

Glenn P. Ambrose. *The Theology of Louis-Marie Chauvet: Overcoming Onto-Theology with the Sacramental Tradition*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012. 205 pages. \$89.95.

Preaching arises out of complex matrices that include, at least, texts, tradition, ordinance, experience, communities, and one's own theological perspective. Arguably all acts of the Church share this diverse and robust point of departure. These various influences are themselves significant, yet their power extends beyond their own limits; the way in which a preacher and a church collectively prioritize and systematize these numerous influences becomes itself a signifier and language to the world. In this way, philosophy remains a component of theological education and training for Christian clergy, providing theories and methods for how the interpretive task plays out not just in scripture for preaching, but also words for the world.

It is within this living and mutually affirming relationship of philosophy and Christian theology that Louis-Marie Chauvet conceptualized his own work, perhaps best known in his *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*. In explicitly relating the two disciplines and their respective claims regarding language, meaning, and sense, Chauvet spans the breadth of Christian theological commitments by grounding his work in the sacramental life of the Church. Chauvet's work is made more accessible by an interlocutor, one who provides both a survey as well as a critical eye to what Chauvet achieves in his writings. Ambrose offers this double service, in a manner both concise and succinct manner.

Ambrose's book jumps right into the philosophical milieu that informed Chauvet's own works. While the book is accessible to those without training in modern and postmodern philosophy, Ambrose (like Chauvet) unpacks figures of immense complexity and denseness such as Heidegger, Lacan, and others; nonetheless, readers of this book will benefit from either having a background in philosophy themselves, or a high-quality philosophical reference aid handy. This book is for an educated clergy, invested in education and interdisciplinary conversation.

After introducing the reader to Chauvet's philosophical conversation partners, Ambrose undertakes an examination of how these philosophical concepts and trajectories play out within linguistics and social sciences; how rarified ideas become systems of social praxis and interpretation. Paralleling Chauvet, Ambrose explains his own moves, while providing a reasonable critique of potential problems for Chauvet's own line of thinking. In this section, Ambrose is particularly successful in clearly articulating how the philosophical becomes (in Chauvet and, arguably, in broader academia) the social scientific. For both Chauvet and Ambrose, the social sciences run the risk of never examining the depth of the Christian confession (and profession); they outline the breadth of Christian life, but cannot alone illuminate its core. The missing component that Chauvet declares necessary is that, in order for the theological to be examined as anything more than merely an interior logic for and of the Church, philosophy and theology must ground themselves in the sacramental life of actual communities of faith, understood precisely with that content and context. Ambrose delineates the contours of this declaration and methodological move, at times in ways that are even clearer than Chauvet's own.

Yet, does any interpretation ever escape itself, ever become more than human artifice? Ambrose explores how this question plays itself out, given the philosophical resources integral to such inquiry. Having done the difficult conceptual work in advance, Ambrose is well-equipped to build his arguments on solid, if not ultimately conclusive, foundations. Readers will be well-served working through the first half of the book; Ambrose makes the figures he must deal with

as accessible as possible. In doing so, the latter chapters are both a critique of Chauvet's conclusions and a presentation of Ambrose's own alternatives.

The preacher who purchases this book will benefit from the opportunity to locate his or her own proclamation within a context of many possibilities and voices. The interpretive act of preaching becomes here a manifestation of the world creation inherent in all aspects of Christian life. Perhaps Ambrose's best contribution is that his reading of sacramental life is, especially in the latter chapters, intensely practical. Questions of idolatry, mourning, and ethics are all addressed; reaching the end, readers can both hear Ambrose's and Chauvet's conclusions on these issues, and be better equipped to draw their own. This book can be a bit intimidating at first, but it is a worthy and worthwhile read.

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