

rational investigation be started anew. In any case, as he says (*Summa contra gentiles* 1, 4), ‘if this truth [the divine revelation] were left solely as a matter of enquiry for human reason... few would possess knowledge of God’. While belief in the existence of God is the result of philosophical argument (the Five Ways), most believers in practice take it as a matter of faith, so Aquinas explicitly held. Moreover, by simply reminding us of the role of will and divine grace in his account of the theological virtue of faith, Di Ceglie clears Aquinas of the widely accepted Protestant criticism (Arvin Vos as well as early Plantinga, see page 25) that, by supposedly placing confidence uniquely in the act of intellect which is assent to revealed truth, the conversion of heart on the believer’s part is damagingly compromised if not quite overlooked. By reminding us of the role he attributes to the effect of divine grace on the believer’s will, Di Ceglie simply gives us St Thomas Aquinas’s full analysis of the reality of Christian faith. Finally, as the intellect’s assent to divinely revealed truths is brought about by the impact of divine grace on the believer’s will, to quote Aquinas’s characterisation of faith once again, this does not diminish the need for activity on the part of reason. On the contrary, as Di Ceglie insists in concluding: Christians with a faith that is a virtue granted by God, occurring as ‘perfected’ by charity, would love exploring whatever invites engagement by our powers of reasoning. In the final footnote, we are referred to recent debates on the effects of faith in the constitution of the intellectual virtues (Grant Macaskill and Kent Dunnington) — ‘Aquinas beyond Aquinas’ (page 159), as Di Ceglie puts it, perhaps somewhat too cautiously at the end of this splendid book, at least for readers who are well versed in the ‘virtue ethics’ of St Thomas Aquinas.

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**FAMILY AND IDENTITY IN THE BOOK OF JUDGES [Studies in Cultural Contexts of the Bible, 7] by Bruno J. Clifton, Brill, Schöning, Leiden, 2022, pp. xii + 225, €99.00, hbk**

I should probably start with a disclaimer: the author is Bruno J. Clifton OP, a brother of the English Province whom I know well. Indeed, he was kind enough to mention me in the Preface of this book, and I recall – it must have been fifteen or more years ago – teaching him Old Testament at Blackfriars, Oxford. This is very much a case of the student surpassing the teacher, and the book represents the fruits of many years study at Oxford, the Biblicum in Rome, and then Cambridge. If this initial offering

represents only the first fruits, then we have reason to hope for a bountiful harvest.

The *Book of Judges* is surely one of the less-well-known works of the Old Testament, a collection of stories set during the period after the conquest of the Promised Land under Joshua, but before the establishment of the United Monarchy under first Saul and then David. I use the word ‘collection’ carefully, because most scholars would agree that one or more editors have gathered together a range of tales from disparate, much smaller groups of people, tales that originally told a story meaningful to each of those local areas, with a view to bringing them together into a somewhat artificial national history. This national history – a part of a much broader chronicle that takes us from the conquest of the Land to the Babylonian exile – seeks to portray the pre-monarchical period as one in which the lack of a central, unifying royal figure was a disadvantage, and at the same time one in which the canker of lawlessness that was to lead to the exile had already begun to eat away at the body politic.

A key theme of this book is the ‘apparent dissonance between the book [of Judges]’s unified depiction of Israel’s society and the more fragmented reality’ (p. 41). In this regard, we are on familiar territory within Old Testament scholarship. However, Clifton’s programme seeks in a certain sense to reverse the practice of historical-critical scholarship: it has become commonplace to use the books of the Old Testament, and perhaps in particular these dissonances between ‘source material’ and ‘redaction’, to uncover the hidden historical reality of Israel. To put it bluntly, the *meaning* of these biblical passages is what it tells us, very often against the plain sense of the text, about history. But this is not how historical criticism began. The original intention – embraced most notably by the Church in *Divino Afflante Spiritu* in 1943 – was that historical study of various kinds should illumine the meaning of the texts. The truly Catholic biblical scholar studies history in order better to understand the Bible, and not the other way round.

Clifton’s particular interest is in how the individual tales within the *Book of Judges* have meaning within the societies from which they originated. He seeks ‘the meaning on account of which the story was told in the first place, and then retold and cherished as a cultural artefact’ (p. 11). These meanings, it is Clifton’s conviction, pertain to notions of social identity, of how the individual is situated within family and other groups, of questions of loyalty: to whom is it owed, and from whom can it be expected. Thus the meanings are to be found by familiarising ourselves, as best we can, with the social milieux and traditions that obtained in ancient Israel.

Thus the first chapters of the book deal with these questions of social identity (chapter two) and the particular realities of Israel in the Late Bronze and Iron ages, and the third chapter offers an extremely helpful and interesting survey of the latest archaeological and other evidence for the nature of life and society in Palestine in these years. Clifton finds an analogy between the nature of the *Book of Judges* itself and the society

it reflects: the book is a ‘collection of local stories *co-existing* [emphasis original] within a wider narrative’ (p. 57) reflecting the attempt to integrate a fragmented tribal society into a cohesive nation. But even as these stories are brought together and thus given new meanings, the original meanings of the individual tales must continue to resonate with the socio-historical memories of those to whom they originally appealed. Thus Clifton argues for a ‘methodological hierarchy by which attentiveness to the meaning of the folkloric core enables a better grasp of its reconfigured meaningfulness when this material is subsequently employed within a national narrative’ (p. 95). First things first, in other words.

In practice, though he acknowledges the ultimate goal of allowing these stories of the Judges to speak with new meaningfulness to the contemporary world, Clifton largely restricts himself to looking for the earliest layer of meaning, though he does offer some suggestive remarks about how Judges might be properly appropriated today. For example, in his chapter on the story of Abimelech and Jephthah (*Judges* 9 and 11 respectively) he draws out the lesson that ‘it is not *what* but *who* you know’ (p. 96). But his well-evidenced argument is that this pointed illustration, so relevant to today’s society, is a crucial element of the original import of their stories, which the redactional insertion of these individual, local heroes into a national history cannot obscure.

The latter half of the book, then, turns to some of the individual stories in *Judges*, specifically, in addition to those of Abimelech and Jephthah already mentioned, the tale of Samson and the Timnites, a story it seems of a man choosing a wife because he likes the look of her, notwithstanding the social difficulties that might arise (*Judges* 14); the slaying of the army general Sisera by Jael, the wife of one of his allies who had invited him into her tent (*Judges* 4); and the in every way obscure (and, as Clifton puts it, ‘horrific’) story of the rape of the nameless wife of a nameless Levite in Gibeah (*Judges* 19). Each of these episodes presents real difficulties of interpretation. To put it bluntly, they strike us (at least, they strike me) as peculiar, alienating, and not obviously helpful in the preaching of the Gospel.

It is therefore to Clifton’s credit that he has rekindled my interest in this difficult book and my determination to read it anew. When one visits an art gallery, one gets so much more out of the experience when accompanied by an expert who can really draw out the significance of the works. This, rather than high-brow sneering, is the proper role of the critic, whether it be of the visual arts, of literature, of music or whatever. I cannot give higher praise to my brother Bruno than to say that it is in this finest, highest sense that he has shown himself in this book to be a biblical critic, and indeed a historical critic. He writes always with tremendous clarity, his high scholarship never leading him into pompous obscurity, but above all with a transparent love for the material which communicates itself so readily to the reader. He finishes his book not with a set of over-arching conclusions but rather with the – quite modestly stated – claim that he hopes

he has shown the value of his interpretive method. He will, no doubt, be delighted to know that, in my eyes, he has done so superbly.

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**AQUINAS, BONAVENTURE, AND THE SCHOLASTIC CULTURE OF MEDIEVAL PARIS: *PREACHING, PROLOGUES, AND BIBLICAL COMMENTARIES* by Randall B. Smith, *Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2021, pp. x + 452, £75.00, hbk***

This study offers a close-up - and vivid - depiction of the actual process of graduating in the thirteenth-century as a Master of the University of Paris. Like Oxford and its offshoot, Cambridge, Paris was run as a medieval guild, with the Masters setting requirements and standards which aspiring apprentices (students) and journeymen (Bachelors of Arts) had to meet before they could be tested in the knowledge and skills they would need as Masters of Arts in their own right. For those who sought to become Masters in the higher-degree subject of Theology, the final examination required them to display the necessary skills in disputation, lecturing, and preaching (*disputatio, lectio, and praedicatio*). A Bachelor of Theology as well as a Master had to preach to the University at intervals. The structure of a sermon differed from that of a lecture in ways which were currently undergoing development. All this is discussed with close reference to surviving examples.

The preparatory studies for such examinations were the *principia*, which a candidate would have written as prologues to Biblical commentary. When he became a Master he would give an address at his inauguration (a *principium* or *introitus*); as a lecturer he would begin a course of lectures on a text also with a *principium*). However, the friars were first and foremost preachers, and the development of medieval Latin preaching reached significant stages in the thirteenth century; and this too is explored in some detail. The formal requirements of order and design were largely applied to lecturing as to preaching.

Candidates who were friars had to submit to the same process of examination, despite a certain amount of wrangling with the secular scholars about the syllabus as the mendicant Orders entered the new universities. In the 1250s two such candidates were to become leading figures in their own Orders, the Dominican, Thomas Aquinas, and the Franciscan, Bonaventure. Parts Two and Three of the book deal with Aquinas and Bonaventure, respectively, taking each through the development of his writing after considering the *principium* for his inception and the *resumptio* with which the ceremony concluded. This makes possible a comparison of their ap-