

RBL 04/2005

Kellum, L. Scott

The Unity of the Farewell Discourse: The Literary Integrity of John 13.31–16.33

Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 256

London: T&T Clark, 2004.

Pp. xv+ 280. Hardcover. \$125.00. ISBN 0567080765.

Joseph Matos

Dallas Baptist University

Dallas, TX 75211

L. Scott Kellum's purpose in *The Unity of the Farewell Discourse*, a revision of his 2002 dissertation, is to challenge the current "axiom" of scholarship that John 13:31–16:33 is an amalgamation of different sources conjoined at different times to address the different situations as they arose in the Johannine community. To that end he employs a method he has dubbed "eclectic" (à la Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews*). Kellum's work represents another application of text-linguistics, which has been developing and increasingly employed in recent decades. He presents his work in four chapters with an introduction and conclusion.

The introduction sets the scope of the project. As mentioned, the Farewell Discourse is generally understood as a composite work. The major argument in support of this assertion (though not the only one) is Jesus' statement at the end of chapter 14, "Arise, let us go from this place." Kellum has creatively dubbed this the *Magnus Reus*, meaning the "great offender," because of the challenge it poses to the unity of the Farewell Discourse.

Chapter 1 is titled "The Movement from 'Discourse' to 'Discourses.'" In a lengthy discussion (69 pages long), a seemingly necessary part of any dissertation, Kellum traces the history of interpretation of the Farewell Discourse from ancient times to the present in four stages. These stages are: (1) the assumption of unity; (2) the loss of unity (post-Reformation and Enlightenment); and (3) the Göttingen revolution (beginning with Wellhausen and Schwartz); and (4) a splintered consensus. In this final stage, the 1960s to the present, scholarship may have arrived at a general agreement that John 15–16 (17) represent a later work; however, there is no agreement as to the person(s) responsible for its composition and adjoining it to the "original" discourse of 13:31–14:31. Kellum's survey serves to underscore for the reader the fact that theories of disunity and

rearrangement are only relatively recent phenomena. In light of this, a major question that begs to be asked is how 14:31 could remain if the final form of the “discourses” represents an edited text. Surely the “editor(s)” would have encountered this and sought to deal with it appropriately. Account, therefore, must be given for the fact that it remained in the text.

Kellum approaches this question primarily on the grounds of internal criteria. His investigation “consists of three planks” (4). These include stylistic, structural, and procedural approaches to the text. Chapters 2–4 set forth these approaches.

Chapter 2, “Unity of Style,” as its name implies, attempts to demonstrate that a consistency in style is maintained throughout the discourse. Kellum summarizes and critiques the Cusum Technique (Morton and Macgregor) and a Univariate Linear Model (Felton and Thatcher) of stylometrics, which resulted in negative assessments in the matter of unity. For his part, Kellum defines style as “an author’s unique mode of expression, or his idiolect” (91). To assess the style of the discourse he opts for a four-pronged methodology: style markers (Ruckstuhl and Dschulnigg); the use of intersentence conjunctions in the Fourth Gospel (Poythress, Levonsohn, and Buth); genre effect on the distribution of tenses (in this instance, the Farewell Discourse is identified as an eschatological discourse); and tense attraction of verbs (observing that the author prefers certain tenses for specific verbs). Together this methodology takes inspiration from a method used by the U.S. Department of Justice known as “forensic linguistics.” The Farewell Discourse first demonstrates a style that agrees with the Fourth Gospel in general, but also a unity of style within the discourse itself. One of the corollaries of this unity, Kellum notes, is that the text is the work of one hand/mind. It would be virtually impossible for an editor or forger to imitate the style of another, given all the factors of style involved. Unity of style strikes a blow to the differing compositional theories. But Kellum admits this one approach is not sufficient alone.

Chapter 3, “Structural Unity,” investigates the movement of the Farewell Discourse using semantic structural analysis. By this methodology one can measure the unity, prominence, and coherence of a text (the matters of text-linguistics), the results of which aid in answering the question of unity at large. Further, if the unity of the text can be demonstrated on the basis of the structural analysis, this only corroborates the findings of the stylistic analysis: the Farewell Discourse is a single work, not a collection of discourses. Kellum presents five basic questions that must be answered using the procedure to determine unity or disunity. (1) Does the text make sense as it presently stands? (2) Do the independent constituents form a coherent whole within the isolated strata? (3) Does the text as it stands have a coherent system of peak? (4) Does an isolated text produce an unlikely system of peak? (5) Does the text display a tight coherence

throughout the discourse? With only question 4 answered in the negative as a result of the analysis (to be expected, if the text displays unity), the methodology demonstrates the overall unity of the Farewell Discourse. Lack of peak in the “first discourse” indicates that it is incomplete apart from the rest. Further, lexical connections evidenced throughout (cohesion) support unity over disunity. This chapter represents the author’s best line of argumentation because the methodology he employs provides the most objective and measurable results. Of course, that it supports the findings of chapter 2 further strengthens the case for unity. Yet, Kellum well recognizes that one stumbling block remains.

Chapter 4, “Again: The *Magnus Reus*,” brings the investigation to the final and “mother of all” obstacles to viewing the Farewell Discourse as a unity. The two-pronged stylistic and structural analyses in the previous two chapters strongly support the notion that the discourse is a unity. However, at the end of the day, such analysis still fails to explain the seemingly intrusive comment: “Arise, let us go from this place.” The fact is that the discourse continues on for another two chapters (actually three when one considers the prayer of John 17). The concern should not be whether the discourse runs more smoothly without this command. Of that there is no doubt. The issue is rather, What is the function of this text in light of its presence when everything else points to unity? This chapter describes the procedural approach to the question of unity. Kellum summarizes and challenges three “assumptions” held concerning 14:31, which are: (1) an aporia must indicate a literary seam; (2) the *Magnus Reus* fits better immediately before 18:1; and (3) the *Magnus Reus* is the prototypical aporia. In the end, Kellum supports the traditional view that some form of movement is at least implied by Jesus’ words, even if the author does not narrate such. A survey of the Fourth Gospel reveals that similar phenomena occur elsewhere. Kellum surmises that in a number of instances the author of the Fourth Gospel records commands to action but does not narrate them so as not to lose focus of the theological movement of the story. As a result, he concludes that John 14:31 is not an aporia at all. When Jesus made this comment, he and the disciples either stood up to leave, but remained a while longer in the upper room, or left and headed to the garden and passed by the temple, which served as the backdrop of the vine analogy given in John 15. The function of the statement, then, is to cause the reader to slow down and pay closer attention to what follows. Kellum asserts that while the *Magnus Reus* appears intrusive by modern standards, the use of obscurity, particularly in religious texts (Thielman, “The Style of the Fourth Gospel”), naturally fits works of the time.

It will behoove authors of monographs and commentaries on the Fourth Gospel and journal articles dedicated to the study of Farewell Discourse (or its parts) to consult this work in the future. Even if Kellum’s procedural approach to the problem of 14:31 will not completely convince (the brevity of the chapter was surprising), his challenges to

assumptions made about aporias and the *Magnus Reus* must be considered. He has offered some support for the oft-rejected thought that Jesus and the disciples actually did go in motion in response to the command. Scholars, however, must take heed to assess his stylistic and structural analyses of the text. Kellum tabulates and charts his arguments. And while his method is highly eclectic, Kellum demonstrates the benefits of text-linguistics. Finally, Kellum's summary of the implications of his study is correct. Eventually, the methodology he employs should be tested by applying it to the Fourth Gospel, the Johannine Epistles, and even the Revelation. Also, if the Farewell Discourse is a unity, then exegesis is affected. Since much of the source theories are wed to reconstructions and developments of a Johannine community, a unified Farewell Discourse affects those reconstructions even if it does not discount the notion of a community outright. *The Unity of the Farewell Discourse* should evoke response.