

C. Clifton Black and Duane F. Watson, eds. *Words Well Spoken: George Kennedy's Rhetoric of the New Testament*. Studies in Rhetoric and Religion 8. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008. 255 pages. \$39.95.

"The present volume does not intend to be a *Festschrift*. Kennedy has already been twice honored with such volumes. Here, sheer celebration of a senior scholar's mentorship is not the order of the day. Rather, our aim is to take his contribution seriously, to note different and provocative phases in his own work's development, and to observe how other scholars are responding to its challenges in the field of biblical exegesis" (3). That is the stated goal of the editors, C. Clifton Black (Otto A. Piper Professor of Biblical Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary) and Duane F. Watson (Professor of New Testament Studies at Malone University). Such an apology was probably necessary to make because the volume reads very much like a *Festschrift*, with former students of Kennedy joining other scholars who have benefited from a former mentor and seek here to highlight that scholar's contribution as well as build on it.

Reading *Words Well Spoken* feels like pulling a chair up to the "smart table" at the local diner. Nine conversation partners circle the table with one old master, Professor Kennedy himself, trading stories, biographical and autobiographical, that trace the history of rhetorical studies from its beginnings but especially in North America in the last century. Black and Watson called this party together, and invited Kennedy as the guest of honor primarily because he was the pioneer on the American scene for providing, as Watson puts it, "a workable methodology for rhetorical criticism of the gospels and epistles of the New Testament" (43).

One sees what one has been trained to see. When Kennedy turned his attention to the New Testament in the early 1980s his vision had been shaped by over forty years of study of classical rhetoric. That unique angle caused him to see things in the New Testament texts that others had not yet seen, could not have seen, since they didn't have the rhetorical eyes to see or ears to hear. Positing what now seems like an obvious assumption, that the New Testament was a product of its time, namely a thought-world indelibly shaped by rhetoric and its conventions, a new path for fresh readings was opened at a time when it appeared that every historical stone had been turned over in NT studies. Kennedy's approach was the stroke that helped move historical critics off the form-critical dime. Kennedy's own analysis of the NT was brief and incomplete but provocative nevertheless and generative of a new generation of inquirers, many of whom populate the chapters of *Words Well Spoken*.

As Thomas H. Olbricht writes, "Scholarship remains aloft on two wings: explorations of the novel and remembrances of the past" (21). As an excellent example of such scholarship, this volume does both of these things well, and quite engagingly at that. Essays by Margaret D. Zulick, Thomas H. Olbricht, Duane F. Watson, James D. Hester, Frank W. Hughes and C. Clifton Black ride primarily the wing of remembrance. This is not mere hagiography, however, as Kennedy's contributions are also critically evaluated. Indeed, in an intriguing chapter, Black examines why Kennedy has not been as influential among NT scholarship as one might have expected him to be.

With a clear eye on the past, and their feet firmly planted on the shoulders of their predecessors, Vernon K. Robbins, Greg Carey and Blake Shipp ride the wing of the novel and the emergent. Shipp and Carey apply Kennedy's methodology, and expand it in significant ways, to texts Kennedy did not substantively treat: The Acts of the Apostles and the Book of Revelation. Carey demonstrates how the Apocalypse was designed to evoke a powerful variety of emotional responses (*pathos*) among its hearers and readers, fear/hope, aversion/emulation,

promised blessing and inclusion. Shipp notes the “almost complete disregard of Kennedy’s proposals in the study of Acts” and makes the judgment that “The neglect appears almost purposeful” (113). Yet, despite inherent flaws in Kennedy’s method and the misapplications of his method, Shipp argues for more, not less, hermeneutical experiments that incorporate insights from rhetorical readings of the book of Acts.

Anyone interested in rhetoric, NT studies or perhaps especially in anecdotal narrative of how each of these players got involved in the rhetorical study of the NT will enjoy this book. And just as he got the first word in this conversation, which created this particular smart table in the first place, Professor Kennedy gets the last word as well in an autobiographical Afterword where he reveals surprises about his own history of hearing sermons, reading theology and experiencing liturgy. But I will leave to the readers these discoveries. Go get this book, pull up a chair, and get ready for good remembrances and challenging gestures for yet new paths of discovery on the path ahead in rhetorical study.

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