Insightful, Detailed And Groundbreaking Analysis

Leviticus served as the liturgical handbook of the Levitical Priesthood of the Israelites. From a professor of Religion and the Bible at the University of California at Berkeley comes a comprehensive commentary on Leviticus, now available with a new translation that is sure to set the standard for years to come.

My Personal Review:
Jacob Milgrom, a Conservative rabbi and modern Bible scholar, is a, if not the, leading authority on Leviticus. Milgrom's painstakingly thorough commentary on the first sixteen chapters of Leviticus has revolutionized the modern understanding of the rituals and practices described in the book. Drawing upon classical (and some obscure) Jewish interpreters, modern scholarship, and his own brilliant insights, Milgrom argues that Leviticus' seemingly dry recounting of rituals and practices expresses a profound theology of Israel, a theology based upon life and death, good and evil, with the G*d of Israel supreme. Milgrom argues that Leviticus banishes demons from its theology and posits man's choices as the cause of evil. Analogizing the sacrificial system to "The Portrait of Dorian Grey", Milgrom argues that sin creates impurity on the Tabernacle and the more serious the sin, the more severe the pollution. Pollution unchecked can drive the divine presence from the people's midst. Sacrifice (chiefly the hattat/purification offering) served to remove the impurity but only if the sinner was motivated by asham/guilt. In addition to explaining the differing types of sacrifices, Milgrom also explains the dietary laws (kashrut) as a reflection of the priestly theology. To twist a phrase, taxonomy recapitulates theology. Milgrom argues that the dietary laws reflected and fostered a profound respect for life, both animal and human. Milgrom also investigates in detail the purity laws regulating childbirth, menstruation,
sex, certain diseases and similar physical causes of impurities. He argues that the laws governing physical impurities reflected the priestly life/death theology but that physical causes of impurity were understood differently than moral causes of impurity. Milgrom proceeds verse by verse and each chapter is followed by fascinating essays in which he sets out in a more orderly fashion his interpretation. His work is regularly cited by leading scholars but the work is accessible to non-experts, though it is not an "easy read" by any means. Be prepared to read and reread this work in order to grasp all that Milgrom is saying. Milgrom's interpretation opens up not only Leviticus but virtually every other page of the Bible to new interpretations. Milgrom includes a huge bibliography and detailed indices. One complaint - the Anchor Bible series does not set out the Hebrew text so be prepared to try to decode the transliteration system employed by Milgrom. I highly recommend this book to anyone seeking to grapple with the meaning of Leviticus. Christian and Jews, modern scholars and lay persons all can benefit from reading Milgrom's penetrating analysis.