

Her Testimony is True: Women as Witnesses according to John. By Robert Gordon Maccini. JSNTSup 125. Sheffield Academic, 1996, 278 pp., \$60.00.*

Her Testimony is True represents an attempt to validate an egalitarian commitment through the author's demonstration that women function as witnesses in John's Gospel on equal footing with men. In order to substantiate his thesis, Maccini examines the following passages in the gospel of John that feature women as potential witnesses Jesus: 2:1–11 (Mary at the wedding in Cana); 4:4–42 (the Samaritan woman); 11:1–46 (Mary and Martha at Jesus' raising of Lazarus); 12:1–8 (Mary and Martha at the anointing of Jesus); 19:25–27 (the women at the cross, including Mary the mother of Jesus and Mary Magdalene); and 20:1–18 (Mary Magdalene at the empty tomb). Chapters on John's gospel as a trial and women as witnesses in Biblical culture are designed to provide a framework for the author's investigation.

Apart from Mary at the wedding in Cana, Maccini finds that John presents all the other women featured above as witnesses to Jesus. The Samaritan woman's witness leads her fellow villagers to Jesus. Mary and Martha confirm the factuality of their brother Lazarus' death. By rendering service to Jesus and by anointing him for burial, the sisters also provide examples of what it means to serve and love Jesus. Mary the mother of Jesus and the other women at the cross witness to Jesus' humanity and death. And Mary Magdalene, similar to the "beloved disciple," testifies to both Jesus' death and resurrection. Maccini concludes that women's testimony in John's gospel is generally considered valid and true and that women function as witnesses to Jesus on par with men.

Overall, *Her Testimony is True* is well-researched and written. Although the author "confesses" to his egalitarian bias at the outset of his study, he largely manages to refrain from imposing an egalitarian agenda on John's gospel. His skepticism regarding the "Johannine community" hypothesis, his concern to keep the gospel's historical and literary dimensions in proper balance and his rejection of treatments that view John's characters merely in terms of literary symbolism, must also be lauded. Moreover, Maccini's exegesis of passages featuring women as witnesses in the fourth gospel is conducted with appropriate restraint. A case in point is the author's conclusion that Mary in 2:1–11 does not function as a witness to Jesus, much less as a mediatrix to Jesus, as has often been claimed. Hence a realistic portrait emerges that generally avoids ideological overrepresentations plaguing several earlier studies.

Still, Maccini's work is beset by several weaknesses. (1) There is virtually no integration between the introductory and the exegetical chapters. In his discussion of the various women witnesses in John the author does not reinforce the notion that John's gospel is presented as a trial. As is the case with many published dissertations (the present study represents the substance of a dissertation completed at the University of Aberdeen under the supervision of Ruth Edwards), this work is strong on exegetical detail yet weak in theological integration. (2) Maccini's idiosyncratic method of selecting one, and only one, section of John's gospel as an interpretive frame for his exegesis of a given passage unduly excludes relevant information elsewhere in John. This procedure also occasionally renders the author's comparisons rather strained. How significant is it that both the wedding at Cana and the encounter at Sychar "happen in small towns beyond Judea, at specified times, and feature Jesus, his disciples, a woman, and others" (p. 119) and that both the supper at the anointing and the last supper feature "the meal itself" and "the moistening and drying of feet" (pp. 172–173)?

Another weakness is Maccini's neglect of John's salvation-historical framework, recently demonstrated by J. Pryor in *John: Evangelist of the Covenant People*. For instance, Maccini insists that Mary Magdalene's absence at the commissioning in 20:21–23 must not be construed as her exclusion from Jesus' inner apostolic circle, since Thomas was absent at this occasion as well. What Maccini fails to note, however, is the fact that Thomas was one of the Twelve, a category upheld in

John's gospel (cf. esp. 20:24), while Mary Magdalene was not. As a result, the author's analogy between Thomas and Mary Magdalene breaks down, for Thomas, as one of the Twelve, may well have been included in Jesus' commission while Mary, at least in a primary sense, was not. This does not mean that Mary is beyond the pale of Jesus' commission; since the Twelve also function as representatives of believers in general in John, Mary, like other believers, is surely included in the commission in a derivative sense. Still, the fourth evangelist demonstrably maintains a salvation-historical distinction between the Twelve and other disciples of Jesus, and this distinction must not be obliterated.

Finally, a comment is in order regarding Maccini's agenda of validating an egalitarian commitment ("I am committed, to the best of my understanding and ability, to the equality of women and men in all aspects of church life" [p. 7]) in the conclusions he draws. While this commitment generally appears not to have had a negative effect on the author's exegetical work, one is surprised by the following concluding statements: "John is by no means oblivious to the concern for justice in community. . . . Establishing equality for all persons regardless of their gender is a cause surely born in the heart of God" (p. 251). "To help in the effort to advance the cause of equality, not just for women but for all people (!), God sends a powerful and contemporary Paraclete, the Spirit" (p. 252). No evidence is adduced to substantiate these sweeping assertions. And nowhere in his study has Maccini even mentioned, much less demonstrated, John's concern for justice or the sending of the Spirit for the purpose of gender equality.

These lapses into egalitarian ideology mar an otherwise helpful treatment. Arguably, Maccini's finding that women, like men, function as legitimate witnesses in John's gospel has not proven that the author's commitment to egalitarianism is borne out by Scripture. The husband's headship in marriage or the limitation of certain teaching and ruling functions in the church to men are not necessarily affected by whether or not women, like men, serve as witnesses to Jesus in John's gospel or elsewhere. These crucial issues for a comprehensive view of the NT's teaching on male-female roles and relationships are not even explicitly addressed in John. For Maccini to claim that his egalitarianism is confirmed by the conclusions reached in his study therefore far exceeds what is warranted. "Her testimony" may be true, but his, at least in this one instance, is arguably not.

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