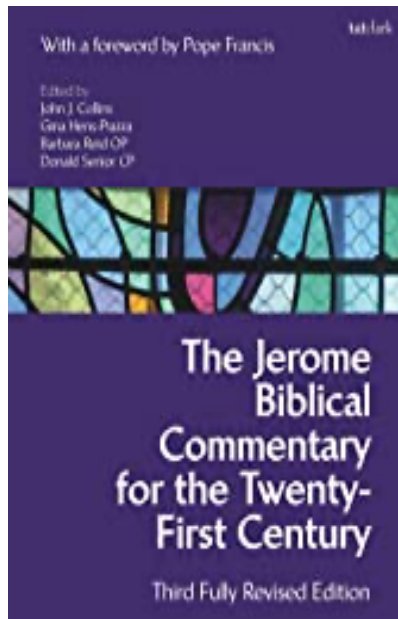


RBL 10/2023



John J. Collins, Gina Hens-Piazza, Barbara Reid, OP, and Donald Senior, CP, eds.

The Jerome Biblical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century

3rd edition

London: T&T Clark, 2022. Pp. xxvii + 2196. Hardcover. \$100.00. ISBN 9781474248853.

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The publication of the first edition of the *Jerome Biblical Commentary (JBC)* in 1968 was a watershed moment in American Catholic biblical scholarship. That volume was a scholarly tour de force edited by three of the most accomplished and influential Catholic biblical scholars: Raymond Brown, Joseph Fitzmyer, and Roland Murphy. The book showcased the quality of Catholic scholarship in a field that had been dominated by German and American Protestant scholars. It demonstrated how quickly Catholic biblical scholarship developed following the publication of Pius XII's 1943 encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, which lifted the veil of ecclesiastical suspicion under which Catholic biblical scholars had labored. Also, the *JBC* provided a valuable resource for the biblical movement that flowered among both Catholics following the Second Vatican Council. Because of the popularity of the 1968 *JBC*, a second updated edition appeared in 1990, also edited by Brown, Fitzmyer, and Murphy.

To carry on the work of the first two editions of the *JBC*, *The Jerome Biblical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century* had to reflect to the current shape of American Catholic biblical scholarship, the face of which has changed since the first edition of the *JBC* appeared. This is apparent from the list of the editors and contributors of the three editions. The editors of the first two editions were Catholic priests. Fifty Catholic scholars contributed to the first edition. Thirty-two were members of religious communities of men. Eight were diocesan priests, and eight were lay men. There were only two women contributors—both religious sisters. Most contributors studied at the Pontifical

Biblical Institute, Catholic University of America, or other Catholic centers of higher learning. Most taught in small seminaries or Catholic colleges in the eastern United States. Only seven contributors came from the Midwest and only four from west of the Mississippi.

The list of contributors to the 2022 volume has grown to ninety-five, including twenty-seven from outside the United States. Only one of the editors is a priest. The other editors include a religious sister, a lay woman, and a lay man. Sixty contributors are men and thirty-five women. Lay men account for twenty-eight of the contributions and lay women for twenty-two. African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Americans are among the contributors. The contributors studied at a variety of American and European universities, and they teach not only in seminaries and schools of theology but also in denominational and secular colleges and universities. The editors succeeded in assembling a diverse group of authors: men and women, lay folk, priests, and religious, and senior and junior scholars. Most of all, the roster of authors reflects the cultural sweep of Catholic biblical scholarship.

An even greater contrast between the two earlier editions of the *JBC* and the 2022 volume lies in the methodology employed by those whose work appeared in the respective volumes. In the first two editions of the *JBC*, the verse-by-verse commentaries on each book of the Bible were historical-critical in approach and replete with citations of scholarly monographs and articles. The 2022 volume reflects the influence of the 1993 publication of the Pontifical Bible Commission entitled *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, which finds value in a variety of exegetical and hermeneutical methods, including feminist, social-scientific, literary-critical, and contextual approaches.

In addition to the commentaries on each book of the Bible, each of the three editions of the *JBC* contain thematic articles. The thrust of the thematic articles in the first two editions demonstrated that Catholic biblical scholarship can and did employ the historical-critical method first developed by Protestant scholars and looked upon with suspicion by some Catholic ecclesiastical authorities. The twenty-two topical articles in the 2022 edition are the standout feature of the volume. These articles along with the commentaries on the books of the Bible are case studies in the development of Catholic biblical scholarship beyond the historical and theological framework that once dominated the discipline. They reveal Catholic scholars to be among the exponents of contemporary exegetical and hermeneutical approaches.

Though the 2022 edition has about the same number of thematic articles as the earlier editions, some of the topics in the 2022 edition received virtually no attention in either the 1968 or 1990 editions. Among such topics are feminism, Latinx biblical interpretation, Asian American approaches to the Bible, ecumenism, and interreligious relations. Thematic articles serve to frame the 2022 edition. The volume begins with several introductory articles that deal with geography, history, and archaeology. The volume concludes with several articles that explore various modes

of the Bible's role in contemporary Catholicism, such as in the liturgy, spirituality, and ethics. Other articles are interspersed throughout the volume and serve to introduce various sections of the commentary (e.g., Pentateuch, prophetic literature, the Synoptic Gospels, and the New Testament letters).

In comments made during the 2022 Annual Meeting of the Catholic Biblical Association, John Collins, one of the volume's editors, asked whether a specifically Catholic commentary is necessary today. Contemporary biblical scholarship is the product of the collaboration among Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic scholars. Jews and Protestants are active members of the Catholic Biblical Association of America. Articles by scholars from all shades of belief are published in the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*. Catholic scholars have been trained in Jewish, Protestant, and secular institutions. Protestant and Jewish scholars have served as visiting professors of Catholic centers of biblical scholarship such as the École Biblique and the Pontifical Biblical Institute. The contribution that Catholicism has to offer to this marvelous and necessary collaboration is the diversity of Catholicism—diversity in doctrinal, liturgical, cultural, and spiritual traditions—all of which distinguish the Catholic approach to the Bible.

As is the case with any multiauthored volume, some contributions are better than others. Still, the 2022 volume is a worthy successor to its ground-breaking predecessors. It is not just an update of the previous two editions of the *JBC*. The commentaries on the individual books of the Bible are arranged in canonical sequence, and their section-by-section format follows the usual commentary format rather than the verse-by-verse format followed in the first two editions of the *JBC*. This serves to make the commentaries more accessible and useful to a readership beyond the community of biblical scholars.

For today's American Catholic biblical scholars, the *Jerome Biblical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century* represents the complete and final vindication of their predecessors whose work was sometimes considered irrelevant and even detrimental to the Catholic community of faith. Pope Francis in his foreword to the volume underscores "the importance and mission of biblical scholarship at the service of the community of faith" (viii) and assures biblical scholars that the fruit of their engagement with the Scriptures is the most precious gift that they can give to others.