

*Revelation Taught: The Paraclete in the Gospel of John*, by Eskil Franck. ConBNT 14. Lund: Gleerup, 1985. Pp. 168. N.P. (paper).

This work was successfully submitted as a doctoral dissertation to the Faculty of Theology at Uppsala. Franck begins his study by adopting two controlling positions:

first, he argues that, whatever the antecedent sources to John 14–16, the text can be usefully interpreted as it stands, since the Paraclete sayings “are so well assimilated in their context and are marked by such a stylistic and linguistic unity that it is reasonable to work with them in their present form”; and second, that each of the various *religionsgeschichtliche* backgrounds proposed for the Paraclete is demonstrably reductionistic. Franck’s thesis is that there must be a “multidimensional” model drawn from a variety of backgrounds, and deduced not by focusing on the word *παράκλητος* but by studying the function of the Paraclete within the context of the Gospel of John. Accordingly, he examines in turn the forensic dimensions of the Paraclete’s role, those bound up with the theme of “farewell-discourse,” and those bound up with teaching (“the didactic dimension”). The fairly brief exegesis of the Paraclete passages in John 14–16 is undertaken with this multidimensional model in view; and Franck concludes that his exegesis validates the model he has proposed. The three dimensions are not found in every Paraclete passage, he admits, but all three recur in the Paraclete passages taken as a whole. The “farewell-discourse” dimension is least visible, apparently “due to the fact that it indicates a *situation* rather than a function.” The forensic dimension is “more noticeable” but never dominant: it serves as “the background against which the descriptions of the other functions are pictured.” But this background must remain background, so that it does not usurp the central role, which is occupied by the didactic function.

In the second half of the book, Franck builds on his thesis by postulating a “triadic” structure in the didactic authority of the Gospel of John, i.e., a certain interrelation among Jesus, the Paraclete, and the Beloved Disciple. The absent Jesus is represented by the Paraclete, who, in turn, is embodied in the Beloved Disciple and legitimates him. Thus the Fourth Gospel itself is the fruit of the initial work of the Paraclete. When Franck asks what background might explain this “didactic activity” of the Paraclete, he focuses upon the “midrashic attitude” of scriptural exposition in the synagogue service, and suggests that the teaching activity of the Methurgeman serves as the concrete background for the presentation of the personal, didactic role of the Paraclete in John.

The thesis that occupies Franck’s attention in the first half of the book is plausible enough: reductionistic approaches to questions of background rarely enjoy long runs in scholarly consensus, and a more synthetic approach obviously has its attractions. Some of the categories he introduces appear a trifle forced: it is not entirely obvious what features in the three “dimensions” that Franck discusses enable him to decide that one is “background” and another is “central,” for instance. Moreover, the force of the argument is severely reduced by his almost total reliance on secondary sources. Franck advocates or rejects positions by introducing still more positions; scholars refute scholars. As a result the book is a useful compendium of recent treatments of the Paraclete, a thoughtful introduction to the literature, but it does not reflect a thoughtful and creative weighing of the primary sources.

The second part of the book, culminating in the proposal that the Methurgeman was the concrete model the evangelist adopted for his structuring of the didactic role of the Paraclete, is more problematic. The line of connection seems to be the “midrashic attitude” adopted both in the targumic exposition of Scripture in the synagogue, and in the Gospel of John. But “midrashic attitude” is an immensely slippery category that is here being applied to two activities that display as many

discontinuities as continuities. If the category is meant to conjure up the creative exposition of earlier tradition, it is too broad: one could as well choose an OT prophet or a NT apostle as the Methurgeman. If it is meant to conjure up something narrower, such as a certain kind of hermeneutical approach to antecedent tradition allegedly shared by John and the synagogue service, that “something” is not specified, and probably could not be specified without noting the discontinuities. What is remarkable is that after eschewing *religionsgeschichtliche* reductionism in favor of a multidimensional model for the Paraclete, Franck adopts some reductionism of his own when he analyzes the didactic component of that model.

The work is marred by awkward English style that makes for difficult reading, and by an astonishing number of misspellings and misprints.

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