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Review of “Saint Mary’s Press College Study Bible”

Jason Paul Bourgeois
jbourgeois1@udayton.edu

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Saint Mary's Press College Study Bible. Winona MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2007. pp. 2048. \$32.95. ISBN: 978-0-88489-907-5.

Reviewed by Jason Paul Bourgeois.

This study bible by Saint Mary's Press is the most suitable Catholic bible for use in the college classroom. Its basic text is that of the New American Bible, with revised Psalms and revised New Testament. It includes all of the introductions and footnotes of the New American Bible. In addition, it contains many useful features that enhance the teaching of scripture in the classroom. The layout of the text is pleasing, with a parchment tint to some of the pages and a brown "Hebrew"-looking font.

There are six introductory essays, including a superb overview by Margaret Nutting Ralph of the process of writing and collecting the scriptural texts. The other essays examine the importance of literary genre, the historical context of the writing of scripture, the interpretation of scripture by the Catholic Church, the English translations of the Bible, and scholarly resources to help in the understanding of scripture. Also included is the full text of *Dei Verbum*, the dogmatic constitution on divine revelation from Vatican II.

This bible also includes (in addition to the NAB introductions) a fresh introduction for each "section" of Scripture (Pentateuch, Historical Books, Wisdom and Poetry Books, Prophets, Gospels and Acts, Letters and Revelation) and fresh introductions for each of the books of the bible. The style and content of these introductions are on the level of an introductory academic explanation of the biblical texts and are exceptionally well-written. The section on the Historical Books thankfully corrects the error (contained in previous versions of the NAB) of including Joshua, Judges, and Ruth in the section on the Pentateuch.

Several study aids are also included in this study bible. There are several illustrations and maps interspersed throughout the text, including illustrations of the layout of Greek cities such as Corinth. There are six color inserts, including several charts listing items such as the patriarchs and matriarchs of the Old Testament, the miracles and signs of the New Testament, the synoptic parables, titles of God and of Jesus. Several photos of biblical places, artifacts, and portraits of biblical figures are included in the color inserts as well.

Also interspersed throughout the text are approximately ninety "articles," written specifically for college students, that "apply" selected scriptural texts to issues of life, spirituality, and justice. The topics of the articles are wide-ranging, from moral issues related to such areas as gender, sexuality, poverty, and discrimination, to spiritual questions such as the meaning of suffering or the value of prayer, to "life questions" such as the call to marriage and the call to service.

In the end matter of the study bible, there is a full chart of the 3-year lectionary currently in use by the Roman Catholic Church, an index of illustrations and article “topics,” a glossary of biblical terms, a timeline of biblical history, a number of full-color maps, and several blank pages so that students may take notes on them.

This study bible does have some limitations. Its inclusion of the revised NAB Psalms, despite their explicit disapproval by the Vatican, limits its use for liturgical purposes. One wishes that there were an index of the titles and authors of the “articles,” rather than just an index of their topics. The themes of the articles themselves, when read in succession, reflect a clear preponderance of “center-left” political and spiritual concerns that does not reflect the totality of Catholic thinking on issues important to college students. For example, the article on “pro-life” issues really de-emphasizes the topic of abortion, which is certainly a pressing issue for college students that deserves a clear, uncompromising, and compassionate presentation of the Catholic teaching.

Overall, however, the *Saint Mary’s Press College Study Bible* contains so many aids to the academic study of scripture from a Catholic perspective, that it easily replaces its rivals (such as the Oxford Press Catholic Study Bible) as the best biblical text to be used in the college classroom. I highly recommend its use in any undergraduate course that uses the bible as one of its texts.