

Andreas Kostenberger and Scott Swain. *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: The Trinity and John's Gospel*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008.

There are few books of theology that I get excited reading. Books on theology typically inform, some good books reform, but only a handful inspire. Kostenberger and Swain's book is in that last category, simply because it takes you on a breath-taking tour of John's gospel. Exploring the high peaks of the Trinitarian terrain, Kostenberger and Swain introduce the reader to the magnificence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit from the faith-arousing gospel of John, the disciple whom Jesus loved.

### **Origin & Method**

The origin of Kostenberger's book stems from a void in Johannine scholarship for such a thorough treatment. With the exception of Royce Gruenler's work, no full-length book has devoted itself to the Trinity in John, a book rich with triune passages. In the book, Kostenberger follows five stated aims: "to build on the fine work done by scholars like Bauckham, Hurtado and others in reconstructing John's historical and cultural milieu, especially pertaining to Second Temple Jewish monotheism," to focus on the intentions of the literary form, to read John in light of biblical theology and its placement in salvation history, to consult church history for guidance, and to read John with "awe and wonder and with prayerful dependence on 'the Spirit of truth'" (22-23).

### **Outline**

After declaring such intentions, Kostenberger and Swain, methodically trace Trinitarian attributions throughout John. In chapters 3-5, each member of the Godhead is identified in John's gospel, but first the word *theos* is considered as the generic moniker for God. Chapter 2 details an exhaustive lexical study and indicates a polyvalent use of the term, "God."

Sometimes of God in general, others of the Father, while still other instances include Jesus in the Godhead—this last idea is complicit with Richard Bauckham’s work on Jewish monotheism and Jesus as God.

Moving from the generic to the specific, chapters 3-5 analyze the language surrounding each member of the Godhead. In chapter 3, Kostenberger demonstrates convincingly how Father-Son language dominates. Over one-hundred times, God is addressed as father (120 of 136 uses), and the theme consistent throughout is that God is the one who sends, and Jesus the son is the one who gladly submits. This metaphorical language picks up cultural notions of the day, and applies them to the trinity. In this way, the relationship in the Godhead toward the father is that of “patricentrism,” where everything revolves around the Father (63).

In chapter 4, Kostenberger turns his attention to the Son, where *huios* refers 41 times to Jesus (75). Listing the ways this language is used reveals four primary descriptions: “the one and only son,” “the Son of God,” the Son of man” and simply “the Son.” Then in chapter 5, Kostenberger addresses the Spirit. Whereas chapters 1-12 focus on the Father and the Son, chapters 13-21 reveal a greater emphasis on the coming *paraclete* (93, cf. 155). God’s Spirit, who has many referents (i.e. “Holy Spirit,” “Spirit of Truth,” “helping presence”), plays an important role in the life of believers—he gives life and regenerates (3:3-8); he inspires worship (4:24);<sup>i</sup> he comforts (14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7), he leads into truth (14:17; 15:26; 16:13), and he convicts (16:8), among other things (96-97). The chapter closes with commentary on John 20:22, an enigmatic passage that has Jesus breathing on the disciples telling them “to receive the Spirit.” Drawing on the biblical theological shape of the book, Kostenberger sees this “breathing” as related to new creation. Just as John begins with creation in John 1:1-3; he concludes with a scene adumbrating the new creation (101-02).

### Some Doctrinal Distinctives

Kostenberger moves from collecting data in the first section to assembling doctrine in the second section. Building on Richard Bauckham's convincing argument for Jesus assimilating identification with YHWH,<sup>ii</sup> Kostenberger shows the patrifamilial relationship between Father and Son. He makes the case that Christian salvation is familial, and that purpose of the cross is to create a Patricentric family, where God the Father is at the center and all those whom Jesus has saved are his children (cf. 1:12-13). Thus, while salvation is earned through the legal payment of death (i.e. penal substitution), the result is a community of love (cf. John 17).

Extending on this familial theme, Kostenberger shows how John depicts the role of the Spirit in this Trinitarian work. Particularly, the Spirit who is God, comes to give life, reveals truth and things to come, initiates new creation, and anticipates God's final dwelling with those who are redeemed brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ (135). Confirming the historic *filioque* clause, Kostenberger writes, "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). More concretely, this dwelling presence is picked up in the temple imagery used throughout the book. Where Jesus is the true temple, and the Spirit fully dwells in him; so too the Spirit will indwell God's people, who are now also a part of that temple.

Then in chapter 9, Kostenberger addresses the role of Father, who stands before and behind the Spirit and the Son. In ordering his chapters—Son, Spirit, Father—he is not trying to reorder the Godhead. Rather, Kostenberger is simply unveiling the logic of God sending the son first, then Father and Son sending the Spirit, and then finally Kostenberger turns to consider the first sender. The chapter presents God the Father as the glorious instigator of missions. How someone could read the chapter and not be moved for the nations is a mystery, for the chapter

shows how the activity of God in the world is a centrifugal force moving to ends of the earth.

Whereas the nature of the Trinity is missional, the scope is universal (156). At the end,

Kostenberger gives 5 applications worth mentioning:

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.
6. Triune God is the Alpha and Omega of the church's mission.

Finally, Kostenberger concludes the book with a brief commentary on John 17 and a biblical-theological meditation on the *pactum salutis*, God's inner-Trinitarian, eternal plan of salvation. Advocating for this reality, he writes that the *pactum salutis* "teaches us that the story which unfolds on the stage of history is the story of an intra-trinitarian fellowship of salvation, a fellowship that reaches back 'before the world began'" (170). With this in mind, Kostenberger brings his book to a close, uniting our understanding of God's essence with his revelatory and redemptive work in the world. The final note Kostenberger plays is that students of God's word should know this Triune God and worship him ardently, in all of his Trinitarian majesty.

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<sup>i</sup> Though it should be noted that while in one place Kostenberger associates the Holy Spirit with worship in John 4:23-24 (96); in another more expansive section on the verse he suggests spirit in this verse refers to the person worshiping and not the Holy Spirit (94). The two assertions appear to contradict one another.

<sup>ii</sup> See Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).