

The following is the introduction from my Master of Theological Studies thesis paper, submitted in April 2022, titled “‘By This We Know’: A Pneumatology of Abiding Love in 1 John and the Farewell Discourse.” This introduction is aimed to an educated but nonspecialized audience and provides an overview of the paper’s methodology and objective.

Introduction

It has long been acknowledged that the Johannine corpus gives a rich and unique testimony to the being and works of the Holy Spirit. In about 180 CE, Eusebius quotes Clement of Alexandria as calling the Gospel of John “a spiritual gospel,” recording something beyond “the external facts” of the Synoptics and written at the prompting of the Spirit.¹ 1 John, too, is rife with *pneuma* language, discussing not only the “testing of spirits” but also “the Spirit that [God] has given us.”² As Christians around the world see revived interest in the Spirit, one might imagine that scholars of John would return to reexamine this corpus’s contribution. Yet in recent years, the academic community, deadlocked in debate as to the history of these texts, seems to have made relatively little progress in close interpretation of Johannine pneumatology.³ Therefore, there appears to be an important opportunity to further address, with historical considerations present but not centered, the witness of the writer(s) we call John.

While such a limited work as this one cannot hope to offer a new systematic interpretation of Johannine pneumatology, it can propose one entry point to the topic. I will endeavor to do so by examining a few major themes present in both the Gospel and the First Epistle, which I believe can form a productive lens for analyzing their insights about the Spirit. While it is difficult not to see the theological and linguistic resemblance between John and 1 John on the whole, Jesus’ final pre-crucifixion teachings in the Gospel seem to have a particularly striking relationship to the Epistle—especially when it comes to themes of love,

¹ (Hist. Eccles. 6.14.7). Barnabas Lindars, Ruth B. Edwards, and John M. Court, eds., *The Johannine Literature* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 41.

² 1 John 3:24. All biblical quotes are drawn from NRSV unless otherwise noted.

³ Tricia Gates Brown, *Spirit in the Writings of John* (Bloomsbury Publishing: London, 2004), 1.

abiding, and the Spirit. Their pneumatological statements are resonant, but not identical. In the Epistle, especially in its third and fourth chapters, we find key terms that are scattered throughout the Farewell Discourse condensed, connected, and reappropriated. In this thesis, I will seek to map the relationships between the overlapping phrases and terms, asking how 1 John uses pneumatological material resonant with that of the Farewell Discourse, and what reading these two witnesses together might contribute to a Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, I will show that, in light of the Discourse, the Epistle has something unique and constructive to offer: an implied pneumatology of abiding love.

Before I begin this analysis, I believe it is important to state the set of perspectives that form the starting point of my investigation and the basis for my methodology. First, as the reader will have noticed by now, I will be interpreting these texts in part for their significance to a particular field of Christian theology. While scripture is more than a wellspring of theological truth,⁴ it is certainly not less than that, and I believe that the New Testament field still needs Christian scholars to read the Bible with an eye to what it tells us about God—after all, these are self-consciously confessional texts.⁵ As a Christian from the Episcopal tradition, I confess the Holy Spirit as the Third Person of the Trinity. I take as axiomatic that scripture includes revelations of the Holy Spirit, the content of which is worth examining. No writer is without preexisting ideological commitments, and these are mine.

My confessional context and the limits of this project together have contributed to my choice of methodology. It should be noted that a significant majority of scholars believe that 1 John followed and had access to at least some portions of the Gospel of John, whether or not

⁴ Daniel Castelo and Robert Wall, *The Marks of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 2.

⁵ “But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.” John 20:31.

they were written by the same individual.⁶ While I will provide a brief overview of the debate surrounding the compositional relationship between these texts in this thesis, I do not purport to contribute to it. Instead, I will offer a reading of the texts that does not absolutely depend on the historical priority of the Gospel or the theory that it was a direct resource for the Epistle. I will therefore situate this piece primarily as a canonical-theological reading, working from the assumption that biblical texts can productively be read in relationship with each other regardless of their compositional history. Treating the texts as conversation partners—even if they may have been written independently, or as one author’s conversation with themselves!—I will seek to tease out what 1 John’s use of the language also found in the Farewell Discourse might mean for Christian pneumatology.

⁶ R. Alan Culpepper, “The Relationship between the Gospel and 1 John,” in *Communities in Dispute: Current Scholarship on the Johannine Epistles*, eds. R. Alan Culpepper and Paul N. Anderson (Atlanta: SBL, 2014), 99.