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Biblical Guides:
Meet the Bible:
Understanding the Bible

Review Article: Philip J. Calderone

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in these deceptively simple pages. As we said in the beginning of this review, the work is not a complete treatise. It is, most probably, not exactly and *in omnibus* what 'the doctor would prescribe' for our local college theology classes, but among recent books on the Church which may be able to render service to teachers of these classes, it is surely one of the best and most useful.

C. G. ARÉVALO, S.J.

BIBLICAL GUIDES

MEET THE BIBLE! (1); MEET THE BIBLE! (2) THE OLD TESTAMENT. By John J. Castlot, S. S. Baltimore: Helicon, 1960, 1961. xiv-144, viii-176 pp. \$2.95, \$3.95.

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE. By Ignatius Hunt, O.S.B. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1962. xvi-207 pp. \$3.95.

The numerous brightly jacketed volumes and pamphlets in book-shops illustrate the current popular enthusiasm for things biblical. These attempts at popularization of the new scholarship, appearing in ever increasing numbers, tend to embarrass both readers and reviewers alike by their quantity, quality and variety. To date, however, there has not yet been written in English a thoroughly modern and technical "Introduction." Such a work should discuss the general questions of biblical inspiration, inerrancy, the canon and versions; it should cover the geography and history of the Bible lands, as well as the science of archaeology, the methods of textual criticism, and the principles of interpretation (exegesis), especially that of literary forms. The bulk of the "Introduction" should be devoted to a description of each of the 73 books in the Old and New Testaments: its origin, author, outline, literary and historical characteristics, doctrinal content, while detailed study of specific problems is left for the commentaries. All of these items are to be treated in an orderly manner and with a relative completeness.

The only Catholic work of this nature in English is *Guide to the Bible* (2nd edition; New York, Desclée, 1960, 1962) in two volumes, a translation from the French *Initiation Biblique* by A. Robert and A. Tricot. The two titles under review are not "Introductions." This is said not by way of criticism, but in the interests of clarity, and precision. What they set out to do in a popular and informal fashion, they do excellently. They touch upon most of the above topics some-

what haphazardly, but lack the order, thoroughness and formality of the "Introduction."

Father Castelot has a syndicated column on Scripture in a dozen diocesan weeklies. Those newspaper articles have been collected in the two volumes of *Meet the Bible!*, and a third dealing with the New Testament is still to come. After some forty pages of general introductory material, the development of the individual books of the Bible is traced according to the history of Israel. This is not the logical order of the books as they are printed in modern or ancient editions, but it is the unique feature of this work. Each book — or major portion of a book — is located in its proper historical setting, since it "can be rightly understood only against the background of the age in which it was written." The first volume deals with the Yahwist and Elohist traditions of the Pentateuch (J and E), the narratives of early Israel in Canaan and the monarchy, and the prophetic materials, concluding with the eighth-century prophets. The second starts with Sophonias and the Deuteronomic tradition, puts the psalms in two different periods and ends with the Book of Wisdom in the first century B.C. Finding Deuteronomy and Leviticus many pages and centuries after Moses may prove to be a stimulating and educating shock. The Salvation History of Israel makes a vivid backdrop for the story of the books and the traditions.

The author has a knack for lucidity, with a colloquial and at times witty style. The first volume includes a select bibliography, and both appendices consist of review quizzes and maps. There is not much exaggeration in the advertiser's prediction that this is destined to become the standard *popular* introduction to the Sacred Books. One would have expected, however, more references to ecclesiastical directives and especially Pope Pius XII's important biblical encyclical, *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, together with quotations concerning those principles that the author follows closely and applies so deftly.

In the very first line of *Understanding the Bible*, Father Hunt expressly acknowledges the dependence of all Catholic biblical scholars on recent Church teaching and starts off with a brief description of the new era and the new trends in biblical studies. In fact, one reason for writing this book is the "good deal of bewilderment about 'what is happening to our Bible.'" The author wishes to show the need for scientific investigation, the actual guidance of the Holy See, immensely practical applications to well-known biblical verses, and thereby to reassure the readers "that not everything has changed with reference to the Bible." It has always been and remains a religious book, containing God's message which is recognized in the "literal sense", that is, the authentic meaning of the authors. He attempts to highlight "what the Bible means" by pointing up many perennial

problems and explaining them above all by literary forms. After seven chapters of general matter, the books of the Bible are explained according to the traditional order. Of the remaining twenty chapters, eight are devoted to Genesis alone, a book bristling with difficulties. There is an excellent chapter on the Qumran scrolls, and others on the Gospels, Acts, St. Paul's Epistles and the Apocalypse.

With only 200 pages at his disposal Father Hunt has to confine his observations to a limited number of issues, the more important and the more delicate. He continually emphasizes the need for both a scientific and a thoroughly religious attitude in approaching the Bible, and gives practical assistance in forming that frame of mind. References at the ends of chapters to other books and articles on the same topic makes this volume all the more helpful. Its chatty and lively style will guarantee a pleased audience of readers.

Both works should prove of immense value in a parish or school library. A teacher of college theology will find *Meet the Bible!* more useful, especially with the third volume on the New Testament; a student would prefer the briefer, less expensive book, intended by the author for the busy but interested priests, religious and faithful. The chief merit of such attractive well written volumes lies in the sure guidance they offer everyone in painlessly understanding the Bible as it has been brilliantly illuminated by modern discovery and investigation.

PHILIP J. CALDERONE

STUDY OF SOCIAL CHANGE

THE SOUTHERN APPALACHIAN REGION: A SURVEY. Edited by Thomas R. Ford. Lexington, Ky.: University of Kentucky Press, 1962. xv, 308 pp. \$10.00.

Persons interested in the development of Mindanao should find absorbing this account of the changes which have occurred in the Southern Appalachian Region of the United States since 1935. Although Mindanao is an island while the Southern Appalachian Region is not, and although Mindanao has a greater variety of physical environment than this Region, still in social and economic conditions Mindanao today is in many ways like the Appalachian Region of 1935. The types of changes which have occurred in the Region by 1960 due to expansion of the mass media of communication, of opportunities for better education, of an improved road system, of in-