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BIBLES AND THE NEWS

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1. INTRODUCTION

I have been working on a book, tentatively titled *The Bible in the News* for the University of Virginia Press. Biblical scholars, I think, have tended to focus almost exclusively on the origins of the biblical text and have too quickly dismissed questions of what the Bible, or more accurately, what bibles have become. My current research focuses primarily on news stories in North America as a starting point for discussion of controversies in biblical interpretation. My presentation today is an introduction to this study.

2. NEW BIBLES

The Bible has never been a static and unchanging text. It

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* 편집자 주: 이 글은 2008년 5월 8일 본원 학술세미나에 발표되었던 글입니다.

has changed from being collections of scrolls, to the codex that bound biblical books together, to the printed press that quickly reproduced bibles for large audiences of readers, and more recently to the electronic media where bibles can be found on CD's, in which bibles are read aloud and in some cases visually reproduced. Bibles have been published in thousands of languages from around the world. From the time the first scrolls were written, their constant reproduction in changing media conditions suggest that bibles have continually been in a process of being re-created as something new. The scrolls and the codices were originally read aloud, never silently; the printed press gave rise to the silent reader and present modern technology is presenting bibles in audio form for the ear to hear and visually in pictures on screen for the eye to see. Bibles have travelled a long way from their starting point on scrolls to the present electronic media.

In North America, the titles of bibles currently for sale generally designate them as “*New*,” for example, The *New* Revised Standard Version; The *New* International Version; The *New* Jerusalem Bible; The *New* American Bible; among numerous others. There is even a *New* King James Version. None of these emphasizes the status quo. They all emphasize novelty. To provide something new is important for sales. The commercialization of bibles in North America has become a lucrative business. We have known that there are *prophets* in the Bible; publishers are clearly aware that there are also *profits* in Bibles.

Bibles for profit became clearly apparent to me several years

ago when I was in Atlanta visiting my niece and her triplets who were about two years old. We went to a factory outlet center where there were numerous stores selling goods of all kinds. There were outlet stores for men's suits, women's clothes, vitamins, underwear, glassware and many other items. The goods represented brand names and gave lower prices for items that had been overstocked or were out of season.

I was surprised, however, to discover a Bible Factory Outlet. Hadley RiCharde Kreiner(1997) in *The Atlanta Journal-The Atlanta Constitution*¹⁾ described the Bible Factory Outlet that opened in the Tangier Factory Outlet Center in 1997.

...speaking of the Bibles, there are thousands of them. Bibles for mothers, Bibles for fathers, Bibles for senior citizens, for students, for teachers. There are New Living Bibles, Revised Standard Versions, New Revised Standard Versions, Bibles with parallel translations and even translations in the original Greek. One simplified version of the New Testament sells for \$1.49, and a three-volume set of the Super Giant Print King James Version(with 24-point type) sells for \$99.99.

The Bible Outlet also sells CD's, non-fiction and Christian romance novels, bracelets with the initials W. W. J. D.("What Would Jesus Do") and other items. According to Louise Lee(1997) in the *Wall Street Journal*,²⁾ the Bible Factory Outlet

1) Hadley RiCharde-Kreiner, "Bible Outlet Renders unto Customers," *The Atlanta Journal-The Atlanta Constitution* (12/6/97).

also sells “Testamint breath mints, each stamped with a cross and wrapped in a Bible verse.” The marketing and sale of bibles has become so extensive that there were seventy Bible Factory Outlet stores in 2005, primarily in the southern states of the USA.³⁾ Although the Bible Factory Outlet was forced into bankruptcy in February 2007, this insolvency appears to have had more to do with the management than with the lack of bibles for sale or interest in buying bibles.

3. BUYERS SHAPING NEW BIBLES

At first appearance, it might seem positive that the sale of bibles is so vast that Bible Outlet Factory outlet stores are needed to sell remainder and end of stock items. The number of bibles for sale in North America is staggering.

An article, “The Good Book Business; Annals of Publishing” that appeared in the *New Yorker* magazine (18/12/06) points out how vast the sale of bibles is in the USA.

The familiar observation that the Bible is the best-selling book of all time obscures a more startling fact: the Bible is the best-selling book of the year, every year.

2) Louise Lee, “Retailing: Bringing the Good Book to the Outlet Mall,” *The Wall Street Journal* (2/12/97).

3) Lynne Garrett, “Bible Factory Outlet in Chapter 7,” *Publishers Weekly* (28/2/07).

Calculating how many Bibles are sold in the United States is a virtually impossible task, but a conservative estimate is that in 2005 Americans purchased some twenty-five million Bibles-twice as many as the most recent Harry Potter book. The amount spent annually on Bibles has been put at more than half a billion dollars.

There is one other important fact that I think needs to be pointed out about the lucrative sale of bibles in the United States. Market research is being used to produce bibles, packaging them in all sorts of ways for sale. Changes to bibles in the 21st century are market-driven. Publishers produce what the buyers demand; the bibles being read are the ones that sell. They are not being produced for general readership but for particular segments of society—"niche marketing." This repackaging is the 21st century contribution to the changing of bibles that I pointed to in the beginning of this paper. I logged into Zondervan Publishers, the largest seller of bibles in the USA and found that I could browse through 559 different bibles for sale. Here are a few of the bibles to be found on the Zondervan web site.

These hundreds of new bibles for sale are designer bibles calculated to appeal to particular and changing markets in the same way that manufacturers design new cars to appeal to new trends and expectations, in the same way the fashion designer designs clothes to replace existing styles, in the same way electronic companies design ever new gadgets. This packaging does

not have to do only with the cover. Changes occur INSIDE these designer bibles.

These changes in Zondervan packaging have been picked up in newspaper headlines. For example following is a story in a business magazine.

Hipper Than Thou Zondervan's youth-oriented packaging generates new sales for an ancient text.

BZTWO(Business 2.0) (1/7/05)

Plenty of companies need to make old products seem new again, but few have pulled it off more divinely than Bible publisher Zondervan. The Good Book has been on the market for centuries. Yet Zondervan, the world's biggest Bible seller, has experienced double-digit growth the last two years by repackaging the Bible, effectively turning it into a youth-oriented lifestyle accessory.

Women buy more Bibles than men, so Zondervan created **True Identity**, a version bound in faux alligator... Dear Abby-style question-and-answer sections offer advice on career and relationship issues. True Identity has become Zondervan's best-selling **new Bible**.

I should not simply be citing Zondervan here, because many presses are finding money in making bibles for the market. Thomas Nelson Publishers have been marketing bibles in the format of magazines, and these have also made the news.

The commentary, devotions, tips and paraphrase was are

not being published as separate books from the Bible. Because bibles are no longer collections of scrolls but a single book with a cover that labels everything inside as a bible, bibles are multiplying in a myriad of directions with content that makes them all distinctive. Darwin Glassford, a lecturer in Salt Lake City Seminary is quoted as saying that bibles are multiplying like rabbits.⁴⁾ Contemporary technology has made it possible to produce and sell bibles in countless numbers. These bibles are introducing change not only by means of translation and packaging but by the inclusion of additional material that publishers insert between the covers of books labeled as bibles. Paraphrase, often questionably styling itself as dynamic equivalence in meaning, is producing bibles with new meaning determined by the author of the paraphrase. Often this is done with the intention of encouraging readers to read the bible, but when substitute bibles are created, what “the Bible” is becomes increasingly difficult to define.

Since I am an Australian as well as an American, I cannot resist mentioning “The Aussie Bible” paraphrased by Kel Richards, an ABC news correspondent and devout Anglican who produced a bible he said that people could take with them to the bathtub. He has produced a bible that collates the Gospels into a single story and adds the 23rd psalm. John Anderson, who at the time of the publication was Deputy Prime Minister, wrote the Foreword and the Anglican Archbishop of Sydney,

4) Noted in Susan Whitney, “Pop! goes the Bible,” *Deseret Morning News* (19/6/2004).

Peter Jensen, wrote the Introduction.

Other new bibles have appeared that also offer a bible paraphrase in a format that makes the bible easily fit into contemporary culture. There appears to be no stopping the ingenuity that publishers will use to sell bibles.

Producing bibles that fit the needs of contemporary readers has characterized the bible throughout its history. When James I came to the throne of England, there was a major division in England between the Puritans and the Anglican Church, with its hierarchical structure headed by the monarch. This tension resulted in a battle of bibles. The most popular Bible at the beginning of James' reign was the *Geneva Bible*(completed in 1560).

It was used by Shakespeare. It was the first bible printed in Scotland. It was the bible on the Mayflower on its voyage to America. The translation was completed in Geneva by English Protestants who fled there during the reign of "bloody Mary." The first bible to use chapter and verse references, it was also annotated with comments to clarify words and passages that might be unclear. The notes, however, clearly reflected the Calvinist theology/ideology and anti-monarchical opinion of the English Protestants. Psalm 105:15, "Touche not mine anointed, and doe my Prophets no harme," a central text cited as biblical proof for the divine right of kings, is annotated not to refer to kings but to "those whom I have sanctified to be my people." The King James Version of the Bible was an attempt by the king to supplant the popularity of the Geneva Bible, with its

annotations opposing monarchical rule.

Although the King James Bible was not readily accepted by the community, it did eventually become the best known Bible in English and has only been overtaken in popularity in the USA by the New International Version(now available as TNIV), which appeared soon after the Revised Standard Version(now available as NRSV).

However, there have been so many errors in the transmission of the King James Bible introduced by publishers that David Norton, a New Zealand academic, who is Head of the English Department at Victoria University in Wellington, spent over ten years attempting to reconstruct the original text. He has published in Cambridge University Press the new critical edition of the KJV called *The Cambridge Paragraph Bible*. Dennis Welsh in an article, "The even newer testament" which appeared in the *NZ Listener* on June 18, 2005 explains the reason for this new edition of the KJV originally published in 1611.

Now here's a surprise. The King James Bible we know and love is not the KJB intended for publication by the team of 40 translators in 1611. The first edition was littered with typographical mistakes, and though some were corrected in later editions, fresh errors were made each time, fresh guesses made at what the translators meant; and so, as Norton says, "variant readings began to accumulate." What most of us think of as the original KJB is almost entirely an Oxford edition of 1769, variant readings and all.

Some Examples of Printing Errors

Examples of errors that were picked up:

The Adulterous Bible-“Thou shalt commit adultery”(Ex. 20:13) published in London in 1631. This error was soon caught but translators were fined.

The Unrighteous Bible-“Know ye not that the unrighteous will inherit the kingdom of God”(1 Cor. 6:9) published in London in 1653.

An error that continued in translations.

^{KJV} **1 Timothy 2:9** In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array...

Shamefacedness means “to be ashamed” and this word continued in KJV editions. The word intended by the translators was “shamefastness” which in 17th century English meant “being modest.”

4. THE BIBLE AND DIET

I could spend the next couple of hours talking of all the new bibles now being published, often reported in news stories in the United States. However, I now want to turn to another way in which the Bible is often found in news stories. These reports have to do with how the Bible is being used by people

to undergird their individual ideologies. In this way the Bible also is being re-created to serve purposes that go well beyond the original meanings. Over and over again “the Bible” has been adapted to popular cultural fashions. This kind of modification of “the Bible” is clearly evident in contemporary American culture, which is currently obsessed with obesity. Sitting beside bibles in many bookshops are popular and bestselling diet books. In such an environment, room is being made for “the Bible” among the new and best selling diet books. “The Bible”, especially the Old Testament, has always had dietary prohibitions, still followed by Orthodox Jewish communities. However, at the beginning of the twenty-first century the connection between “the Bible” and diet is about losing weight and healthy living. This connection is even newsworthy so that dozens of articles have recently appeared on books that have been offering “bible diets.”

George Malkmus offers what he calls the “the Hallelujah Diet.”⁵⁾ It is called by this name, one of his advisors at Hallelujah Acres in North Carolina is quoted as saying, because “[t]he Lord gave us everything we need in the Garden of Eden: fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds.”⁶⁾ This vegan diet, however, runs into conflict with Jordan S. Rubin’s “The Maker’s Diet.”⁷⁾ While Malkmus looks to Gen. 1:29 as the basis of his vegan Hallelujah

5) Give details of the book

6) This quotation is from a story by Holly Hickman of Associated Press Newswires on June 7, 2004.

7) Reference to book

Diet, Rubin draws on Leviticus and warns against a raw vegan regimen and encourages certain meat and dairy products, though in their organic and least processed form. “The healthiest diet,” according to Rubin, “is to consume meats, poultry, dairy, fruits and vegetables and to consume them in a form the body was designed for.”⁸⁾

Don Colbert looks away from the Old Testament and has written a biblical diet book titled, *What Would Jesus Eat? The Ultimate Program for Eating Well, Feeling Great and Living Longer*.⁹⁾ He encourages people to eat “living foods” as opposed to dead or processed foods. He is therefore opposed to foods that are derived from animals.¹⁰⁾

As “the Bible” enters into the contemporary world of diet and health, it also creates controversy. Should a biblical diet be vegan or carnivorous? Or should we perhaps look at the view of Gwen Shamblin who, in her book, *The Weight Down Diet*, disavows food restrictions and suggests more generally that one follow “God’s perfect boundaries of hunger and fullness.”¹¹⁾ In many ways the controversy over biblical diets is fun. For the most part no-one is getting hurt,¹²⁾ and I suspect some people are losing weight. However, there are more serious controversies as well.

8) Holly Hickman as above.

9) Give details

10) Hickman as above.

11) Hickman

12) The exception here is Shamblin.

5. CREATIONISM AND INTELLIGENT DESIGN

A topic that has attracted many news stories in this first decade of the 21st century concerns efforts in a number of states in the USA to include creationism or intelligent design as well as evolution in biology classes. For many the creation story in Genesis is to be understood as an alternative to science. The following headlines are an indication of the variety of stories that have appeared in newspapers.

DARWIN PUT TO FLIGHT IN BIBLE BELT
CREATIONISM HAS THE GREATER BASIS IN
SCIENCE
EARTH IS A MERE PUPPY
DESIGN BACKERS GET BOOST FROM BUSH
CHILDREN KEPT DINOSAURS AS PETS
INTELLIGENT DESIGN: NEW IDEA OR CREATIONISM
LITE?
SUMMARIZING THE JUDGMENT ON INTELLIGENT
DESIGN

I don't intend to discuss any of these stories in detail other than to say that I think that to read Genesis 1 as if it were science is as problematic as attempting to find the ideal biblical diet. It is an attempt to package the Bible in contemporary culture-to make it speak the language of science even though it emerged in a pre-scientific age.

As some of you may know there was a famous legal case

in the 1920's in Tennessee where a law was introduced banning the teaching of evolution in schools. The trial is known as the Scopes trial, named after the teacher, John Scopes, who was arrested for breaking the law by teaching evolution in a biology class. The trial was made into a play and later a movie entitled, "Inherit the Wind." The play and the movie freely change the specifics of the actual trial. Business leaders from Dayton, Tennessee, where the trial was held, answered an ad by the American Civil Liberties Union to test the case. The local businesses thought that it would bring attention and more importantly income to their city. Scopes, who was the football coach, was only a substitute teacher in the biology class and volunteered to be arrested. The trial received a lot of media attention across the nation. It was covered by over 2,310 daily newspapers and broadcast live on radio, which was in its infancy at the time.

The trial pitted two well known lawyers against one another: William Jennings Bryan, a former candidate for President, who represented the prosecution, and Clarence Darrow, who represented the defense. In some ways the trial became a contest between two books: the Bible and Charles Darwin's *The Origin of the Species*.

The trial backfired on the businessmen of Dayton, because the coverage of the trial made the city look ridiculous. H. L. Mencken, who wrote a daily column for *The Baltimore Evening Sun*, was largely responsible for promoting the ludicrous por-

trayal of the people of Tennessee. In one column, he provides a humorous but demeaning description of the mentality of the people of Dayton.

The preacher stopped at last and there arose out of the darkness a woman with her hair pulled back into a little tight knot. She began so quietly that we couldn't hear what she said, but soon her voice rose resonantly and we could follow her. She was denouncing the reading of books. Some wandering book agent, it appeared, had come to her cabin and tried to sell her a specimen of his wares. She refused to touch it. Why, indeed, read a book? If what was in it was true then everything in it was already in the Bible. If it was false then reading it would imperil the soul. Her syllogism complete, she sat down.

The trial was also known as “the Monkey Trial” and gave rise to many satirical cartoons such as the following one in the Chicago Tribune.

What I want to talk about here, however, is not the news coverage of this event but what went largely unreported at the Scopes trial and is sadly missing from not only news coverage in the current USA debate but also from those who promote creationism. Since the bible is forced by creationists to be a discourse about science, the insight that the bible can give to the evolution debate is largely being ignored. William Jennings Bryant was not the bumbling fool he was made out to be in

Inherit the Wind. He was anti-militaristic, even though he had served the government as a defense minister. While Bryant was a clear defender of the biblical account of creation, he was not a biblical literalist. He was primarily concerned with the social implications of the notion of “the survival of the fittest,” which was taking hold in his own time. He was opposed to this “social Darwinism.” Indeed, as E. Edward J. Larson summarizes this concern succinctly in *The Summer of the Gods*.

Many Americans associated Darwinian natural selection, as it applied to people, with a survival-of-the fittest mentality that justified laissez-faire capitalism, imperialism, and militarism...[F]or example, Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller, Sr., claimed this as justification for their cutthroat business practices. Bryan, who built his career on denouncing the excesses of capitalism and militarism, dismissed Darwinism in 1904 “as the merciless law by which the strong crowd out and kill off the weak.”

While the Bible should not be made to speak a scientific discourse, as some try to do, neither should it value material goods over the welfare of people on the basis that it is only the fit who survive. Although the Bible does not speak about the universe in terms of contemporary cosmology, it strongly berates those who will do anything to retain wealth. Amos’ words directed against Israel can just as well be directed against the wealthy capitalists whose wealth was accumulated by walking

all over anyone who stood in their way.

Thus says the LORD: For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals-they who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and push the afflicted out of the way...(Amos 2:6-7)

Science is not always value-neutral in presenting its findings. This is evident in George William Hunter's *A Civic Biology*-the book used in the biology class in the Dayton School and central to the Scopes trial.

A Civic Biology was the bestselling textbook in the country at the time(Larson, p.23). While the textbook clearly gives a general scientific definition of evolution in language for high school students, it is not devoid of ideology. There is clearly an attempt to put Caucasians-the "white inhabitants of Europe and America"- at the pinnacle of the evolutionary ladder.

At the present time there exist upon the earth five races of man or varieties of man each very different from the other in instincts, social customs, and, to an extent, in structure. These are the Ethiopian or negro type, originating in Africa, the Malay or Brown race, from the islands of the Pacific; the American Indian, the Mongolian or yellow race, including the natives of China, Japan, and the Eskimos; and finally, *the highest type*

of all, the Caucasians, represented by the civilized white inhabitants of Europe and America(Hunter, p.196, italics mine).

His statement about the close relationship between the ape and the human is also interesting in that he distances himself and other civilized people as far as possible from the ape. The close link is understood to be between “the highest type of ape and the lowest savage”(p.195). By making these ideological statements about the superiority of Caucasians and relegating what he calls savages to a closer relationship with the apes, Hunter’s *A Civic Biology* is not misrepresenting Darwin.

In another of Darwin’s books, *The Descent of Man*, Darwin wrote, that “at some future period, not very distant as measured by centuries, the civilized races of man will almost certainly exterminate and replace the savage races”(Chapter VI, “On the Affinities and Genealogies of Man “http://www.infidels.org/library/historical/charles_darwin/descent_of_man/). This notion of superiority has no doubt been a contributing factor to colonization and the disregard of the rights of indigenous peoples whose lands were confiscated by the white inhabitants of Europe and America. Hunter’s textbook was not value free.

6. THE BIBLE AND THE LAW

In contemporary American culture, the Bible is being made to fit into every nick and cranny of American life. People are

reading it in increasingly diverse formats; they search it for the healthy diet; and some are reading it as the definitive word on science. Rather than seeking to understand how the Bible, an alien presence from the past, might speak from that past about our present situation, the Bible is promoted as having the last word on everything. It is almost as if they are trying to prove that the woman quoted in the Baltimore Evening Sun at the time of the Scopes trial was right-when she noted that because everything we need to know is in the Bible, so that there is no need for any other book. It is not surprising that the Bible has also made headlines as being indispensable for the practice of American law.

An Associated News story, “Commandments Start National Tour Alabama Monument’s First Stop: Tennessee,” on August 1, 2004 is about Roy Moore who had been the Chief Justice of Alabama until he was ejected from office because he refused to remove a Ten Commandment Monument from the lobby of the Judicial Building in Alabama. He is convinced that the Ten Commandments are the very basis of American law. After he was removed from office, he took his ten commandment monument, what some called “Roy’s Rock” on a tour across the country. Many people shared Judge Moore’s proposition that the Ten Commandments are the very foundation of American law. The intensity of their feelings was evident in quotations given in the Associated Press article published at the beginning of Judge Moore’s Ten Commandment tour.

The Ten Commandments monument banished from Alabama's state judicial building began a national tour on the back of a flatbed truck on Saturday-starting outside the courthouse [Dayton, Tennessee] where the teaching of evolution was put on trial almost 80 years ago.

Jewell Sneed, 70, snapped photos of her 7-year-old great-grandson, Jacob, standing beside the monument. "I think it was awful for them to make them move it from the courthouse," Sneed said. "That is what our country is based on, is God and the Bible. Why we want to take God out I don't know. I think we are headed for big trouble when we take God out of schools and everything."

[Rocco's Comment after bumping into Larry Darby, president of the Montgomery-based Atheist Law Center:]

"I'm glad I didn't carry my gun. I'd probably be in jail right now." Rocco said. "I believe in the Ten Commandments, and I don't appreciate what people like him are doing to my country."

I want to mention a forgotten reason that there are so many displays of the Ten Commandments across America. Ellen Goodman in *The Cincinnati Post* article "Making Religion Secular" reminds us that ten commandments monuments, like the one on the grounds of the Texan Capitol that was contested in

the US Supreme Court in 2005, were placed there nearly half a century ago as part of Cecil B. DeMille's publicity drive to promote his movie epic "The Ten Commandments" starring Charlton Heston.

Ten Commandment Monuments found in many places in America were not erected as the result of patriotic fervor linking an immutable law code with the foundations of American law. DeMille funded the Fraternity Order of Eagles to place Ten Commandments monuments, like the one in Texas, all over America to promote a film.

7. The Jefferson Bible

There has been a tendency for Americans to over-emphasize the influence of the Bible in the development of American culture. Clearly the Bible has made a significant impact. However, the influence, as we have seen, has also gone in the other direction. American culture has been a major force in shaping the Bible. As the Bible Factory Outlet signifies, in the United States bibles have been produced reflecting the values of a consumer culture. Bibles are produced to sell. They are made for the market.

Bibles are changing at the same rate as toothpaste and toothbrushes. Whenever I go shopping to fill my dental needs,

I am always faced with brushes with new improved handles and with toothpaste with some new ingredient to make my teeth whiter. Whenever I enter a bookstore, I am confronted in the same manner with bibles with a new ingredient making it necessary to buy. In those same bookstores, the bible is also taking its place on bookshelves beside diet books, law books, science books, and so forth. Bibles have been made to fit into every niche and cranny of American culture so that the Bible has lost its identity.

Making the Bible fit contemporaneous cultural and political needs is probably no more clearly evident in what has been called “The Jefferson Bible.” Since it has been recently published in a new edition by Beacon Press, it has also made the news. The following are some of the headlines.

JESUS WITHOUT THE MIRACLES
BESIDES WRITING THE DECLARATION OF
INDEPENDENCE, JEFFERSON REWROTE THE
BIBLE
OUR FIRST 50 YEARS; GENIUS OR HERETIC?
JEFFERSON’S LABOUR OF LOVE
ODDS & ENDS: THOMAS JEFFERSON’S JESUS
SEMINAR
THOSE WHO DON’T STUDY JEFFERSON MAY
THINK HIS GOD AND THEIRS ARE THE SAME
THE FOUNDERS WERE OF THE RELIGIOUS
RIGHT? THAT’S LUDICROUS

The interest in the Jefferson Bible has probably related to the current US president George W. Bush. When he was asked, “Who is your favorite philosopher?” he responded “Jesus Christ, because he spoke to my heart.”

Thomas Jefferson also had an interest in Jesus, but his Jesus spoke to his mind. Commencing when he was in the White House and continuing fifteen years later at Monticello, Jefferson literally used scissors and paste to cut out and assemble what he thought were essential teachings of Jesus the philosopher while discarding the rest. He arranged his selections from the Greek, Latin, French and English(the King James) in parallel columns. He made Jesus into a moral teacher, a philosopher, while eliminating any reference to Jesus as God.

In a letter to John Adams, the second president of the United States, Jefferson described his method for creating his version of the Bible, which he titled,“The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth Extracted Textually From the Gospels.” In the letter he wrote.

In extracting the pure principles which he [Jesus] taught, we should have to strip off the artificial vestments in which they have been muffled by priests, who have travestied them into various forms, as instruments of riches and power to them...We must reduce our volume to the simple evangelists, select, even from them, the very words only of Jesus...[paring off the misconceptions of the evangelists themselves. When that is done] there will be found remaining the most sublime and benev-

olent code of morals which has ever been offered to man. I have performed this operation for my own use, by cutting verse by verse out of the printed book, and arranging, the matter which is evidently his, and which(sic) is as easily distinguishable as diamonds in a dunghill. The result is an 8 vo. of 46. pages of pure and unsophisticated doctrines, such as were professed and acted on by the *unlettered* apostles, the Apostolic fathers, and the Christians of the 1st. century.

Jefferson, in his own Bible Factory, was producing a bible for his own use. In a kind of nascent Jesus Seminar, Jefferson produced a Jesus that fit his world. Jesus was not a divine figure; he was not involved what Jefferson considered all the nonsense of the writers of the Gospels who spoke of a virgin birth or a resurrection. Jefferson viewed Jesus as a moral philosopher. Although Jefferson intended his bible to be for his own use, his bible was discovered over a hundred years ago. It was reproduced and handed out to all incoming members of congress. Now that it has been reissued by Beacon Press, the Jefferson Bible takes its place alongside the Aussie Bible, the New Revised, New International Version, and all the other bibles produced and sold for the market. The irony is that, at a time when people like Judge Moore are advocating the need to display Ten Commandment monuments in courthouses, the writer of the Declaration of Independence produced a bible that excluded the Old Testament.

8. Conclusion

As scholars we know that there never was such a thing as “the Bible.” When I prepared this paper, I typed “the Bible” into Google and then looked at the images that my search produced. These images themselves indicate that “the Bible” is many different things.

In the history of Judaism and Christianity the Bible has had many different manifestations. When the biblical books existed as scrolls, there were different notions of what constituted the canon. These discrepancies continue until today not only between Christianity and Judaism but also within Christianity itself. Earliest Christianity read the Hebrew scrolls translated into Greek, the Septuagint. This translation like all subsequent translations introduced further differences. Such translations multiplied differences profusely with the invention of the printing press. The codex and the book format fixing the books of bibles in different orders also established differences in what communities were labeling as “the Bible.”

My research on bibles in contemporary American culture raised by stories about the bible in the news has pointed to a myriad of bibles being produced in such a capacity that even Bible Factory Outlets appear in shopping centers with other factory outlets selling everything from clothes to vitamins. The production of bibles is big business in the USA. There are

so many *new* translations and paraphrases; so many new

formats such as the “biblezines,” comic book format; so many bibles packaged for particular consumers, surfers, teenage girls, moms and dads, boys and girls; so many rearrangements of the text, the gospels appearing as a single story, genealogies placed in an appendix, bibles reduced in word number to be read quickly, bibles for outdoors, and a bible that I had not mentioned earlier designed to be read in the bathtub,

that the notion of what constitutes “the Bible” is more hopelessly problematic than at any other time in Christian history.

The attempts to make new bibles accommodate contemporary language and culture is matched by other attempts to make the bible as American as “apple pie.” Books promoting bible diets offering healthy eating and weight loss suggestions, while ignoring biblical prohibitions concerning what is kosher, are refashioning the bible according to current fads. Bibles situated so easily into American life expose even more the problem of defining what is “the Bible” and what is “biblical meaning.”

The religious right in the States, which argues for “the Bible” to be at the very basis of American law, transports the Bible and biblical meaning into a world where it has no place. The founding fathers, such as Jefferson, many of whom were deists, had different notions of what was at the heart of the biblical text. For Jefferson, the core was not the Ten Commandments, but Jesus who, when the miracles and the divinity of Jesus are pared away, emerges as a moral philosopher not a legal scholar. To dilute biblical meaning by equating it with American law

also manipulates biblical meaning to the point that it loses any distinctiveness.

To make biblical meaning provide scientific insight is to force the bible into an alien discourse. The biblical notions of creation are not about the cosmos uncovered by scientists in the space age. However, biblical texts speak of a creator concerned with social justice. Care for the poor, the widow and the orphan, turning the other cheek in order to alleviate violence, to love one's neighbor as one's self, are biblical insights in danger of becoming lost if biblical meaning is equated with scientific meaning.

In my research I have examined many other ways communities are promoting "the Bible" as a book about everything to such an extent that biblical meaning is in danger of becoming a book about nothing. Misguided archaeological claims, often sensationalized without any merit, are offered in order to provide a foundation for biblical stories and biblical meaning. "The Bible" does not need this support. Biblical codes that claim to find hidden meaning God encoded in the text sells books. Some have promoted this notion of information encoded in the text to prove the divine origin of "the Bible." However, to subject the clarity of biblical meaning to a restricted few, who are in the know about secret codes, obscures biblical meaning that is stated directly on top of the text (so to speak) and not hidden underneath the letters and words. People are using "the Bible" to promote contemporary notions of sexuality, family life, and marriage. These sorts of institutions and practices

have varied extensively throughout the history of Christianity. To make “the Bible” support Western views is to make over “the Bible” to conform to notions its readers bring to the text.

I am offering these views on “the Bible” in contemporary American culture as observations about what is happening to “the Bible;” I am not discussing in detail here what should or should not be. As scholars, we speak about biblical meaning, referring to Greek and Hebrew texts of which the overwhelming majority in the faith is unaware. The bibles our communities are reading are unrelated to the bibles our scholars read. Biblical scholars who focus on the intricacies of origin, who talk about J,E,P and D or First, Second and Third Isaiah, are speaking about texts that our communities who read bibles never encounter.

In order to deal adequately with biblical meaning, we need to become aware of the bibles people are reading and to be as much concerned with the Bible’s interpretation in contemporary culture as we are with the interpretation of the Bible in its original languages.