A STORY AND A COMMUNITY: READING THE FIRST FAREWELL DISCOURSE (JOHN 13:31-14:31) FROM NARRATOLOGICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT
Any effort to make a new contribution to such a well-known subject as the Johannine Farewell Discourses has really become an exegetical challenge. Although it has been thoroughly investigated from different viewpoints (cf Painter 1981; Segovia 1985; Schnelle 1989; Du Rand 1990) the full exegetical consequences of a holistic approach (cf Martin 1987) are still to be spelled out. The aim of this contribution is to work in that direction, focussing on some narratological as well as sociological aspects concerning the First Farewell Discourse, John 13:31-14:31, and on the relationship between text and context.

1 SOME POINTS OF DEPARTURE

1.1 The First Farewell Discourse
From a historical viewpoint John 13:31-14:31 is taken as the First Farewell Discourse. The other two discourses, 15:1-16:4a and 16:4b-33, are versions of the first, reflecting definite situations in the development of the history of the Johannine community (cf Painter 1981:526). From a syntactical perspective, the beginning of the First Farewell Discourse is demarcated by the remark that Judas has left (13:31) and ends with the command in 14:31: ἔγειρε·σθέ, ἄγωμεν ἐν τῇ θεόν, which signifies the end of the Discourse. This should probably be followed by 18:1: ταῦτα εἰπὼν ἦσαν ξηλόν σὺν τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ...

1.2 Division according to syntax and content
According to syntax and content the First Farewell Discourse can be arranged in many ways.1 Beutler (1984:13-15) divides chapter 14 as follows: 14:1-14; 14:15-24 and 14:25-31, linking up his divisions thematically because of the possible influence of the Psalms (verse 1-14); the covenant theology (verses 15-24)

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and the post-exilic prophets (verses 25-31). Segovia’s division is as follows: 13:31-38; 14:1-3; 14:4-14; 14:15-27; 14:28-31 (1985:478). The centrality of the themes of the departure and return of Jesus is convincingly argued by Becker (1970:223-228) as well as Segovia, although from different viewpoints. The importance of this ‘Leitmotiv’ convinces me that the discourse should be divided between verses 14 and 15. Syntactically, the reference to Jesus’ departure is repeated in verses 2 and 12 to form an inclusio. The emphasis on belief in verses 1 and 12 confirms this.

Therefore the First Farewell Discourse can be divided as follows (cf Du Rand 1981:189):

1 13:31-38 Jesus’ departure
2 14:1-14 Jesus’ return at the Parousia
3 14:15-26 Jesus’ return in the mean time
4 14:27-31 Resumé: Meaning of Jesus’ departure and return

The focus in section 1, 13:31-38, falls on departure in the phrase: ὁ δὲ ὁ διὸν ἐγὼ ἐπάγω ὑμεῖς οὐ δύνασθε ἐλθεῖν... In section 2, 14:1-14, it falls on the expression in verse 3: πάλιν ἔρχομαι καὶ παραλίμπομαι ὑμᾶς πρὸς ἐμαυτόν..., emphasising the return of Jesus at the Parousia. In section 3, 14:15-26, the Leitmotiv once again is the return of Jesus, but during the mean time, focusing on verse 18: οὐκ ἄφησον ὑμᾶς ὁρθανοὺς ἔρχομαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς. Section 4, 14:27-31, binds the First Farewell Discourse together by once again emphasising the departure and return: ὑπάγω καὶ ἔρχομαι ... (verse 28).

It is noteworthy that two other farewell discourses in John, 7:32-36 and 8:21-24, directed at the Jews of Jerusalem, contain the same basic elements of departure, being sought, of cannot being followed and misunderstanding (cf Segovia, 1985:476).

1.3 The co-text
The preceding co-text of the First Farewell Discourse can be understood within the framework of the function of discipleship within an eschatological context. Jesus’ time and ‘hour’, the moment of his death and resurrection has come (cf 12:23). He turns to his disciples after a public ministry. The washing of the feet of the disciples (13:1-17) focuses all the energy in the narrative on discipleship as a proper introduction to the First Farewell Discourse: Therefore 13:31-38 functions as a hinge, linking up with 13:1-30 and introducing the Discourse itself. Thus, from the viewpoint of the contrasts regarding the implementation of discipleship, the co-text can be read as follows (cf Du Rand, 1990:371):
1.4 Text and context
The First Farewell Discourse also functions against a definite extratextual background. It was first read in a specific socio-historical context. This context should be taken into consideration in as far as it is manifested in the text (cf Du Rand 1990:381). The First Farewell Discourse was probably first read within the context of a closed Judaic-Hellenistic group. Furthermore the Discourse might also be read from a retrospective point of view, taking into consideration the principle of transparency. The Jesus-story is read through the coloured spectacles of a community, struggling to implement successful discipleship. The First Farewell Discourse probably had the literary function of establishing a Jesus-centred discipleship as counter-resolution to the strong Tora-centred Christianity, resulting from the Pharisaic reorganisation of society after AD 70 (cf Schmithals 1987:370).

Therefore the historical context, concentrating on the cultural and social codes of the extratextual readers, plays an important role in the interpretation of the First Farewell Discourse. This Discourse is a fitting response to the social and religious situation of a closed group of Christians in Asia Minor at the end of the first century, although the gap between text and socio-historical context should always be taken into consideration.

2 NARRATOCOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

2.1 Methodological departure
From a predominantly holistic exegetical perspective (cf Martín 1987) the exegete always has to remain aware of his methodological instrumentarium. A few appropriate remarks on the working and function of a narratological reading would be useful for understanding the further analysis.

As a narrative the First Farewell Discourse is the literary presentation of a complete action, concentrating, as communicative phenomenon, on the point of view of the narrator. It comprises a series of shorter narratives, organised into a unity, due to the teleological perspective of the author. In other words, different discourses and events become story by being interpreted according to the judgment of the narrator (cf Martín 1988:6). A myriad of minor happenings are transmitted in the light of a unified action, namely a discourse by the protagonist Jesus at the Passover meal, after the footwashing.

The function of the narrative in the First Farewell Discourse is to strengthen
discipleship. Therefore the reader obtains a more profound view of him/her and the world. The reader is penetrated by the text to such an extent that he/she led by the text (cf Brown 1988:234) to discover the real meaning of discipleship And that brings us to the plot as the causal connective function (cf M 1968:177) between the events in the First Farewell Discourse. Jesus’ departure and return bind together the story’s sequence of events — within the perspective of the disciples’ perception of following Jesus.

2.2 A narratological analysis (Greimas)

The application of Greimas’ actantial model (cf 1971) as an objective reconstruction of the First Farewell Discourse as narrative, brings to the front some stimulating narratological observations.

The narrative propositions, divided into four narrative units, are as follows:

Unit 1: 13:31-38

- Jesus announces his departure to the disciples.
- Jesus gives a ‘new’ command.
- Peter’s question concerning Jesus’ departure.
- Jesus’ explanation to Peter.
- Jesus predicts his denial by Peter.

Unit 2: 14:1-14

- Jesus announces the aim of his departure.
- Jesus announces his return at the Parousia.
- Thomas’ question concerning Jesus’ destination.
- Jesus’ answer: his relationship with the Father.
- Philip’s question concerning the Father.
- Jesus answer: his relationship with the Father.

Unit 3: 14:15-26

- Jesus announces the gift of the Spirit.
- Jesus emphasises his and the Father’s return in the meantime.
- Judas’ question concerning Jesus’ return.
- Jesus reaffirms the gift of the Spirit.
Unit 4: 14:27-31

Jesus announces the gift of peace (through the Spirit).
Jesus reminds the disciples of his departure.
Jesus reminds the disciples of his return.
Jesus announces the coming of Satan.
Jesus reaffirms his relationship with his Father.
Jesus announces his physical departure.

Some tentative conclusions:

* In all four narrative units the dominant narrative resonance is either the departure or return of Jesus, or both.

* In communicative perspective, Jesus wants to lead his disciples to understand his departure and return.

* Narrative unit four, 14:27-31, is a summary of the preceding three.

* In units 1, 2 and 3 we find a definite pattern, namely an announcement by Jesus, followed by one or more questions by his disciples after which Jesus provides an explanation of his announcement.

* The disciples’ perception of Jesus’ departure and return is strengthened by a ‘gift’ in each of units 1, 2 and 3: In narrative unit 1, the ‘new’ command; in unit 2, Jesus’ return (at his Parousia) and in unit 3, the Spirit.

Greimas’ actantial model can be applied schematically to the First Farewell Discourse as follows:
2.3 Focalisation in 13:31-14:31

Focalisation is the narrative process, which instructs the reader where to focus the senses, where to look for the action that is about to take place (cf Funk 1988:102). Focalisation has a wider scope than the traditionally used concept point of view, although it incorporates cognitive, emotive and ideological orientation (cf Rimmon-Kenan 1983:68). Three applicable facets of focalisation can be mentioned: the perceptual facet, concerning space and time; the psychological facet, concerning the cognitive and emotive components and the ideological facet, which focuses on the evaluation of the characters and events in the story (cf Rimmon-Kenan 1983:77-82).

In the First Farewell Discourse we deal with external focalisation which means that the focaliser is external to the story. The narrator-focaliser is sketched as a spectator. It is interesting to note that in the preceding 13:1-30, three meaningful inside views of the protagonist’s mind are given to help the intended read-
ers in their ideological orientation (cf Tolmie 1991). In John 13:1, 3 and 11 it is said that Jesus knew beforehand. This internal focalisation helps the reader to experience the First Farewell Discourse, knowing that the protagonist, Jesus, being the Son of God, knows everything that is going to happen to Him.

The perceptual facet of focalisation in the First Farewell Discourse focuses on the polarisation between inside and outside. The protagonist and disciples are inside, at the place where the footwashing occurred, while Judas is moving towards the outside. On the one hand this emphasises intimacy between Jesus and his own (cf 13:1), in contrast to the night (darkness) realm (cf 13:30) where hostility against the protagonist prevails. The narrator is also focalising on the present with a definite perspective on the future, when the reader is informed about Peter's denial (13:36-38) which is about to occur, and the future coming of the Spirit (14:15-26).

At the psychological level, with reference to the cognitive aspect of focalisation, the contrast between the protagonist and the disciples is remarkable. Jesus knows everything that is going to happen, but the disciples do not know. This is illustrated by the announcement of Peter's denial (13:36-38), Thomas's question concerning Jesus' destination (14:5-7), Philip's question concerning the Father (14:8-14) and Judas's question concerning Jesus' return (14:22-24). It serves to convince the reader of Jesus' control over his passage to glorification (cf 13:31-33). This truth about the protagonist assures the readers that Jesus, as Son of God, can be relied on in future. The intended readers are to live in this security concerning their future by obeying the 'new' command (13:34) and be guided by the Paraclete (14:15-26). The identity of the protagonist in his relationship with his Father (cf 13:31-32; 14:2; 14:6-7; 14:9-14; 14:21; 14:23; 14:28; 14:31), serves as backup for the disciples' confidence in the future, but also as an authoritative basis for their obedience to the 'new' command (13:34) and the Paraclete (14:15-26). The focalisation on the combination of the Paraclete and obedience to the love command (14:15-26) should not be underestimated in the story. The function of such a focalisation is to secure unity and solidarity among the intended followers of the protagonist.

3 AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL READING

3.1 Methodological remarks

Different perspectives gained from a variety of sources constitute a methodological framework, concerning a sociological (anthropological) reading of the First Farewell Discourse.

* The first historical readers of the First Farewell Discourse might be described as a closed group, the Johannine community (cf Brown 1979; Culpepper
1983). From a socio-historical viewpoint, the tradition about the First Farewell Discourse was shaped within this community, reflecting a situation of crisis in the history of Johannine Christianity (cf Painter 1981:527).

A socio-historical reconstruction of the theological views of the Johannine community should be distinguished from a social-scientific approach. The only explicit social data we can lay our hands on can be derived from literary texts, particularly from the Gospel of John. This means that literary data are to be translated into social data, which is a challenging process.

After a thorough literary analysis has been made, the macro-social context of the text, sketching the relationship between ideas and social reality, can be analysed, after which a micro-social analysis can focus on the relationship between sender(s) and receiver(s) (cf Theissen 1978:27). After this, the text can be read by making use, as in this case, of an interpretation model from the field of anthropology. The next step would be to move from the narrative to the historical world. In this way the text is to be understood as an encodement of information concerning the social context. It is the medium of communication, shaped by the anthropological, cultural and social forces of the social system of the specific historical setting of the Johannine community to which it is an appropriate response (cf Elliot 1981:7). The historical community within which the First Farewell Discourse was shaped sociologically also gave birth to John 13:31-14:31.

* According to the sociology of knowledge, reality itself is a social construction which implies that man and society reciprocally define each other. A social-scientific exegetical interpretation of a text should include a procedure to differentiate between the social location of the interpreter and that of the objects to be interpreted. The interpreter should be careful not to impose his own perception of reality arbitrarily on the object to be interpreted. In order to control one’s own perception of reality, the social scientific approach uses theoretical models, such as the anthropological model, to conceptualise and interpret human interaction (cf Malina 1982:233).

* The correlation between the beliefs of the Johannine community and their social behaviour should be kept in mind. Catching it up in one model has its limitations. Malina says: ‘The use of models is like the use of tools; in this sense models are question-specific or area-specific constructs. The appropriate model depends on the type of information one seeks to generate and comprehend’ (1982:237).
Malina distinguishes three types of social scientific models which can be used to visualise social interaction (1982:233): the structural functionalist model, the conflict model and the symbolic model. For the purpose of this paper, attention is focused on the symbolic model which concentrates on a social system's meanings, values and feelings regarding persons, things and events. In this sense a macro-social model for exegesis is used by Malina, namely the cross-cultural model of Mary Douglas, called an anthropological approach (cf Malina 1986b), making use of ethnocentricity which views one's own group as the centre of everything and rates all others with reference to this group. The Johannine community might be viewed as such a group, striving to find their own ideological identity in contrast to other groups (cf 1 John).

3.2 Mary Douglas’s anthropological model

Douglas’s model, which has gone through different stages of development constitutes a synthesis of the major results of cultural anthropology. It is applicable to Biblical texts because of its comprehensiveness and its suggestions regarding the consistency and coherence of a given cultural viewpoint (Neyrey 1988:118). Her model focuses on the issues of order, structure and control within social groups. This model locates social units in terms of two basic variables, called group and grid. Group refers to the degree of societal pressure within a given social unit to conform to the society’s classifications and evaluations. The pressure may be strong or weak. A social unit’s relative pressure for conformity to societal norms can be rated on a scale from 0 to 100 (cf Douglas 1982:188-192; Neyrey 1988:119). Grid, on the other hand, reflects the degree of socially constrained adherence of members of a group to the prevailing symbols, beliefs and norms. Group and grid can be plotted on a diagram as follows:

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GROUP

GRID

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High</th>
<th>Insulated B</th>
<th>Strong group C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Individualist A</td>
<td>Strong group D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Weak</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Position A (low grid/weak group) indicates individual autonomy in that the individual is not constrained by any external boundary and experiences competitive conditions.

Position B (high grid/weak group) shows that the individual’s behaviour is
ordained by the defined classifications of the social system. The social context is dominated by insulation. Individual autonomy is minimal.

In position C (high grid/strong group) dominates a constraining group boundary dominates; life support comes from the group which controls individual behaviour and emphasis is on behaviour and group loyalty. It persists longer than groups in position D.

Position D (low grid/strong group) indicates that the social experience of the individual is constrained by the external boundaries of the group against outsiders. Because of the low grid, formal internal divisions and dominating roles are absent. Therefore relationships between individuals will lead to conflict and factionalism.

Different exegetes have applied Douglas's model to Biblical scholarship: Neyrey (1988) starts off with Raymond Brown's three stages in sketching the history of the Johannine community and has found that the community's road can be plotted on Douglas's group/grid model. He calls stage one (quadrant D) the period of missionary propaganda and 'low Christology' (cf 1988:122); stage two (quadrant D), replacement in which Jesus claims to replace the major elements of Judaism; stage three (quadrant A), the period of 'high Christology' and in which revolt takes place against the structures and symbols of stage two (1988:147). From a social-science perspective the community has moved from a strong group/low grid (D) situation to a strong group/rising grid (D) position to end in a weak group/low grid (A) situation. Domeris (1991) differs from Neyrey in putting stage three in quadrant A and argues that it should stay in D (1991).

3.3 Application of this model to the First Farewell Discourse
According to Neyrey (cf 1988:142-150), the Farewell Discourses are to be mapped in both quadrants D and A, which means that the movement is from reform to revolt. Domeris, on the other hand, suggests that the Farewell Discourses reflect a society in quadrant D (1991), showing signs of a strong group/low grid format.

In opposition to the views of Neyrey and Domeris, I would venture to argue for a location in quadrant C, concerning the First Farewell Discourse.

According to Douglas, quadrant C (strong group, high grid) shows the following applicable peculiarities (cf 1982:206):

1 'The social experience of the individual is first and foremost constrained by the external boundary maintained by the group against outsiders.
2 The extreme case of strong group will be one in which the members gain their whole life-support from the group as such.
3 Individual behaviour is subject to controls exercised in the name of the group.
4 Following from the strong grid condition, C is organised internally into sepa-
rate graded compartments, has scope for internal specialisation of roles and
may accordingly distribute its resources unequally between members.

Consequent on 4, it has an armoury of different solutions to internal conflicts,
upgrading, shifting sideways, downgrading, resegmenting, redefining.

Consequent to 4 and 5, the group can be bigger than groups at D since it can
devolve, federate, become tributary to another, etc.

Consequent also on 4 and 5, the C group can expect to persist longer without
fission.

Consequent on the evident feasibility (7) of persisting as a group into the fu­
ture, it can make levies on its individual members to ensure capital
investment to endow its posterity.

Consequent on 8, the feasibility of persisting as a group being made realisable
through the capital investments undertaken for the group, it does persist in
fact longer than groups at D'.

Therefore the group in quadrant C survives socially, not only by justifying its
boundary against outsiders, but also by justifying its grid (Douglas 1982:210). In
such a group one might expect an intellectual effort to elaborate a transcendental
metaphysics which seeks to bridge their situation and the purpose of God. The
role of the Paraclete (14:16, 26) fits into such a category. Douglas says further: 'I
also risk the suggestion that this is the kind of social environment in which doc­
trines of atonement flourish and which can make sense of a full once and for all
historical incarnational theology' (1982:211). Such a view corresponds with the
Johannine situation. With reference to time past, Douglas says that in D (strong
group, low grid) the sudden arrival of the millennium is more credible than at C
which exists in a longer time-span both with regard to the past and future (cf
points 7, 8 and 9 above). 'Plans have been laid for many tomorrows so it is con­
tradictory to expect the end of the world tomorrow' (1982:218). The emphasis on
the love command in respect of discipleship in the First Farewell Discourse con­
firms just that. C has a strong historical sense: they select from the past a loyal
justificatory charter for their present actions (Douglas 1982:218). In a sense C
has a potential resistance to chiliastic movements.

The narration of the coming of the Paraclete in the mean time (14:15-26) and
the emphasis on realised eschatology prove this. Groups in C have ascribed re­
lations that cover nearly every aspect of life (cf the impact of the love command
(13:34)). As Douglas says: '...friendship in C is likely to be formally organised

In turning to the First Farewell Discourse (13:31-14:31), and taking into
account the footwashing as introduction (13:1-30), the following facets empha­
sise the strong group and high grid components:
## STRONG GROUP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Data</strong></th>
<th><strong>Commentary</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jesus’ knowledge that the time has come (13:1)</td>
<td>Assurance of hierarchical control of group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The devil has already prompted Judas Iscariot (13:2 and 18-30)</td>
<td>Story of Judas Iscariot is told to warn as well as to protect the group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanations of footwashing to Peter and disciples (13:6-11 and 12-17)</td>
<td>Strengthening of the group in order to uphold discipleship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judas has left (13:31). The world must learn that Jesus loves the Father (14:31; cf 14:17)</td>
<td>Distance from the world strengthens group solidarity and boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘New’ commandment (13:34)</td>
<td>Characterises discipleship as distinctive constitutionalisation of group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus will return and take the disciples to be with Him (14:3)</td>
<td>Assurance of the existence of the group in future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus the way to the Father (14:5-14) and through the Paraclete the way from the Father (14:15-26)</td>
<td>Jesus’ hierarchical position on transcendent grounds guaranteed by Paraclete to lead the group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### HIGH GRID

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Data</strong></th>
<th><strong>Commentary</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It was just before the Passover feast</td>
<td>The Passover context emphasises the ritual actions of Jesus (footwashing), strengthening the grid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus’ knowledge (13:3) and his relationship with his Father (13:31-32; 14:6-8)</td>
<td>Higher Christology is an integral part of the First Farewell Discourse</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet (13:10)

A new commandment I give you. Love one another (13:34)

Trust in God; trust also in Me' (14:1) '... so that you will believe that I am He' (13:19)

'I will come back and take you to be with Me ...' (14:3) 'I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you' (14:18)

'He will do even greater things than these' (14:12)

'... and He will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever' (14:16, cf 14:26)

3.4 Conclusion

It is clear that the First Farewell Discourse is narrated from the perspective of a strong group and strong grid. Jesus' words confirm ritual purity and the 'new' commandment has transformed the community's grid into a new tradition. The grid has changed from the Jewish synagogue tradition to the Jesus-idiom. But this does not mean that the grid has been lowered. The boundaries of the community are clearly drawn, facing the threat of the world. And the hierarchy settles in the metaphysical leadership of the Paraclete.

The First Farewell Discourse is narrated in such a way as to foster the expectation that the community will exist for ever. The similarities between the Farewell Discourses and 1 John (cf Brown 1982:16) confirm that the strong group and grid power lies in the brotherly love as applicative of the 'new' commandment.

The Johannine group with its strong group and grid features lives from their belief in Jesus, as the knowing pre-existent logos, in the self-understanding that they are the community of the Spirit of truth. And in this sense group in grid feeds each other. At the time of the First Farewell Discourse the Johannine com-
munity matched the C quadrant on Douglas's diagram.

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