

Estela ALDAVE MEDRANO, *Muerte, duelo y nueva vida en el cuarto evangelio*. Estudio exegético de Jn 11,1–12,11 a la luz de las prácticas rituales de la antigüedad (Asociación Bíblica Española 70). Estella, Editorial Verbo Divino, 2018. 7-437 p. 16 × 24. €32,00.

This very engaging book is a slightly revised version of Aldave Medrano's doctoral thesis, directed by Carmen Bernabé and defended in 2017 at the University of Deusto. It is a detailed exegetical study of John 11,1 – 12,11 using an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates biblical methods with those of social science, social and cultural anthropology, and sociology. Through the Johannine narrative of the resuscitation of Lazarus and the anointing of Jesus in Bethany, Aldave Medrano examines the social consequences of death and how the text reflects the mourning rituals employed by the early followers of Jesus. She also examines the expected roles in these rituals along gender lines. Her thesis is that John 11,1 – 12,11 reflects the experience of dealing with death within the Johannine community and provides a way for them to confront the experience similar to the way mourning rituals provide catharsis and transformation.

In the first chapter, Aldave Medrano reviews previous work on John 11,1 – 12,11, describes her methodology, lays out her presuppositions, and outlines the body of her work. In the next chapter, she sets forth how people in the Mediterranean world of the first century CE experienced death, what were their rituals, and who performed them. She holds that some aspects of the experience of death transcend culture, while others do not. She shows how the death of a loved one in the ancient Mediterranean world, where people had a collective consciousness, would produce more social disturbance than in modern Western societies where the disturbance would be more individual.

To sketch what were the rituals following a death in the ancient Mediterranean world, Aldave Medrano relies on archaeological and literary sources, including Greek and Roman literature, the Old and New Testaments, and later rabbinic texts. She justifies her use of Old Testament and rabbinic texts to understand details in the Johannine text, on the basis of anthropologists' affirmations that no generation completely re-invents their rituals; they always maintain elements from previous times. While that may be true, this reviewer would be more cautious about

using sources from periods so much earlier and later and from diverse locales to interpret a New Testament text. Aldave Medrano outlines customs around the preparation of the body, the wake, the funeral procession, the rites at the sepulcher, the entombment or incineration, and the purification rituals and funerary banquets that follow afterward. She outlines the roles of women in expressing lament and of men in voicing elegies and in attending banquets honoring the dead. She shows that there was a division of tasks and spaces: women took charge of the care of the body of the deceased and were especially tied to the spaces in homes and at the tombs; women expressed their grief with laments and tears while men pronounced elegies and were not to cry; in expressing their experience of death, women stressed the pain of loss while men focused on the nobility of death for the good of the people. The rituals of mourning have a performative character; the fixed sequences of words and actions effect transformation for those who carry them out. The analyses done in this chapter lay the groundwork for understanding John 11,1 – 12,11, to be able to reconstruct how death affected the members of the Johannine community and how they coped with it.

Chapters three and four present a detailed social-scientific exegesis of 11,1 – 12,11, carried out in light of the prior ritual study. The author shows the literary unity of this section, which has two parallel threads that interrelate the death and resuscitation of Lazarus with the death and raising of Jesus: (A) 11,1-16 Lazarus is threatened with illness leading to death; Jesus, threatened with death, has fled to the other side of the Jordan; (B) 11,17-44 a scene in Bethany where the mourning ritual for Lazarus is interrupted by Jesus' arrival; Lazarus' emergence from the tomb anticipates Jesus' absence from his tomb; (A') 11,45-57 Jesus is again threatened with death and flees to Ephraim; (B') 12,1-11 a scene in Bethany with the mourning ritual of a funerary meal, at which the resuscitated Lazarus is present, which anticipates the death and resurrection of Jesus. Chapter three deals with parts A and B; chapter four with A' and B'.

In the first scene (11,1-16), the dialogue between Jesus and his disciples redefines life and death in terms of the Johannine concepts of glory and eternal life. Aldave Medrano examines links between the Johannine text and LXX Isa 52,13 – 53,12, Dan 12,2 and proposes that these latter provide the original nucleus of the Johannine eschatological outlook: that those who believe in Jesus are already living in part the fullness of eternal life expected in the last days.

The author's examination of the second scene (11,17-38a) reveals the ways in which the text reflects the elements of mourning rituals: some are disrupted, some are maintained, and some new actions are added. The changes in the mourning ritual correspond to Jesus' transformation of death into new life. Aldave Medrano also demonstrates how the final scene at the tomb of Lazarus (11,38b-44) has strong parallels with the scene at the tomb of Jesus (20,1-18). The tomb of Lazarus becomes the place to remember the tomb of Jesus, where places of death are transformed into places of life. Jesus' prayer at Lazarus' tomb brings about an inversion of the interment ritual. Lazarus' emergence from the tomb prefigures Jesus' own being raised and creates a prototype for mourning for believers who die. As Jesus lives, so also with those who believe in him.

Aldave Medrano also notes the ways in which the gender roles are blurred. Both Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalene exhibit emotions and tears typical of females in mourning rituals, Martha, with her more calm confession of faith,

comports herself in a way more associated with males. Moreover, in John 11,33-35 Jesus displays tears and strong emotions, which is more proper for women than men.

Chapter four analyzes the funerary banquet for Lazarus (12,1-11), which is preceded by the plotting of Jesus' death and his withdrawal to Ephraim (11,45-57) and terminates with another sounding of a death knell for the recently resuscitated Lazarus. The celebration of the funeral dinner, however, has two novel elements: the dead person being honored is alive, and the place of honor that should be his is occupied instead by Jesus. For Aldave Medrano, this scene points to the way that the Johannine community gathered to celebrate banquets for their members who have died. They experience Jesus' presence with them in the midst of the assembly as they celebrate the new and eternal life of the one who has died.

The final chapter develops the way in which hearing John 11,1 – 12,11 proclaimed could generate in the hearers an effect analogous to that of mourning rituals. Performance criticism enables the author to show the transformative potential of the text in times of mourning. The context the author proposes for the proclamation of John 11,1 – 12,11 is the celebration of funeral banquets for members of the Johannine community who have died — but with the innovation that they are offered in honor of Jesus, rather than their deceased members. They celebrate Jesus death and God's raising him to life, which has inaugurated the final time, making it possible that those who believe in Jesus receive eternal life. The meals are an effective way of affirming life even while mourning the dead, thus enabling the participants to integrate their loss as they return to daily life.

The chapter concludes with an analysis of how the expected roles of males and females in mourning rituals are blurred in John 11,1 – 12,11; both Martha and Jesus exercise control of themselves and speak elegies and confessions, the actions expected of men; both Mary and Jesus weep and express emotion, the behavior expected of women. By dissolving the cultural boundaries between masculine and feminine and redefining gender roles, the text opens up new possibilities for male and female members of the Johannine community to express their grief in the face of death. Ending on a note that makes clear the pastoral relevance of the work she has elaborated, Aldave Medrano invites her readers to see in the Johannine text a call to all followers of Jesus, men and women, both then and now, to adopt an ethic of care of both the living and the dead, an ethic that most aptly expresses who we are. In facing death, in particular, believers confront their fears, questions, vulnerability, but with faith and confidence.

This book makes a significant contribution to Johannine studies and to studies of ritual and of early Christian practices. The new insights into the gender dynamics in the chosen text add to a growing body of work attending to gender in the Fourth Gospel. The innovative combination of methods yields fresh results and exciting new insights, that are well-argued. It is hoped that the questions opened up by this author, some of which are outlined in her conclusion, will be taken up by her and other scholars in future studies. All serious students of the New Testament will want to engage this fine work.

Catholic Theological Union
Chicago, IL 60615
U.S.A.

Barbara E. REID