

Rekonstruktion und Entfaltung: Exegetische Untersuchungen zu Joh 15 and 16, by Konrad Haldimann. Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche 104. Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000. Pp. ix + 444. N. p.

The method used in this work combines redaction criticism with an analytical philosophy of language. The title “Reconstruction and Development” indicates that John 15 and 16 (the focus of this present volume) are considered to belong to a later phase in the development of John’s Gospel. Haldimann believes that these two chapters take up theological issues that were important to the fourth evangelist yet had to be newly configured and integrated into a larger whole. The starting point for such a procedure, according to the author, was the first farewell discourse in 13:31–14:31.

There are ten chapters: (1) The text of John 15 and 16 as text; (2) A philosophy-of-language approach; (3) The structure of the farewell discourse of John 15 and 16; (4)–(9) Interpretations of John 15:1–11; 15:12–17; 15:18–16:4a; 16:4b–15; 16:4b–15; 16:16–24; and 16:25–33; and (10) John 15 and 16 as second farewell discourse. There are fourteen pages of bibliography but no indices. Following Becker, Haldimann believes that 13:31–14:31—but not 15–17—were part of the original Gospel. In interaction with Culpepper, the author develops his own methodology. The goal is both to appreciate the coherence of the final text of John and to trace the underlying diachronic development.

Haldimann holds that redaction criticism ought to expect three characteristics: (1) a tendency toward integration (striving for greater coherence); (2) a certain amount of linearity (John 15–16 taking its point of departure in 13:31–14:31); and (3) an element of self-reference (John 15–16 referring back to 13:31–14:31). After discussing speech act theory and other textual models, Haldimann turns to an exploration of the structure of John 15–16. Contra Schnackenburg and Painter, who divide these chapters into two independent discourses, 15:1–16:4a and 16:4b–33, and others who discern three units, with 15:1–17 constituting a separate discourse, Haldimann (following Brown and Lindars) concludes that John 15–16 form a unified section.

In support of such a thesis, Haldimann finds clear thematic links between 15:1–17 and 15:18–16:4a, such as the choosing and calling of the disciples in 15:16 and 19 or the complementary nature of mutual love (15:1–17) and the world’s hatred (15:18–16:4a). The Paraclete is featured in both 15:18–16:4a and 16:8–11. John 15–16—in parallel fashion with 14:1–31—further develop themes first introduced in 13:31–38. The concluding section 16:29–33 corresponds to the conclusion of the first farewell discourse in 14:27–31 and at the same time forms an inclusion with 13:36–38. The unit of 16:16–33 further narrows and concludes 15:1–16:15. Theories that view John 13–17 as an overarching unity—possibly in three phases, John 13–14, 15–16, and 17 (Simoens, Brodie)—are dismissed as too simplistic.

Haldimann agrees that 14:31/15:1 and 16:33/17:1 constitute major breaks. Yet he considers traditional interpretations as inadequate that postulate Jesus’ leaving of the Upper Room at 14:31 and his arriving at the other side of the Kidron in 18:1. He contends that John 15–17 are meant as an excursus that suspends the course of events, which moves from 14:31 directly to 18:1. Haldimann’s own solution: Jesus’ comment, “Come now; let us leave,” in 14:31 is directed solely to the disciples—but not to Jesus himself, who continues to speak, as it were, to no audience in particular. The only audience of John 15–17, according to Haldimann, are the implied readers, with John 15–17 serving as a commentary on John 13–14. In 18:1, Jesus fetches his followers who had been waiting for him outside, as it were, and takes them

from the Upper Room to the garden on the other side of the Kidron. The break between 16:33 and 17:1 indicates a change of audiences, from the disciples to God the Father. Further transitions—though not major breaks—are discerned between 15:17 and 18; 16:4a and 4b; and 16:15 and 16.

The author proposes the following structure for John 15–16: 15:1–11; 15:12–17; 15:18–16:4a; 16:4b–15; 16:16–24; 16:25–33. He conceives of 15:1–11 as grounded in 13:31–14:31. John 15:12–17 takes its point of departure from 13:34–35; 15:16–16:4a further develops 15:12–17; 16:4b–15 harks back to 15:18–16:4a. Finally, 16:16–24 builds on 16:4b–15, and 16:25–33 draws the implications of 16:16–24. Theologically, Haldimann views John 15–16 as reflecting three important dimensions of Jesus’ incarnation: (1) the conflict between the Christian community and the world; (2) the love commandment; and (3) creation (Jesus as “the bread of life”).

Overall, the presentation is cumbersome and has all the trappings of an original dissertation. Introductions are frequently lengthy and dry. Overlap between chapters lends the work a certain repetitiveness that could have been remedied by substantial editing. There are more serious problems with Haldimann’s work, however. Perhaps the most significant weakness is his reductionistic focus on John’s text as text at the exclusion of historical factors. Yet text originates in a particular historical, cultural, and social location and serves as a vehicle of communication between a sender (the author) and recipients (the readers) in a real life context. Thus a text’s literary nature must not be played off against its historical embeddedness.

In my judgment, Haldimann does not significantly advance the discussion beyond previous research. The presence of transitional statements such as 14:31/15:1 or 16:33/17:1 is clear enough, but it is less obvious how these alleged “seams” enable the redaction critic to assign the various units of John 13–17 to different redactional stages and layers. Why could not the original author of 13–14 himself have expanded these chapters in 15–16 (viz. the cyclical nature of 1 John)? It is unclear on what basis Haldimann rejects this possibility. To quote Pierson Parker’s famous dictum, “It looks as though, if the author of the Fourth Gospel used documentary sources, he wrote them all himself.”

The issue of the literary unity of the farewell discourse is an interesting and important one. Clearly, Haldimann’s work will need to be considered by anyone working on this subject. Yet his solution is neither original nor a necessary improvement over more conservative treatments that consider, not merely the literary, but also the historical dimension of the Johannine text.

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