



Reviews

THE BIBLE AND BAPTISM: THE FOUNTAIN OF SALVATION by Isaac Augustine Morales, OP, *Baker Academic*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2022, pp. xxv + 230, \$22.99, pbk

This volume is the first in a new series entitled ‘A Catholic Biblical Theology of the Sacraments’, and baptism, as the gateway to the sacraments, seems like a good place to start. Indeed, drawing the typological witness to and nascent ecclesial experience of this foundationally salvific aspect of baptism from Old and New Testaments is a major contribution of the study.

Beginning with the merits of the series, exploring the witness to God’s didactic care in bringing the fallen world to the knowledge of salvation certainly seems to be a worthwhile endeavour. The rubric ‘biblical theology’, however, always gives me pause because the object of such a sub-genre is never clear to me. Is not all theology informed by the bible which is, after all, the ‘soul of theology’ (*Dei Verbum* §24)? What would be the goal of a theology that is not biblical? Such specialisation risks an attitude that finds the scriptural witness mostly superfluous to theology, only to be studied as a specialist interest. It also does not inspire confidence that the field often feels the need to justify what biblical theology is; hence, the preface of this series explains that ‘the expression “biblical theology” is used to indicate that the series engages in a theological reading of the Bible in order to enliven our understanding of the sacraments’ (p. xiv). Speaking of a ‘theological reading of the Bible’ seems to me preferable because this describes an exegetical emphasis rather than a division of theology. If this is the goal of the ‘biblical theology’ that this series undertakes, then it certainly has potential and as the first book of the series, Morales does this well.

Now turning to the book, its stated contribution, ‘inspired by the writings of the Church Fathers as well as the Church’s liturgy’ (p. xxii), is that this volume draws on *both* Old and New Testaments in search of God’s pedagogical and salvific purpose in giving us the gift of baptism. The book thus has two parts each devoted to exploring the bible’s two testaments. The first part has four chapters and examines the Old Testament’s water imagery, while the second is twice as long, including eight chapters on baptism in the New Testament. The emphasis on the New Testament is understandable, given that the radical witness to the sacrament’s purpose and effects begins with Christ. In this way, Part One is a ‘reading

backwards’—a phrase gratefully borrowed from Richard Hays (p. xxiii)—in which water in the Old Testament is seen in a new revelatory light.

This is not to say that this book’s Old Testament exegesis is swamped with spiritual readings at the expense of the literal sense. The success of Morales’s scholarship is to let the Old Testament images speak for themselves, gaining significance and depth for understanding the Church’s sacramental life precisely as an enrichment, not a Christological conquest.

The first chapter takes water as life-giving, looking at creation (*Gen* 1–2), and images from the *Psalms* and the prophetic books, before dealing in chapter two with the perhaps surprising image of water as a bringer of death with reference to the Flood, the crossing of the Red Sea and imagery from the prophets once more. The balance between these first two chapters recognises a fundamental role of water as an inclusion at the opening and close of the entire bible (cf. p. 3). In *Gen* 1:2, water represents the chaos out of which the created order is formed (vv.6-9). In turn, *Rev* 21:1 understands the new heavens and new earth to be without the deathly chaos of the seas, although life-giving water appears in *Rev* 22. The tension between these aspects of water will be effectively brought to bear on the New Testament language of baptism being a dying and rising with Christ in chapter eight.

Chapter three turns to the Old Testament’s concern with freedom from slavery, expressed once more in water imagery. The crossing of the Red Sea is revisited as liberation, looking at the exodus tradition in many Old Testament texts. The further likeness of the exodus in the book of *Joshua* as the Israelites cross the Jordan lends itself to a typological understanding of baptism as freedom from sin and entry into the Promised Land. The insight of this discussion, however, is to draw out the purpose of this freedom – to worship God (pp. 54–55). Thus, Morales begins to build his argument that baptism is the true gateway to the Church’s sacramental life.

Water brings not only life, death, and freedom, but *purity* in Old Testament tradition, a relevant discussion if our baptismal calling is to worship. Chapter four discusses the bible’s legal witness to preparing oneself for worship, along with echoes in the psalms and prophets of temple liturgy. Although Morales is careful to underline that ritual purity does not equate to moral purity, in these texts, nevertheless, purification for and by means of worship allows for a deep reflection on the purpose of the baptised life.

Thus prepared, the book turns to the New Testament in Part Two carrying the Old Testament’s literal sense into the light of the climax of the biblical witness – Christ. This really is Morales’s strength, and these eight chapters discuss the evangelical witness to Christ as the model and source of baptism, before turning to the purpose and effects of the sacrament, typologically represented in the Old Testament, as discussed and interpreted in the epistles of the early church. As well as developing the argument that baptism allows for worship—which means a sanctification by the indwelling of the Trinity in the believer—Morales examines what being baptized ‘in the name’ might signify. In this we revisit the Old Testament, the

Holy Name, and the expression ‘calling on the name of the Lord’ to indicate worship. The typological import of this concept is usefully brought to bear on Peter’s recommendation in *Acts* (in citing the prophet Joel) that ‘whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved’ (*Acts* 2:21; cf. *Joel* 3:5 *HB*) and the great commission of *Matthew* (28.19). This is a very interesting contribution to reflection on baptism and I felt that this Old Testament theme even deserved its own chapter in Part One. The book’s second part concludes with acknowledgement that the baptismal life is an entry into the Body of Christ and is hence a sacrament of unity, calling us forward to fulfil the command of love.

If I had a criticism of this study, it is that it is quite descriptive, particularly in the Old Testament section, leaving the reader to make the expected connections. What is more, the fascinating fact that water seems to be uncreated in the *Genesis* 1 account (cf. *Gen* 1:2) I felt needed more treatment as relevant for baptismal imagery. Much of the discussion also seems to be an acknowledged synthesis of insights from previous scholarship. Nevertheless, such groundwork is helpful and needs to be done for us to take up the challenge of analysis. In all, if this series is indeed devoted to understanding the biblical witness to the Church’s sacramental existence, then this is a very good introduction to such a project. The question remains, however, whether this is how we are expected to understand the meaning of a ‘Catholic Biblical Theology’. We await further books in the series to judge.

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THE DISCOVERY OF BEING & THOMAS AQUINAS: PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES edited by Christopher M. Cullen, S.J. and Franklin T. Harkins, *The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C., 2019, pp. vi + 311, £79.95, hbk.*

One of the ways in which St Thomas distinguished the speculative sciences from each other was through the kinds of being they considered. Thus, whilst natural philosophy considered material being and mathematics quantified being, metaphysics, uniquely, considered being insofar as it was being (*In Meta.* IV, # 530). This way of characterising metaphysics, however, inevitably led to further questions. For instance, how does one acquire the requisite notion of being? Does such a notion, which henceforth we can call the metaphysical notion of being, differ from being as first known? Once acquired how might this notion be employed in