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BOOK REVIEWS

“And No One Will Keep That Light from Shining”: *Civil Religion after September 11 in Speeches of George W. Bush*. By Nicole Janz. Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2010; pp. vii + 89. \$44.75 paper.

Nicole Janz, a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Politics and International Studies at the University of Cambridge, U.K., has undertaken a new look at George W. Bush’s rhetorical leadership in a study designed to debunk European and some lingering U.S. perceptions that Bush interpreted and acted upon his presidency as an evangelical mission preordained by God. The charge, often media based, that Bush was overly religious and his religiosity made him an exceptional figure in the pantheon of U.S. presidents, is attacked by Janz through the interpretive frame provided by Robert Bellah’s seminal treatise on civil religion.

Janz limits her analysis of Bush’s public address to speeches and remarks delivered from September 11, 2001, to March 19, 2003, the last speech President Bush delivered prior to the Iraq War. She further limits her study only to those “speeches addressed to the American people or to their representatives in Congress rather than those given to international representatives” (4). Though she cites 44 speeches in total, we do not receive a definitive rationale nor concrete criteria for how and why certain speeches for domestic audiences were selected and certain others left out. We are reminded, however, that since 9/11 there has been “a renewed awareness of the term American civil religion” and that scholars have found evidence that America’s “mission to protect freedom” often provides presidents with justificatory arguments for going to war (8). Presidential addresses targeted to multiple audiences in the United States garner vast media coverage and can appeal to mass audiences. The selected time period, of course, can be critical in helping us apprehend the rhetorical strategies President Bush employed in justifying the invasion of Afghanistan, arguing for Homeland Security, increasing the defense budget, and finally, marshaling support for the Iraq war (5). Thus, Janz’s focus on Bellah’s

concept of American civil religion as a critical methodology for analysis and interpretation of the president's addresses to various audiences in the United States in the run up to the Iraq War would seem to provide a useful foundation for detecting or denying Bush's appropriation of civil religious discourse.

This brief book unfolds in three parts. Part One, "Introduction," is comprised of the first two chapters. Chapter 1 discusses problems associated with Bush's "God" talk and covers the research questions, scope, methodology, and structure of the book, as well as previous studies relevant to the task at hand. Chapter 2 defines Bellah's concept of civil religion, defends his work from critics, and establishes a working definition of civil religion, as well as the specific criteria that will be employed in the analysis of Bush's discourse. Janz resurrects Bellah's work from a history of withering critical attack and relative inattention in recent years with the following rationale: "[T]he attempt to find a convincing alternative has so far been unsuccessful" (17). As I will note later in this review, this foundational claim may be open to further interrogation.

Part Two, "Civil Religion in Presidential Speeches," is fleshed out in three chapters. Chapter 3 discusses Bush's evangelical faith, and then sets about analyzing Bush's speeches by applying Bellah's key criteria for identifying civil religion—God and mission, freedom, sacrifice, and rebirth—all of which, Janz concludes, serve as unifying modes of appeal to rally the nation. This analysis is undertaken to answer the key line of inquiry motivating the study: "[D]id Bush really use overly religious language that stands out from his predecessors? Or did he stay within the traditional rhetoric of U.S. presidents, expressed through American civil religion?" (23). Chapter 4 offers a comparison of Bush's civil religious discourse to that of other presidents using the same criteria found in chapter 3. The intent here is to demonstrate that Bush's civil religious discourse *is in line* with that of other presidents, especially during crisis situations; Bush, Janz argues persuasively, is anything but an outlier in this regard. Chapter 5 offers commentary on Bush's "evangelical motifs" and notes that "specific evangelical features are not reflected in George W. Bush's rhetoric in the time period under examination" (63). Interestingly, such evangelical motifs appear to be rather sparse throughout the Bush presidency. For example, Janz claims that "out of hundreds of speeches, Bush refers to Jesus so seldom that it is negligible" (64).

Part Three, "Conclusion," simply comprises the last chapter of the book and offers requisite findings. In chapter 6, then, Janz concludes that George W. Bush "employ[ed] the full repertoire of civil religious elements as defined

by sociologist Robert Bellah” (69). Although Bush’s “God” talk may have legitimated “military attacks against Afghanistan and Iraq” (69), for Janz, “one significant ‘good’ came out of this: new attention to Bush’s rhetoric has suddenly reminded us of how different the American value system has always been compared to that of Europe, and how old myths still make up the American identity” (71).

Janz makes a good case for reclaiming Bellah and his concepts. She makes notable progress debunking European misperceptions and misapprehensions regarding G. W. Bush’s “evangelical” presidency, and her analysis is convincing regarding Bush’s employment of traditional formal appeals earmarked by the key characteristics of American civil religion in his public address. Equally important was the claim that Bush’s appropriation of civil religious discourse was a unifying factor in convincing the American people that the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq were justified. Of course, we do well to remember that Bush’s discursive appeals were made more critical and manifested themselves to U.S. citizens in a more urgent fashion precisely because of the 9/11 attacks on the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and the World Trade Center’s twin towers in New York. Terrorism had invaded the United States in a horrific and unexpectedly palpable way, which increased the saliency of any subsequent presidential public address.

One small disappointment for this reader was the fact that Janz’s analysis did not break any breathtakingly new ground for rhetorical scholars in the United States who are quite familiar with Bellah’s work and its limitations, as well as the long tradition of civil religious discourse attending presidential public address. Janz also does not engage much of the work of rhetorical scholars in this area. For example, she devotes only one line to Roderick P. Hart’s *The Political Pulpit* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1977). Although noting that Hart preferred the term “civic piety,” she made no attempt to discuss Hart’s position or take up his challenges. At a minimum, Hart’s discussion of the rhetorical features of civic piety draws from and implicates presidential public address and thus seems to demand a more full-throttled response on the part of the author. Janz also seems to have overlooked Roderick P. Hart and Jon Pauley II’s *The Political Pulpit Revisited* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2005), a slightly edited edition of the earlier book, which offered some provocative reprinted commentaries first published in the *Journal of Communication and Religion* (2002) featuring Ronald Lee, Carolyn Marvin, Robert Friedenberg, and Martin Medhurst, among others, including, for purposes of full disclosure, this reviewer. (My

original article from the *Journal of Communication and Religion*, which was reprinted in *The Political Pulpit Revisited*, was cited in Janz's book). Hart's own final reflection in that *Revisited* volume, which was conceived and brought to fruition some 25 years after the first appearance of *The Political Pulpit*, might also have informed Janz's work. Serious engagement with *The Political Pulpit Revisited* might have positioned Janz not only to foster fruitful engagement with rhetorical scholars in the United States, but perhaps even to break new ground in defense of Bellah's project.

Nevertheless, Janz's effort is likely to reinvigorate and expand discursive studies dedicated to understanding contemporary instantiations of American civil religion. That she has been able to refocus and reframe international attention on such an important and unique American phenomenon is all the better.

STEVEN R. GOLDZWIG, *Marquette University*

Speechwright: An Insider's Take on Political Rhetoric. By William F. Gavin. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2011; pp. xxii + 149. \$24.95 cloth.

I looked forward to reading this book because Bill Gavin and I have a good deal in common. We are both sons of lower middle-class, immigrant stock parents who survived the Depression. We were both overly influenced by movies as we grew up. We are both Catholic conservatives, who started speechwriting at the top of the political ladder, me for a president, him for a winning presidential candidate. And, in fact, our paths crossed at various junctures. While he was working on Richard Nixon's 1968 Acceptance Speech at the GOP Convention, I was working at the same convention as a researcher-writer for CBS. In 1976, while he was writing for candidate Reagan, I was speechwriting for President Ford. While he was toiling on behalf of House Minority Leader Bob Michel, I was working for the Republican caucus of the Senate. In 1980, while he was working Reagan's successful campaign for president, I was working on George H. W. Bush's unsuccessful one. Thus, I can attest to the fact that Gavin's book resonates with what I know about the political world.