

Rodolfo Galvan Estrada III, *A Pneumatology of Race in the Gospel of John: An Ethnocritical Study* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2019). x + 351 pp. \$67.00 hardcover; \$42.00 paperback.

What do ethnicity, race, and all too frequently tense, oppressive, and even violent interethnic relations have to do with Johannine pneumatology? A great deal, claims Rodolfo Galvan Estrada III, adjunct assistant professor of the New Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary. In 2018, Estrada completed his PhD dissertation, entitled “Ethnicity and the Spirit in John 1–7,” at Regent University School of Divinity. This monograph is a revision and extension of that dissertation, expanding the scope to provide an ethnocritical treatment of the pneumatology of the entire Gospel of John.

As to organization of the volume, Estrada arranges the material in three parts. Part 1, “Ethnicity and the Spirit in Johannine Christianity,” consists of three chapters. Chapter 1 provides a brief survey of pertinent issues like previous scholarship (strangely not even mentioning Cornelis Bennema), an appropriate hermeneutical context for Johannine pneumatology, elucidation of terminology for ethnicity and race, and an introduction to Estrada’s ethnocritical methodology (a narrowly focused interpretive approach that reads texts through the lens of the “ethnic context of the Greco-Roman age,” including “ethnic and racial challenges, negotiations, relationships, context, and ideologies” (21). Next, chapter 2 examines standard background questions like author, implied readers, and location and date, but it does so with a strong focus on ethnicity to determine the ethnic context of John’s Gospel. Finally, chapter 3 offers an informative treatment of ethnic ideologies as expressed in ancient Greco-Roman literature. Part 2, “Ethnicity and the Spirit in Jesus’ Public Ministry,” begins with a brief chapter detailing how πνεῦμα was conceptualized in the ancient world; it then precedes to proffer ethnocritical readings of John 1:32–33; 3:1–10; 4:23–24; 6:62–63; 7:37–39 (chaps. 4–9). Part 3, “Ethnicity and the Spirit-Παράκλητος in the Far[e]well Discourse and Conclusion of the Gospel,” begins with a short chapter on the terms παράκλητος and “Spirit of truth”; it then presents ethnocritical interpretations of John 14:16–17, 26 (chap. 11); 15:26–27; 16:7–15 (chap. 12); and 20:19–23 (chap. 13). Chapter 14, “Yielding to the Holy Spirit,” then draws the volume to a close. The book throughout could have benefitted from more careful editorial attention (e.g., the reverse spelling of פּוּר on 101; errors in the Gr. text throughout; the misspelled “Far[e]well” on viii and 211; and some errors in the writing itself).

Estrada accepts the Johannine community hypothesis and the concomitant two-level hermeneutic (popularized especially by J. Louis

Martyn and Raymond Brown), whereby the community's own experiences are blended with the historical details of Jesus's ministry (41–42, 51, 260–61); and he argues on this basis that one can discern “the ethnic identity and concerns of the readers” within the retelling of “the narrative story of Jesus” (42; cf. the interpretations proposed throughout the volume). From this hermeneutical vantage point, Estrada further proposes that “the theology of the Spirit was a contextual portrait for a community that was undergoing ethnic challenges” (14). Estrada argues that “ethnic hostilities were a significant concern for the community which prompt[ed] a new development and understanding of the Spirit” (22); “the Johannine writer articulated a pneumatology in response to ethnic conflicts and prejudicial views that were experienced and perpetuated by members of the community” (22; cf. 94). Thus, according to Estrada, “The gospel has an ethnic agenda that is intrinsically linked to its articulation and description of the Spirit” (288). Interestingly, interpreters' ability “to recognize this agenda” remains impossible “without an ethnocritical approach which draws our attention to how elements of ethnic difference, rationalization, and prejudice of the Greco-Roman world ought to shape and influence our reading of the Spirit discourses in the Fourth Gospel” (288). This perhaps explains why other scholars working from the two-level hermeneutical perspective have previously failed to discern such readings of Johannine pneumatology. Moreover, given the foundational nature of Martyn's “two-level drama” for Estrada's thesis, there is a disappointing lack of robust engagement with dissenting voices and hard-hitting critiques of this approach—one thinks of contributions like Richard Bauckham, “The Audience of the Gospel of John” (chap. 5 in *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007]) and Edward Klink III, *Sheep of the Fold: The Audience and Origin of the Gospel of John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), not to mention critiques from scholars like Martin Hengel and Andreas Köstenberger or Robert Kysar's notable renunciation of the theory that he once espoused.

Estrada provides a valuable summary of various Greco-Roman perspectives on ethnicity and elucidates some relational, political, and religious implications of such in the ancient world (esp. in chap. 3, “Study of the Greco-Roman Ethnic Ideologies,” but also in more topically focused ways throughout the various chapters). In so doing, the author interacts with both the primary literature and modern scholarship, providing a discussion that will prove beneficial for NT scholars by broadening their awareness of important aspects of potentially relevant background material for various NT passages. Certainly, acknowledging the value of considering such possible connections within the Gospel of John would not constitute a novel approach and ought to be encouraged.

Yet Estrada makes the bold attempt to read *the entirety* of Johannine pneumatology through ethnic lenses, and one gets the sense that he has to work a little too hard to do so.

Many of Estrada's readings appear less than obvious, at least to my mind. For example, commenting on the contextual meaning of κόσμος within the Farewell Discourse, he asserts, "One becomes the 'world' with the embrace of violence and power toward minority communities" (257). Is this really what the Johannine author wishes to communicate or has his text simply been hijacked by the "ethnic imagination" of his interpreter? (cf. 296 for the term *ethnic imagination*). In fact, Estrada frequently does not appear to arrive at his conclusions by meticulous exegetical analysis of the details and flow of the text as much as he does through finding possible ethnocritical points of entry—such as the mention of the Greeks (John 7:35), the orphan (14:18), or the fear of the "Jews" (20:19)—and leveraging these in support of an ethnic-racial reading. Consequently, in regard to 7:37–39, one discovers that "ethnic suspicion . . . sets the scene" for the invitation to receive the Spirit (295), that this invitation "includes the Jews and Greeks who live in ethnically hostile parched lands of racial suspicion," and that it anticipates "the coming nourishment of the Spirit that would bring an end to the fear and trepidation of ethnic association and crossing of boundaries" (209). The basis for this reading is "the accusation that Jesus desires to flee to the Greeks," his "inability to clarify this misunderstanding," and the supposed implications of this for readers in a diaspora context (210). As it pertains to our second example (14:18), Estrada argues that "the use of child and orphan imagery that permeates the Farewell Discourse and gospel" serves to "reimagin[e] one's ethnic kin" (228). Finally, the interpretation produced by the utilization of the "fear of the Jews"—Estrada's "primary context" for the giving of the Spirit (279; cf. 272, 275)—as an interpretive lens for 20:19–23 is this: "[T]he fear of the other is overcome by the Holy Spirit. The Fourth Gospel presents its own Pentecost tradition by including the role of the Spirit in helping the disciples overcome their fear of the 'Jews', which in the community's context also includes the ethnically other. The Spirit infuses the disciples with the divine life-giving power to proclaim the message of Jesus' identity, reach those who participate or condone the synagogue excommunication, or who enact violence against the innocent" (287).

These proposed ethnocritical readings exhibit a tendency to read ethnic ideas into the text where they are less than obvious and to downplay, if not deny, more obvious contextual emphases. In fact, Estrada not only concedes that one could not discern the ethnic agenda of Johannine pneumatology if not for an ethnocritical approach (288), but he also speaks of subjectively *generating* meaning: "all meaning

generated from the biblical text is also influenced and interpreted through a subjectivity that is racial and cultural, as well as ideological and theological” (289). For many within a postmodern interpretive milieu, this will doubtless appear unproblematic. But for those who regard it as incumbent upon biblical interpreters to discover (as opposed to create or generate) the meaning anchored in the author’s communicative intent, this does prove to be a hindrance in accepting these readings.

In conclusion, Estrada’s challenge to face head-on ugly realities connected to ethnicity is certainly timely, but his ethnically reconfigured and reimagined reading of Johannine pneumatology fails to provide a biblically grounded way forward. Moreover, while future work in Johannine pneumatology will need to engage this monograph, this reviewer found that the methodology employed reads everything as reflecting and responding to ethnic issues and thus tends to misconstrue rather than elucidate the text.

Adrian P. Rosen
Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, Baguio, Philippines