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Introductions to the Bible:

Water in the Wilderness, Understanding the Bible, Introduction to the Bible

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INTRODUCTIONS TO THE BIBLE

WATER IN THE WILDERNESS, UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE.

By T. G. Chiffot. Translated by Luke O'Neill. New York: Herder and Herder, 1967. 141 pp.

INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLE. By Pierre Grelot. Tr. by G.

Patrick Campbell. New York: Herder and Herder, 1967. 436 pp. 12 maps.

If learned and lengthy introductions help readers understand the books of the Bible once they have the holy book in hand, this enthusiastic volume will attract them to the Word of God and prepare them, with great expectations, for that vital encounter. Though not a trained Scripture scholar, Père Thomas Chiffot, O.P. was the biblical editor of Cerf publications and the moving spirit behind its numerous and remarkable projects, such as the Jerusalem Bible. The love and appreciation of the Scriptures as the life-giving Word of God is what the author communicates to those who will dialogue with him and accept his guidance.

The book is divided neatly into brief sections and chapters. The first part explains fundamental ideas like inspiration, inerrancy, interpretation with clarity and warmth, and adds handy hints on ways to read the Bible. The second part purports—far too modestly—to offer “simple thoughts to nourish our faith”: the Bible as Sacred History and Promise, the Book of Christ, of the Church, of prayer, a mirror of ourselves. Rich fare indeed, even if simply presented!

The author casts a critical eye, in the last part, on various problems that have affected attitudes towards the Bible, its defence and its interpretation. Rationalistic historicism, Kirkegaardian existentialism, the liturgical and ecumenical movements have exerted influence of one type or other on the biblical movement. Emphasis is placed on reaching the authentic meaning of the human author as the only way to find God's word and on the demanding task of translators to strive for the greatest possible accuracy along with modern comprehensibility. “Christian people are entitled to the Bible exactly as it is.” God's message is in the lowly human words which cannot be ignored; even the truth is in the biblical *image* rather than in the idea we manage to draw from it. There is a masterful essay on the “imagination” that went into the Bible's composition—even on the part of God—and that must be exercised in reading it intelligently.

The translator has produced a lively, readable English version (“Daddy's boy,” Uncle Clarence and Aunt Abigail, Canaanite slang, and Julie Christie!), but charming Gallic flavor still remains in a few expressions (“cross the Pyrenees,” “bourgeois morality”) and some literary allusions.

As a popular introduction to the Bible for beginners as well as oldsters, this sound and cheerful little book cannot be recommended too warmly.

There can never be an oversupply of good, popularly written books on the Bible, if "easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful" (Vatican II Decree on Divine Revelation, par. 22). The *Introduction to the Bible* of Pierre Grelot, Scripture professor of the Paris *Institut Catholique*, has long been considered one of the best general introductory works in French. The present English translation evidences the same "unquestionable scholarship and high readability," as the publisher's ad on the book jacket claims without any exaggeration, and should find a wide, appreciative audience.

Father Grelot has avoided the methodology of technical introductions that treat the books according to the artificial order of the canon; he chose rather to present the natural order of growth and development of the various texts within the appropriate life-settings. Such an arrangement has the advantage of helping the reader enter more sympathetically into Israel's salvation history and her encounters with the covenant God which are now enshrined in the written traditions. It has also guided the author in focusing as sharply as possible on the doctrinal message, the word of God, which is the divine revelation as it was received and assimilated into the blood stream of Israel through oral teachings, liturgy, prayers, and all facets of living tradition, in both the Old and New Testaments. The historical perspective highlights the dynamism of the biblical traditions as they prepare men to meet and accept the Word of God incarnate.

After a brief chapter putting the reader "On the Threshold of the Bible" with hints on how to approach it, the author plunges immediately into the origins of Israel and her early history from Moses down to Solomon. There follow two valuable and masterfully expressed essays that explain the growth of Israel's early traditions from the oral to the written form and present her fundamental faith in God and in man's relation to him. After a summary of the people's history continuing down to the exile, two chapters highlight the uniquely Israelite phenomenon, the prophets and their message. The rise of Judaism in the Persian period and the Hellenistic age are neatly sketched as background for the postexilic literature. A transition chapter on late Judaism leads into the N.T. A view of Jesus as Messiah and Son of God precludes the study of the various books: the synoptics, epistles, Johannine writings. The final chapter touches upon the important general questions on the Bible as word of life, such as those on inspiration and inerrancy, relation of Scripture to tradition, and interpretation.

This table of contents clearly reveals the outline of a course (or rather many courses) on the whole of Scripture. Besides, the book contains many pedagogical aids. At the end of each chapter the author has added copiously annotated bibliographies and study guides, as well as a judicious selection of extra-biblical texts, generally two or three, that stem from diverse sources, like ancient monuments, Church fathers, and modern writers. There are also five chronological tables, a dozen maps and several indices. All these features indicate how invaluable this introduction is for the classroom and for all serious readers of the Bible. It could also be helpful for teachers in college and even seminaries: the author has the knack of expressing abstruse scholarly views succinctly and clearly.

The present review copy with pp. 321-328 misplaced after p. 344 is no doubt exceptional and simply a case of Herder nodding. A final point: the book is reasonably priced—by US standards—but still well beyond the range of most prospective buyers in the Philippines and the rest of Asia. If only US publishers could realize the economic situation of developing countries and produce suitable editions with soft covers and less costly paper for export, they would be benefiting an immense portion of humanity and would find to their delight far wider and more appreciative audiences in the Orient and elsewhere.

P. J. CALDERONE, S.J.

ON QUESTIONS RELATING TO PHILIPPINE POPULATION

FIRST CONFERENCE ON POPULATION, 1965. Edited by Mercedes B. Concepcion. Quezon City: The University of the Philippines Press, 1966. xii, 519 pp.

Anthropologists tell us that Filipinos are accustomed to unite into their "alliance" systems persons whom they find personally helpful. Social scientists, on this score, would do well to make room in their "alliance systems" for this book. They will find it a helpful friend for a long time to come.

The editor, Mercedes Concepcion, modestly asserts in the foreword that the multi-disciplinary group constituting the conference participants rather posed questions upon population matters than found answers so that they identified rather than wholly clarified issues. Nevertheless, this is the first substantial set of population essays, written under a