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Rigato, Maria-Luisa

Giovanni: L'enigma il Presbitero il culto il tempio la cristologia

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This accurate study is an insightful contribution by a scholar who has produced a number of valuable articles on John the Evangelist and a book largely devoted to him: *Il titolo della Croce di Gesù* (2nd ed.; Rome: Gregoriana, 2005; see my review in *InvLuc* 27 [2005]: 361–64). It consists of seventeen dense chapters, grouped into two parts and preceded by a brief introduction (7–11). The first part (17–119) investigates the much-debated question of the identity of the author of the Fourth Gospel; the second (212–324) illustrates the presence of much templar and liturgical imagery both in the Fourth Gospel and in Revelation; it is followed by the conclusion (325–28), a select bibliography (329–40), and indexes (341–52).

Rigato begins with a review of modern and contemporary opinions concerning the identity of the Evangelist (17–21): Bretschneider, Hengel, Thyen, Colson, Winandy, Boismard, Cazelles, Segalla, and Ghiberti. Just like the first seven of these authors, she challenges the opinion—found already in Origen—that the Evangelist is John the son of Zebedee; she rather shares Colson's view, also followed by Winandy, that the mentality of the author of the Fourth Gospel is that of the Jewish priestly environments. Whereas in Revelation the author names himself four times, in the Gospel there is an apparent anonymity, but Rigato carefully seeks the hints offered by the Evangelist to his readers in order to identify him (23–49): she argues that the John mentioned as a witness in 1:6–8 is the Evangelist, not the Baptist; it is the Evangelist who has also seen the Logos's glory (John 1:14; cf. 2:11). Therefore, 1:8 is included by her in the eighteen passages in which the Evangelist cites himself in the Gospel, usually as a “disciple” of Jesus. He probably is the unnamed disciple in 1:40 and 21:2. That he was probably not the son of Zebedee is suggested by many details: he never lists the Twelve; he never names the sons of Zebedee

(only in 21:1 “those of Zebedee” are mentioned), whose premature death is suggested by the prophecy in Mark 10:39; in Acts 4:13 John of Zebedee is said to be ἀγράμματος καὶ ἰδιότης, which does not square with the content and form of the Fourth Gospel; and the Evangelist probably lived in Jerusalem, and the Last Supper may have taken place in his house (as was already supposed by H. Delff), which would explain why he was leaning next to Jesus and why Mary Magdalene, after a first visit to Jesus’ tomb, went to Peter and to “the other disciple” (20:2), who probably hosted Peter in Jerusalem. The Fourth Gospel is more interested in Jerusalem than in Jesus’ Galilean ministry. Moreover, John of Zebedee, a fisherman, would hardly have been familiar with the house of the high priests (John 8:15–16). Rigato even wonders whether the John mentioned among those of high-priestly family in Acts 4:5–6 may have been the Evangelist (39) and whether John’s name, Johanan, meaning “God has favored/is benevolent,” may have been paraphrased by him as “Jesus has loved” and hence “the beloved disciple” (28).

John was a disciple, and an apostle, but not one of the Twelve. Rigato offers a precise analysis of the meaning of ἀπόστολος according to John, to Paul (who includes among the apostles, e.g., Andronicus and Junia, ἐπίσημοι ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις; Rom 16:7; see the valuable analysis of E. J. Epp, *Junia: The First Woman Apostle* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005], with my review in *Exemplaria Classica* 11 [2007]: 204–12), and to Luke in Luke-Acts (on Pentecost, in Acts 3:16, certainly not only the Twelve but all men and women forming the πάντες in Acts 1:15 became prophets, apostles, and witnesses to the risen Jesus [51–57]). John the Evangelist, not the son of Zebedee, is probably one of the three στύλοι of the church of Jerusalem in Gal 2:9, like James, not Zebedee’s son, who was killed several years earlier, but the kinsman of Jesus, he too of Levitical high-priestly family, as can be inferred from Hegesippus. Another close investigation (59–76) is devoted to the term πρεσβύτερος in the Old Testament, Philo, Josephus, and the New Testament, where it also appears in 2 John 1 and 3 John 1 to designate the sender of these letters, identified by Rigato with the Evangelist, who was a πρεσβύτερος in Jerusalem. As such, and as a disciple of the Lord, he appears in Papias’s crucial attestation (*apud* Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39), recently analyzed also by R. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 12–38, and by me (“Fonti note e meno note sulle origini dei Vangeli,” *Aevum* 81 [2007]: 171–85). Differently from Eusebius, Rigato identifies the first John mentioned by Papias with Zebedee’s son and the second John, the πρεσβύτερος, with the Evangelist, of whom Papias was a hearer. Further sources on the Evangelist are studied (77–111): Ignatius, who mentions not John but the πρεσβύτεροι, Justin and Irenaeus, who both call the Evangelist “apostle”; and above all Polycrates, bishop of Ephesus (*apud* Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.31; 5.24), who attests that John the beloved disciple was a ἱερεύς, a Jewish Levitical priest (this term in the New Testament and in the first two centuries is never used for Christian ministers, for the only ἱερεύς is Christ,

according to Hebrews) and wore the πέταλον, the high-priestly golden lamina with the Tetragrammaton inscribed. John is not mentioned as a high priest by Josephus or the rabbinic sources, but Josephus's list may be lacunose; John may have been excluded from such lists as a Christian or may have been a substitute of the high priest even for one day. Polycrates also speaks of Philip's daughters, one of whom died in Ephesus; Rigato (320) identifies her, or another prominent woman in the early church, with the ἐκλεκτὴ κυρία who is the addressee of 2 John and her "children" with the members of the church led by her, just as her ἐκλεκτὴ ἀδελφὴ (2 John 13) led her own community. This would be nothing strange but rather a parallel to the female church leaders well known from Paul, such as Phoebe, deacon and president of her church (Rom 16:1).

Rigato discusses the tradition concerning John's martyrdom in Rome (which I related to a striking pagan allusion in "La Satira IV di Giovenale e il supplizio di s. Giovanni a Roma sotto Domiziano," *Gerión* 18 [2000]: 343–59, now accepted by L. Bianchi, *Ne scelse dodici: Dove sono sepolti gli apostoli* [Rome: Giorni, 2007], 16–17). Tertullian, its first source, identifies the John who was plunged into boiling oil, survived, and was sent to Patmos with the Evangelist who lived in Ephesus. He does not specify the date of the torment, which is located under Nero only by Jerome, who was forced to give this imprecise chronology because he placed John's exile in Patmos under Nero, but Eusebius places it under Domitian and says that it ended under Nerva. Thus, I think that the torture took place under Domitian (when the impressive allusion to it is also set); Rigato accepts Jerome's date in order to distinguish Zebedee's son, who, in her view, was plunged into the oil and died in Rome under Nero, from the Evangelist, who lived in Patmos and Ephesus.

In the second part, after presenting forty traces of "templar mentality" in John (121–28), Rigato offers a notable and detailed exegesis of chosen episodes from John and Revelation. The attention for the hours of the day in the Gospel, the assimilation of Jesus' body to the temple, and the probable identification of Jesus, the ἀρνίον ἐσφαγμένον in Revelation, with the tiny lambs of the daily temple holocaust (Tamid), sacrificed in the same way as Jesus was crucified, are well explained if the author was a Levitical priest, linked to the temple liturgy (128–78). Jesus as ἀμνὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ in 1:29 is reminiscent of Isa 40:2, 11, and his faculty for eliminating (ὁ αἴρων) the sin of the world is due to his divinity, not to his being an expiatory victim: it is God, not the victim, who can remit sin. The Johannine formula Ἐγὼ εἰμι, recalling Exod 3:14 and the Name on the high-priestly lamina, proclaims Jesus' divinity. John 4 (179–208) well illustrates both the priestly culture of the Evangelist (attention to the cult place; the water: God is the spring of the water of life in Jer 2:13, and there is probably an allusion to the complex hydric system of the temple) and the overcoming of misogynist prejudice on the part of Jesus, which is apparent throughout the whole Gospel: a woman, who could not be a witness according

to the law, becomes witness of the Messiah here and in John 20 of his resurrection; moreover, Jesus breaks the conventions by conversing with a woman on the highest things, as with Mary of Bethany.

Rigato relates Bethsaida/Bethesda in John 5 to the water collectors of the temple mentioned in Sir 50:2 (the water system of the pre-Herodian temple is described in the *Letter of Aristeas*) and to “Bethesda” mentioned in the Qumran Copper Scroll 3Q15 in connection with water. Also on the basis of the Mishnaic description of the temple washing system for the removal of the victims’ blood, and of a fourth-century tradition according to which the water in Bethesda was reddish, Rigato supposes that there flowed the blood of the temple sacrifices. For this reason it was considered to have healing powers (213–35). A chapter is devoted to Mary of Bethany (243–56), a disciple of Jesus, as John 11:28 reveals. Rigato thinks that the anointing in John 11:2 and 12:3 and in Mark 14:2–9 and Matt 26:6–13 might be the same as in Luke 7:37–50, where the woman is called ἀματωλός, which does not necessarily mean a courtesan. Emphasis is laid on the prophetic and symbolic value of her deed and on the fact that Mary, just as Mary Magdalene after Jesus’ resurrection (μή μου ἅπτου means “Do not go on touching/holding me!”), touched the temple-body of Jesus, the saint, which was intangible and inaccessible to any layperson, all the more for women, who were all, forcedly, laypersons. Even if they belonged to a Levitical family, they could not be priests and enter the temple. Rigato notes that, whereas Jesus destroyed all misogynist prejudices, in some Christian confessions women are still forced, on no ground, to be laypersons and denied access to ministry and hierarchy.

In John 19:14 ἐκάθισεν ἐπὶ βήματος means, consistently with the use of καθίζω in John, that Pilate sat down, not that he had Jesus sit on the βῆμα, as several scholars maintain following Harnack, who, however, argued mainly on the basis of Gos. Pet. 3:7 (where it is the people who have Jesus sit, and not on the βῆμα but ἐπὶ καθέδραν κρίσεως). The Lithostroton/Gabbatha is not the place at which Pilate sat but that toward which (εἰς τόπον) he was turned; it probably was a mosaic in the porticos of the Herodian temple. The analysis of the deposition of Jesus, with, for example, μίγμα belonging to templar terminology, leads Rigato to conclude that it was a kingly and provisional deposition. She even supposes that John, as a priest of the temple, may have provided the byssus and the μίγμα of myrrh and aloe (257–82). A substantial chapter is devoted to Mary Magdalene (283–302), whose presentation in the four Gospels is analyzed. Rigato is right to point out that in the resurrection scene in Luke 24:1–9 the angels’ exhortation to the women to remember Jesus’ teaching to them (ὑμῖν in the direct discourse) in Galilee and the Evangelist’s report that they remembered is a clear indication that these women had been disciples of Jesus since his Galilean ministry, as attested also by Luke 23:49; now they became also witnesses to his resurrection and the first apostles announcing the κήρυγμα

(a more detailed analysis is provided in Rigato, “Remember [...] Then They Remembered: Luke 24:6–8,” in *A Feminist Companion to Luke* [ed. A. J. Levine and M. Blickenstaff; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002], 269–80). I agree that these women are included among those who had followed Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem (Acts 13:30–31) as the μάρτυρες to whom Jesus appeared for many days after his resurrection and who became witnesses to him in front of the people. And surely they are included in the πάντες who received the Spirit as well as the Twelve and are constituted apostles in Acts 2:1–13. Mary Magdalene, a disciple just as the μαθηταί, who calls Jesus *rabbuni*, is the first witness to his resurrection (and ascension) and receives the apostolic mission directly from him. Moreover, after announcing these events to the other disciples—who in John are not at all only the Twelve but included many others and also women—she remained with them and was there when Jesus came in the evening and constituted them apostles, communicated them the Holy Spirit, and said that those whose sins they would remit would have their sins remitted and those whose sins they would retain would have their sins retained (John 20:19–23). All this was said to women, too. Rigato also challenges the toponymical origin of Μαγδαληνή. We know no town or village named Magdala or the like in the first century; *migdal*, “tower,” may well have been the meaning of “Magdalene,” which may be the hophal participle of *gadal*, “to be great,” thus *m^gdala/m^gdalet*, with a Graecized termination: “she who has been made great.” Rabanus Maurus rightly calls her “apostolorum apostola” and “Christi apostola.”

A remarkable observation comes from the last chapter (309–24), devoted entirely to show how for John, who misses the temple, Jesus recapitulates it and what was related to it, such as the high priesthood (see also Hebrews), the Menorah, the lamps, and the Tamid, although not according to a theology of substitution but in a “mysterious recapitulation” (323). The figure of Jesus in Rev 1:13–16, where he is dressed as a high priest and has μαστοί—a term exclusively applied to women in the Bible, Philo, and Josephus—whereas the angels have στήθη in 15:6, is plausibly interpreted by Rigato as a symbol of inclusiveness, in reference to the creation of the ἄνθρωπος, obviously not only one gender, “to our image and likeness” (Gen 1:26–27). To save the entire humanity, Jesus, ἄνθρωπος corresponding to the first ἄνθρωπος (Rom 5:6–11), assumed the whole of humanity, not only one race or one gender. In the transcendent Christ gender disappears, like all other differentiations (Gal 3:28), and only the human nature remains, together with the divine one (Phil 2:6–8). These are only some of the reflections offered by Rigato in her fine and careful analysis, as a result of many years of clearly fruitful studies. All students of the New Testament and Christian origins should be interested in, and grateful to, her scholarship.