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López Rosas, Ricardo

***La Señal del Templo, Jn 2, 13–22: Redefinición
Cristológica de lo Sacro***

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This monograph was originally a doctoral dissertation successfully defended in 1999 at the Philosophisch-Theologische Hochschule Sankt Georgen in Frankfurt am Main by Ricardo López Rosas, a Roman Catholic priest from the state of Guanajuato in Mexico who did his work under Johannes Beutler, S.J. It is published by the Pontifical University of Mexico in Mexico City, where the author had previously earned a Licentiate degree in Biblical Theology in 1987.

In the introduction, the author traces a brief history of the exegetical studies done on John 2:13–22 from the first half of the twentieth-century to the present and offers a short summary of the content of each of the five chapters of the book. Unfortunately, one struggles to find there and elsewhere a clear and concise summary of the main thesis or argument of the work as a whole; at key points his only stated purpose is that of analyzing the text in order to understand it and interpret it for today (e.g., xiii, 1, 45, 54). For the most part, his primary objective appears to be that of demonstrating that he has carried out exhaustive research on his subject matter and is able to do a careful exegesis of the text—which is only to be expected, of course, given that this is a doctoral dissertation; in all fairness, that objective is accomplished quite successfully, as the scholarship displayed throughout the work is of high quality. Nevertheless, as is no doubt true of most dissertations, the reading at times can be rather tedious (especially if one

attempts to work through over 1,200 footnotes, many of which are quite extensive), and the relevance of much of the material is not always evident.

The first chapter, titled “Ubicarnos” (“Situating Ourselves”), looks at the context and “cotext” in which John 2:13–22 is found. López Rosas focuses primarily on the beginning and the conclusion of the Gospel, the different sections making it up, and the first narrative section (1:19–3:36) in which the pericope under consideration appears. In the second chapter, “Análisis del Texto Jn 2,13–22,” the passage is examined with the aid of a variety of analytical approaches (particularly narrative analysis), and an extensive verse-by-verse commentary is provided. While these chapters no doubt contain many interesting observations, what appears to be the predominant argument of the work does not begin to take definite shape until chapter 3, “El Contexto de Jn 2,13–22.” Here the author begins by exploring the significance of the Jerusalem temple in ancient Judaism along with the beliefs and practices associated with it, then compares the Synoptic accounts of the temple episode with the Johannine account, so as to argue that the Fourth Gospel presents Jesus as the “eschatological Sanctuary” who through his death and resurrection replaces the Jerusalem temple as the “universal Sign” and place of divine revelation and salvation (153–55, 223–29; cf. 124).

This idea is developed further in chapter 4, the most interesting of the five chapters, “La Intratextualidad de Jn 2,13–22,” where the author makes use of a neologism to speak of the “*crístología náutica*” (νόος) as well as the “*crístología templaria*” (templo) running throughout the first twelve chapters of the Fourth Gospel. López Rosas argues that the idea that Jesus himself constitutes the eschatological sanctuary is behind a number of the key concepts, images, and passages found in these chapters. Like the Jerusalem temple in ancient Judaism, Jesus is the place of God’s dwelling to which the people (including Greeks) come as pilgrims (245, commenting on John 6; and 304–11, commenting on 11:55 and 12:20), the τόπος where access to God is to be found and from which the divine instruction goes forth (252–75), and the rock of the eschatological temple (276–79); other images appearing in the Gospel and applied in various ways to Jesus, such as the serpent of bronze, water, light, glory, bread, and even the door of the sheep (i.e., Sheepgate, Neh 3:1, 32; cf. John 10:7), are also closely linked to the Jerusalem temple in ancient Jewish thought and thus employed by the Evangelist to develop his “*naotic Christology*.” While on occasion the arguments may be a little weak (even though López Rosas is careful not to overstate his case), on the whole the discussion is provocative and the author succeeds in raising in the reader’s mind the question of just how central the notion of Jesus as the new, eschatological temple may be in the Fourth Gospel. Might this be the reason, for example, why the Evangelist has placed the temple episode toward the beginning of the Gospel and why the Jewish feasts associated with the Jerusalem temple play such an important role throughout?

In the final chapter, “Trazos para la Pragmática desde Jn 2,13–22” (“Outlines for Pragmatic Concerns Deriving from Jn 2,13–22”), the author considers how practical applications for present-day contexts might be drawn out of the passage. In particular, he argues that the same use of religion to promote injustice against which Jesus reacted by expelling the merchants from the temple is to be found today in places such as Mexico, where the plight of the poor has grown ever more precarious due to the rise of the “religion” of neoliberalism and the deification of the market on a global scale. While one may agree with the author’s analysis of the present political and economic situation, it is not always clear how his argument here builds on the content of the previous chapters or relates to the “naotic Christology” he ascribes to the author of the Fourth Gospel. Once again, although there is much that is innovative and interesting in this chapter, as in the rest of the work, it is difficult to discern any overarching thesis; the author gives ample evidence of his exegetical abilities but apparently has found it difficult to construct a clear and coherent argument around which his investigation might revolve, as the absence of any conclusion or summary of the main findings in the book demonstrates.

The work (about a \$15.00 value at the current rate of exchange) is written in a very elevated and eloquent Spanish and makes use of a great deal of technical language; while this no doubt reflects favorably on the level of scholarship of its author, it will unfortunately make for difficult reading for those whose skills in the Spanish language are limited. No matter how fluent one is in that language, however, anyone interested in researching the Johannine account of the expulsion of the merchants from the temple or the significance of the Jerusalem temple in the Fourth Gospel will find the work quite helpful simply because of the seventy-three pages of bibliographical references from works in German, English, French, Spanish, and Italian mostly dating from 1985 to the present; it would be difficult to find a more complete and up-to-date bibliography on the subject matter. In addition to that and a good number of promising veins inviting further exploration scattered throughout, the major contribution of the book is its proposal that lying at the heart of the Christology of the Fourth Gospel is the idea that Jesus assumes the salvific role and functions ascribed to the Jerusalem temple in ancient Judaism; one can only hope that the author will continue to explore and develop this proposal on the basis of the enormous amount of research already carried out.