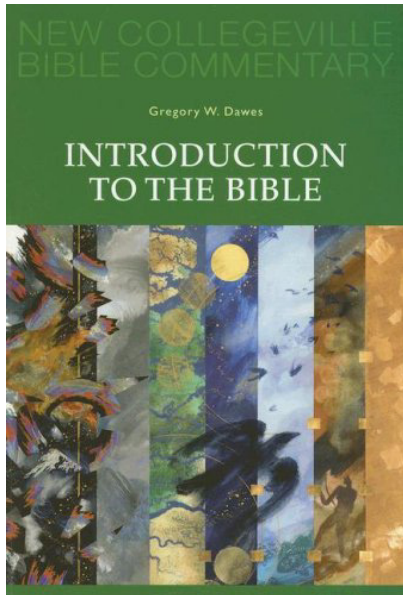


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Dawes, Gregory W.

Introduction to the Bible

New Collegeville Bible Commentary

Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2007. Pp. 80. Paper.
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While doing undergraduate work, I spent a semester at a small Jesuit Catholic college. Although I was there primarily for sports, I did have the opportunity to take a basic theology course. Since I had grown up Protestant—Southern Baptist at that—I had no idea what to expect. Whereas I was pleased to read Augustine’s *Confessions*, I was utterly surprised at how basic the Bible lessons were. We spent the semester learning the basics of how to navigate through the Bible, whether looking up a passage of Scripture or properly referencing such a passage. Teaching was approached as if the student had never picked up a copy of the Bible. This was completely foreign to me, having grown up in Sunday school. This is not to say that all the students were biblically illiterate, but only that such a situation would have been greatly enhanced by the resource that Dawes has produced.

Volume 1 in the New Collegeville Bible Commentary is a short book (or perhaps more accurately, booklet) intended “to provide an initial orientation to the Bible for the general reader” (7). Moreover, it serves as the introduction to the planned series of commentaries on the whole Bible. In this light, Dawes has done an extremely good job of summarizing the larger issues involved in how the Bible came together and how it has been interpreted.

Each subsequent volume of this series will deal more specifically with individual books in the Bible.

The book consists of two sections. Dawes first traces the origin of the Bible, beginning with the idea of canon and proceeding through a discussion of the development of both the Old and New Testament canons, then ending with a section about how the text was transmitted and translated throughout church history. Second, Dawes moves to the interpretation of the Bible, beginning with the patristic era and ending in the postmodern age. Given the brevity of the book, none of the sections is comprehensive, yet Dawes has done a tremendous job of summarizing these periods.

In some ways, the book has a limited readership. It is not necessarily intended for church leaders or Bible scholars. Its succinct nature gives it a more popular feel—in fact, it even includes pictures! Moreover, scholars may take exception to some comments about Dawes's conclusions about interpretation, but to be fair, it would be nearly impossible to deal with all the intricacies of postmodern interpretation in just a few pages. Ultimately, then, the book serves its purpose of introducing these concepts to a general audience.

Coming from Liturgical Press, it is naturally focused on the Catholic Church. It will thus be best used by a Catholic readership. However, this volume will be helpful for both Catholics and Protestants. On the one hand, this is an invaluable resource for those Catholic laypeople who desire to read the Bible but lack a foundation for understanding what it is and from whence it came. In that light, it will prove invaluable as a simple resource for theology classes at Catholic schools and perhaps colleges and universities. Thus, Dawes's book, as well as the entire New Collegeville Bible Commentary series, may fill a niche that the Catholic Church needs in developing a more biblically literate constituency.

On the other hand, this is a quality introductory resource for Protestants who are unfamiliar with the beliefs and teachings of Catholicism. Particularly, it will assist them in understanding the Catholic Church's approach toward the interpretation of Scripture. Given the succinct nature of the book, Dawes does a good job of retelling the history of interpretation, especially of how the views of the Catholic Church toward historical criticism and biblical inspiration evolved in modern times. Moreover, whereas some of the typical dividing lines between Protestants and Catholics may rub a Protestant the wrong way (such as the tendency to equate the inspiration of Scripture by the Spirit of God with the Spirit's work in protecting the subsequent church leaders from error), the Protestant reader will be surprised at Dawes' fair treatment of the canonical and deuterocanonical books.

Furthermore, the value of the book is enhanced by a section of “Review Aids and Discussion Topics,” which will be helpful in a school classroom, for an individual, or for small-group discussions. I only wish we would have had this resource in that Bible class many years ago.