



REVIEW

The Bible and the Priesthood: Priestly Participation in the One Sacrifice for Sins by Anthony Giambrone OP, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI, 2022, pp. xxi + 297, \$22.99, pbk

In commenting on what really is a fine book on the Bible and the Roman Catholic Priesthood I hope to resist the temptation of levelling criticism simply because it is not what I would have done. Placed in a series that seeks to engage ‘a theological reading of the Bible in order to enliven our understanding of the sacraments’ (p. xii), this book is shaped in response to its remit. Noting the overwhelming amount of biblical material on the priesthood, Anthony Giambrone confesses to being selective and to some measure of experimentation, making ‘no pretence whatsoever to offer anything approaching a comprehensive or definitive “biblical theology of the priesthood”’ (p. xv). He has done well, nevertheless, to marshal a remarkable range of typological, cultic, social, and historical evidence to demonstrate the Bible’s witness to the institution of the sacrament of Orders as a participation in Christ’s own priestly fulfilment of eschatological hope.

Giambrone is well aware of historical context and literary diachronic issues, even commenting at one point that ‘a clear view of redactional strata is very important for interpreting this material’ (p. 153. n. 4), an opinion with which I wholeheartedly agree. An essential insight, for example, is that the Priestly material of the Pentateuch post-dates most of the prophetic corpus and hence is in the position of *responding* to prophetic critiques of the cult (cf. p. 82). Still, I felt that arriving at ‘a clear view’ of the biblical texts’ socio-historical realities ought to have been the structuring methodology to ground theological reflection in the ongoing reality of a lived ministry. But this may be merely what I would have done.

The series ‘a Catholic Biblical Theology of the Sacraments’ in which this book appears continues to raise the question ‘what is biblical theology?’. Some thirty years ago, the Dominican moral theologian, Servais Pinckers, observed that increasing specialization risked separating theology from its sources. Exegetes, historians, and theologians emerged as different beasts, no longer sharing the same skill sets nor interests. Despite the instructions of *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943) the fruit of advanced biblical studies seemed rarely to play a part in theological reflection and the exhortation of the Second Vatican Council that ‘the study of the sacred page should be the very soul of theology’ (*Dei Verbum* 1965, §24) appeared to have been forgotten. *The Bible and the Priesthood* seeks to remind us of Church teaching, and to demonstrate its implementation, offering a ‘hermeneutical interlude’ early on in the book to discuss scholarly application of *Dei Verbum*, §12 (pp. 23–35). It is a notable achievement that the book goes on to exemplify this ecclesial hermeneutic. It is of course a *Catholic* biblical theology of the priesthood that is under consideration, and so the opening chapter sets out the Church’s doctrinal positions. This requires a recognition that other Christians

have not come to the same conclusions about the priesthood in their biblical study, and a brief discussion of reformation theology here throws Catholic doctrine into relief.

The rubric 'biblical theology' is in many ways itself a product of theology drifting away from source and the fact that Giambrone begins by acknowledging this divorce is very promising. He reminds us that as recently as 2019 Benedict XVI expressed the belief that the 'abandonment of the Christological interpretation of the Old Testament' was at the heart, not only of a theological shallowness but also of a crisis in living the priesthood itself, and so the book is 'offered as a meditation' on Benedict's thoughts and an attempt to address the problem (p. 3). In this, the book makes a good beginning.

Giambrone's meditations take a range of forms: reflections on biblical texts, excursions on relevant themes, and the above-mentioned discursive interludes on church teaching and hermeneutics which form Part One. The cardinal chapters examine texts from the Old Testament (Part Two) and the New (Part Three), with a summary of key points at the end of each chapter. Because these chapters respond to specific texts, wider biblical themes on priesthood such as priestly genealogies, purity and corruption, messianic royalty, and pastoral ministry are referred to in ten interspersed excursions. The book concludes with a reflection that brings things together, old and new. Also included at the close are some brief 'points of orientation' (p. 256) (perhaps too brief for some) on the ordination of women and the western discipline of priestly celibacy.

An obvious criticism of the book's style is that the choice to employ a range of discursive genres results in an uneven presentation. Such a method has evidently been preferred in order to address as many issues as possible raised by scripture in light of sacramental theology and contemporary experience of the priesthood. The excursions, for instance, give helpful summaries of relevant discussions and offer some literary and historical assessments of the Bible's account of the priesthood's socio-cultic development. While it all feels a bit breathless as we rush from one theme to another, these sections highlight important themes and have the (perhaps intended) consequence of making us want to learn more.

A catholic biblical theology must read scripture as a unity (cf. pp. 24–26) and the idea behind the brief excursions' themes becomes clearer as we turn to the New Testament and Jesus's fulfilling climax of God's providential action. In considering the Gospel witness and the growth of Christian ministry, Giambrone shows how the many Old Testament debates and concerns are resolved and embodied in Christ's saving work. And yet at the same time as offering a continuity with Israel's cultic covenant, Giambrone makes the point is that the priesthood instituted by Christ is also new, focused on the Cross and the Eucharist, rather than on animal slaughter and a single temple. This, in fact, is Giambrone's conclusion: that in the Church's priesthood God has indeed 'done a new thing' (*Isa 43:19*) for which the Old Testament people longed. 'The gift of the Spirit and the New Covenant, although they belong to the old prophecies, burst the old wineskins by their sheer power (*Matt. 9:17*)' (p. 273).

This is a very interesting book, particularly because, as well as examining the role of sanctification with which the priesthood is tasked in light of the scriptural witness, it also faces and explores the crisis of clerical sin. Fascinating too is the idea, following Pope Benedict, that it was the inability to read scripture as a whole, as integral to theology, that precipitated this crisis. Any criticism of how the almost unmanageable amount of biblical material has been handled really comes down to personal priorities.

Giambrone's strength is typology and the Christological interpretation of scripture which lends itself very well to a project of sacramental biblical theology. Nevertheless, an opinion on how biblical texts came together, who wrote them and why, matters for interpretation, and I felt that this exegetical stage could have been more systematically present. By foregrounding the canonical and typological, the book risks stranding its fascinating theological reflections on the conceptual level. While the unity of scripture is an important principle guiding Catholic biblical interpretation, at the same time Old and New Testament texts have a very different provenance, different cultural histories and ontologies, that argues for the preliminary stage of contextualization. While Giambrone observes the historical discussions, I felt that these observations followed in the wake of the theology rather than providing the necessary point of departure. God draws his people on to glory precisely through his providential presence in Israel's and the Church's lived history, and the priesthood is a lived history for the Church's people. Beginning with the history fixes the anchor which allows theology to soar. But then, this is merely what I would have done.

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