospel, a group within the community downplayed the importance of Jesus' death and elevated the role of the Spirit as broker. This group, the secessionists attacked in 1 John, made the

Spirit the ultimate broker for God. The author of 1 John, therefore, downplays the role of the Spirit and celebrates instead the Spirit's role in orthodox confession of Jesus—the true παράκλητος. Indeed, Spirit possession and proper confession are intricately linked in 1 John: only those who properly confess Jesus have the Spirit, and only those with the Spirit properly confess. Brown concludes the section noting the comparisons and contrast between the pneumatology of the Gospel and the epistle.

This study brings the ancient Mediterranean concept of patronage to life, and for that Brown is to be commended. As for the details of the exegesis, however, there is little that is really remarkable. Her methodology allowed the use of precise terms such as *broker* and *patron*, but I am not sure these clarifications really contributed to my overall understanding of the Gospel and epistle.