

*John's Gospel and the History of Biblical Interpretation*, 2 vols. By Seán P. Kealy. Mellen Biblical Press Series 60 a–b. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2002. iv + 971 pp., n.p.

Over the centuries, John's Gospel has generated a truly astonishing amount of scholarship. In an admirable, ambitious project, the present two-volume work sets out to chronicle the history of interpreting John's Gospel by providing a chronological listing of authors and works annotated by succinct, survey-style commentary. The author, professor of Scripture at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, PA, has previously published works on the history of interpretation of the Gospels of Matthew (1997) and Mark (1982). The first volume of the present work traces the history of scholarship on John's Gospel up to the nineteenth century; the second volume covers the twentieth century and closes with a discussion of new paradigms and approaches.

At the outset of his study, Kealy cites Markus Bockmuehl's recent plaintive remark that New Testament scholarship has all too frequently neglected the history of interpretation, resembling cappuccino with "all froth and no coffee." As an antidote for Johannine scholarship, Kealy offers his work. According to Kealy, while the Gospel has remained the same, the questions asked in particular time periods have varied. The scope of this review does not permit a detailed critique and interaction, though it should be noted that the depth of Kealy's coverage varies from interpreter to interpreter and there is little effort to provide a larger, integrative treatment throughout. Yet while criticisms could be lodged at many levels, those interested in the study of John's Gospel owe Kealy a considerable debt of gratitude for his labor of love. For our present purposes, it will suffice to summarize briefly Kealy's classification of various stages in the history of interpreting John's Gospel in the last century and to interact with his concluding assessment of the past, present, and future of Johannine studies.

According to Kealy, the twentieth century is best described as the "century of hermeneutics" and evidences several stages of interpreting John's Gospel: the classical stage (1900–1930); source criticism (1930–60); the new critical approach (1968–78); and the pluralistic stage (1979–present). The center of gravity in Johannine studies has moved from Germany (1900–15) to Britain (1916–45), the Continent (1945–80), and North America. Kealy concludes his study by referring to his own article, "Paralysis By Analysis," noting that Johannine studies have moved from viewing the Gospel as a personal eyewitness account to an anonymous reflection of a community's life, loves, and hates at the end of the first century (the "Johannine community hypothesis" in its various permutations).

Beasley-Murray's application of the book of Hebrews' description of Abraham as "without father, without mother, without genealogy" to John's Gospel is apropos here. As Beasley-Murray writes, "Everything we want to know about this book is uncertain, and everything about it that is apparently knowable is matter of dispute. The Gospel is anonymous...." Taking his point of departure from my critique, lodged in 1999, that "notions of political correctness, not authorial intent ... increasingly control biblical interpretation," Kealy proceeds to list essay topics in the volume edited by Fernando Segovia, *What is John?* expressing his belief that the ever-increasing production of readings of the Fourth Gospel will result in "a greater fascination with the Gospel itself" (p. 943).

That may be so, but, one might add, the proliferation of readings, no longer grounded in a hermeneutic that seeks to determine a text's meaning within a framework that assigns primacy to authorial intention as conveyed through the text, has also resulted in the fragmentation of the field of Johannine studies. The center could no longer hold; it has all but collapsed under the weight of a postmodern, anarchy-producing disarray of readings. No longer do interpreters listen

to the text as written by a given ancient author and ultimately the God of Scripture himself. Rather, reading the text has largely become a circular exercise in which a given reader listens to herself by reflecting on a biblical text (as one among many examples, witness Vols. 1 and 2 of the Feminist Companion series on John's Gospel, reviewed elsewhere in this issue).

The sooner Johannine scholars realize that they are headed down a blind alley, and the sooner they repent and return to a more responsible and realistic reading of John's Gospel, one rooted in the notion of divine revelation in and through the biblical text and grounded in authorial, textual intention, the sooner they will return to experiencing genuine fruitfulness in their exegetical endeavor. Kealy's survey of the history of interpreting John's Gospel is helpful in that it provides some of the raw material for reassessing the current state of Johannine studies and in charting out the desirable future of the discipline that has the appearance of liveliness but has lost its mooring, having followed after the gods of the Enlightenment and postmodernism rather than remaining true to the God of the Bible.

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