

D. Moody Smith Jr.
1931–2016

D. Moody Smith Jr., George Washington Ivey Professor Emeritus of New Testament at Duke University and past president of the Society of Biblical Literature (1999), passed away on May 10, 2016.

Although best known for his contributions to Johannine scholarship, Moody Smith engaged the historical and theological issues of the New Testament broadly. His scholarship was characteristically grounded in the text, informed by continental as well as English-speaking scholarship, nuanced, and expressed with reserve and precision. After noting that some of his readers might wish for stronger assertions or more dogmatic claims, Robert Kysar explained Smith's judicious proposals this way: "he believes that something serious is at stake, namely, the quest for truth. And his commitment to that quest is too deep for him ever to lead another away from the truth" (*Exploring the Gospel of John*, 13).

Smith was born in 1931. After finishing high school in Spartanburg, South Carolina, he graduated from Davidson College magna cum laude (1954) and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. He received the B.D. from Duke University in 1957 and went on to Yale University, where he received the M.A. in 1958 and the Ph.D. in 1961. His dissertation, *Composition and Order of the Fourth Gospel: Bultmann's Literary Theory* (Yale University Press, 1965; Wipf & Stock, 2015), set the direction for his later scholarship. The clarity of Smith's exposition and critique of Bultmann's theory made it widely accessible to scholars and students, especially in the United States and Great Britain, and Smith has continued to be the voice through whom Johannine scholarship has understood Bultmann's literary theory. In his review of *Composition and Order*, C. K. Barrett commented, "It is probably fair to say both that the theory is more convincing when Dr. Bultmann is allowed to set it forth in his own way in the context of exegesis, and also that if it cannot stand restatement in Dr. Smith's terms it loses the right to be convincing" (*JTS* 17 [1966]: 440).

A lifelong Methodist, Moody Smith began his teaching career at the Methodist Theological School in Ohio (1960). Five years later, in 1965, he joined the faculty of Duke University, where he taught in the Divinity School and the Graduate Program in Religion. Early in his career Smith spent two years in postdoctoral study, first in Zurich and Basel (1963–1964; Lilly Fellowship) and then in Cambridge (1970–1971; Guggenheim Fellowship). He was elected to membership in the Society for New Testament Studies in 1965. From 1974 through 1980 he was Director of Graduate Studies in Religion at Duke, and in the course of his graduate teaching he directed the dissertations of two dozen Ph.D. students.

Although his research centered on the Gospel and Epistles of John, he taught a wide range of New Testament courses, particularly on the Gospels and Jesus. This broader interest is reflected in the introduction, *Anatomy of New Testament* (7th ed., with Robert A. Spivey and C. Clifton Black, 2013), which has been in print continuously since 1969. This volume, which has been used by countless students over the past forty-seven years, is distinctive for its focus on the documents of the New Testament itself and their interpretation.

Smith's fascination with the questions of John's sources and composition continued to shape his thought. As he himself said, "From the sources my interest moved to the setting, with the goal of getting a better grasp of the theology of John. But the question of sources, particularly as regards the Fourth Evangelist's possible knowledge and use of the synoptic gospels, I have never been able to leave behind" (*Johannine Christianity*, x). He published the Proclamation Commentaries volume on John in 1976; *Interpreting the Gospels for Preaching* in 1980; a collection of his essays under the title *Johannine Christianity: Essays on Its Setting, Sources, and Theology* in 1984; *First, Second, and Third John, Interpretation*, in 1991; *John among the Gospels: The Relationship in Twentieth-Century Research* in 1992; *The Theology of the Gospel of John* in 1995; *John*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries, in 1999; and *The Fourth Gospel in Four Dimensions*, a collection of his later essays, in 2008. He also served as editor of a series entitled Studies on Personalities of the New Testament.

In 1982 he was elected to membership in the American Theological Society. In 1990 Davidson College awarded him the Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*. In 1990 and 1991 he was a resident member of the Center of Theological Inquiry in Princeton. In 1996 he was presented a Festschrift, *Exploring the Gospel of John in Honor of D. Moody Smith*, edited by R. Alan Culpepper and C. Clifton Black.

In 1999 his presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature raised the question, "When Did the Gospels Become Scripture?" This topic harnessed the underlying current of his sustained engagement with the New Testament, and especially the Gospel of John:

my interest in the setting and sources of the Gospel of John has had a theological goal in view.... I remain committed to the importance of historical understanding and historical theology as tasks laid upon us by our scholarly discipline and by the character of Christian theology" (*Johannine Christianity*, xiii).

Smith's friends and former students know that he was an ardent tennis player, even organizing games at meetings of the SNTS, and enjoyed traveling and cruising with his wife, Jane, with whom he celebrated their sixty-first anniversary this past November. Together they regularly hosted his graduate students in their home.

Smith married the former Jane Allen in Spartanburg, South Carolina, in 1954, and he is survived by her. He is also survived by his four children, Cynthia Smith and her husband, Frank Reiss; Catherine Smith Meynardie and her husband, Robert Meynardie; David B. Smith and his wife, Deborah Camp Smith; and Allen Smith and his partner, Andrew Wilson. Additionally, Smith leaves behind six granddaughters: Hannah Mary Reiss, Juliana Cornwell Avery, Elizabeth Grace Meynardie, Isabella Jane Reiss, Mary Margaret Meynardie, and Eleanor Jane Meynardie.

A memorial service will be at Trinity United Methodist Church in Durham on Friday, May 20, at 2:00 p.m. In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to Trinity United Methodist Church, 215 North Church Street, Durham, NC, 27701.

R. Alan Culpepper
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