

**THE BIBLE  
IN  
EVANGELICAL FAITH AND LIFE**  
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The Bible is supposed to be at the center of evangelical faith and life. In what ways is this apparent confessionally, in the life-style of Christians, and in behavior? What should be the place of the Bible in evangelical life today?

As I think about it, the Bible in the hands of dedicated lay Christians was the crucial factor in the conversion of my parents, then in my own conversion and re-orientation in life as a young teen-ager. The turn of the wheel in attitudes toward the Bible during the past hundred years (my life encompasses most of those years) has been remarkable.

In the early 1900s the Modernist theological impulse, particularly from Europe, undermined confidence in the Bible and its key doctrines and resulted in rupturing most of the major Christian denominations. The reaction to this was swift, in the formation of new evangelical denominations and the development of the Bible School and Christian College movements. Through all of this, the *King James Version* (KJV) was the text in the hands of most Christians. It furnished a sense of common heritage and internalized language of faith.

Meanwhile in Britain Modernism intruded only on the fringes of traditional theological commitment. During the period of the 1920s through the 1950s new biblical scholarship emerged which trumped the undermining theologically liberal ethos. I can easily count over one hundred names of prominent British biblical scholars from this period. These generated the impetus and furnished literature which fostered interest in biblical studies and new translations of the Scriptures in America as well as the emergence of new scholarship.

In America strong defence of Scripture during the rise of attacks on the Bible included B. B. Warfield's essays (later published as a collection in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, 1948), and the subsequent work of evangelical scholars such as compiled by Carl F. H. Henry in *Revelation and the Bible*, 1958. Along with the rapid development of missionary outreach within America and overseas the demand for the Bible and for new translations increased exponentially.

The Bible is the book of the people. It has always been this. Putting the Bible in the hands of the people in the language of the people began with John Wycliffe in England (1320 – 1384), long before the Protestant Reformation. The most lasting influence was that of William Tyndale who may be regarded as the father of English Bible translation. His work emerged publicly in 1523 and his complete Bible was published in Cologne in 1534. In 1536 he was arrested in Brussels, strangled and his body burned. His translation served as the foundation of the KJV, which became the standard English language text until modern times.

Meanwhile Baptists in Europe in 1529 completed the first German language version, the *Worms Bible* (by the Anabaptists Ludwig Hetzer and Hans Denck) which quickly went through seventeen editions and was commended by Luther. Luther himself completed his New Testament translation by 1522 and the complete Bible by 1534, which became standard use among German-speaking Protestants.

The first Bible printed in America was the Eliot Bible (1623), an Algonquin Indian language translation, long before an English language Bible was printed in the American colonies.

Following World War II public demand and the new scholarly resources which were becoming available in the United States led to the current plethora of new Bible translations, the sale of which has massively increased English language Bible circulation world wide, and has stimulated the production of hundreds of new language translations.

The *Revised Standard Version* (RSV: N.T. 1946, O.T. 1952; revised 1989) was well received at first, but circulation decreased when many readers felt that the Old Testament renderings published later tended to diminish or sidestep messianic implications of Old Testament texts as traditionally understood by Christians (I continue to use the complete 1952 RSV as a basic study tool). The *New International Version* (NIV 1978, revised 1984) is probably the most widely circulated translation among evangelicals and conservative Christians. I use it regularly as a study text, though I feel that neither the RSV nor the NIV approach the elegance, or literary and liturgical value of the KJV.

The Bible is fundamentally a “peoples book.” What is its place in modern evangelical life?

But first,

### **What is the Bible?**

The Bible comprises the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament (the books of the Hebrew Scriptures) and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament (the writings which derive from Christ’s apostles and their associates).

Fundamentally, Christians accept the Old Testament to be God's Word because these are the Scriptures handed down from generation to generation in the life of Israel. The word "Testament" is used in the sense of "Covenant;" the Old Covenant of God with his people Israel, and the New Covenant with God's people in Christ (Luke 16:17).

Jesus identified the Old Testament as sacred Scripture comprising "the Law," "the Prophets," and "the Psalms" or Writings (Matthew 5:17-18; 11:13; Luke 24:44). The customary arrangement of the Old Testament was:

(1) The Law:

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

(2) The Prophets:

(a) The Former Prophets: Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings.

(b) The Latter Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve minor prophets.

(3) The Writings:

Psalms, Proverbs, Job; Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Ezra-Nehemiah, 1 and 2 Chronicles.

Jesus affirmed this scope and limit of the Hebrew Bible when speaking of the Old Testament martyrs in Luke 11:51 he said *from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zachariah*, which encompasses the first martyr (in Genesis) to the last. In the order of books in the Hebrew Bible Zachariah is the last martyr to be identified in the last book of the Hebrew Bible, 2 Chronicles 24:21.

Subsequent to the resurrection of Christ the Apostles, either directly or through those associated with them, transmitted the story of Jesus' life and his teachings, and the significance of the events surrounding his birth, life, ministry, death, resurrection, their commissioning to mission, the promise of his return, and his ascension.

The key criterion which determined what was included in the Canon or excluded from the Canon is the concept of Holy Scripture: the Old Testament comprised the received Scriptures of the Hebrew Bible, and the New Testament comprised Apostolic writings, or writings attributed to those associated with the Apostles, and so acknowledged by their use among the early Christian churches.

Early Christian writings are replete with such data. To be sure, the writers were in many cases well educated and cite texts and practical wisdom from pagan sources, but their citation of the Scriptures stands on a higher plane: these are the authoritative Word or Oracles of God.

Thus Clement of Rome, when writing from the congregation at Rome to the congregation at Corinth about 96 A.D. about dissension in their ranks, cites or makes allusions to over 180 biblical references, from both Old Testament and New Testament writings to buttress his argument – a remarkable display of biblical literacy. The authority to which he appeals is not that of the church at Rome, but the wisdom which comes from Holy Scripture and accumulated practical wisdom.

Similarly, in the latter part of the second century A.D. Irenaeus, who led in the rapid expansion of Christian witness in Gaul, emphasized that the truth which the Church preached was conserved by the prophets, fulfilled in Christ, and then handed down by the Apostles.

Along with the books of the Old Testament the completion of the Canon included writings authored by an apostle or apostolic man, knowledge of use of such writings in early church congregational life because of their utility and orthodoxy, and interaction among the leading church centers as to their holdings and scripture reading lists.

This was not a mechanical process, nor did any one Church Council decree the final shape of the Canon. It was, I believe, the on-going action of the Holy Spirit to conserve Holy Scripture: the books of the Old Testament and authentic Apostolic writings.

It remains to add a word about “nine-day-wonders” – proposals dismissive of all previous knowledge, intended to make a mark for their authors. During my lifetime we have had some notable ones.

After World War II Charles Templeton rose to become a popular preacher and founder of Youth for Christ in Toronto (I ushered in those splendid rallies). A superb Christian and Missionary Alliance preacher, he decided to “get an education,” then went left-wing, forsook his wife, became a media celebrity in Toronto on the side of atheists and skeptics, ending up unhappy about the final resolution of his skepticism. I listened to him at both ends of his intellectual venturing while I was pursuing an advanced degree in philosophy only to feel sorry for a man who had critically not plumbed deeply enough.

In the 1950s John A. T. Robinson proposed his “God is Dead” hypothesis, which became a media number for months; except that years later in a volume which shocked his skeptical friends he proposed dating New Testament sources earlier than some evangelicals have done.

I recall flying to Chicago in the autumn of 1963 to hear A. Q. Morton describe his use of a computer (they were then new and regarded as wondrous gadgets which would revolutionize all previous knowledge) to evaluate biblical texts statistically on the basis of sentence length and common word occurrences such as

prepositions and conjunctions. R. M. Grant of the University of Chicago and frequent critic of evangelical use of the Bible, introduced him. Morton said that his method had nothing to do with the way words and sentences are used – in other words the sense is irrelevant – only distribution is the clue as to authorship and authenticity. But as data which he used to support his claims gradually emerged critics quickly undercut his conclusions that a great deal of the New Testament is a pastiche of disjointed pieces arbitrarily joined together by scribes.

I recall his answer to the question as to what doctrinal issues he had in mind when he claimed that changes to core New Testament theological teaching would occur as a result of the use of his method. He replied simply that they were inevitable.

For years during the 1980s and 1990s, like clockwork, each Easter in Britain the media sought comments from David E. Jenkins, the Bishop of Durham, regarding his denial of the resurrection of Christ in order to feature his skepticism on their Easter pages and in their programming. However, he tended to confuse the nature and effects of the resurrection, with inadequate attention to the data supporting the resurrection, which Murray J. Harris, the Warden of Tyndale House in Cambridge, pointed out in his rebuttal (*Easter in Durham: Bishop Jenkins and the Resurrection of Jesus*, 1985). It is ironic that the current Bishop of Durham is N. T. Wright, whose comprehensive study defends the historicity of the resurrection of Christ (*The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 2003).

In America the recent nine-day-wonder is the work of Bart Ehrman of Duke University, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*, 2005, which is an extension of *Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, 1993, with little attention to critics of the earlier work. Ehrman, of earlier evangelical background, now classifies himself as a happy agnostic in his view that there is no authentic historical record of Jesus and that variants in the extant New Testament texts undermine the credibility of the scribal tradition. He no longer attends church but teaches New Testament from the standpoint of the unreliability of the extant manuscripts.

According to an interview with him published by Neely Tucker in the *Washington Post*, March 5, 2006, Ehrman enjoys needling his students to go beyond what their parents have taught them. He has developed a roster of stock variances which, he claims, discount the authenticity of what existing manuscripts report or any concept of the inspiration of originals.

However, on close examination his premises are on shaky ground, though examination of these becomes an irritant when one is so popular on the skeptical circuit. He has produced no variant that changes any core New Testament doctrine.

Consider two examples:

For over a century scholars of the New Testament texts have known that the pericope (short passage) concerning the adulterous woman (John 7:53 – 8:11) is not present in the oldest available manuscripts. The Metzger/Aland editors exclude it from the text, but place it as an addendum to the text of John with extensive textual notes both there and in their *Commentary on the Greek New Testament*. In my case, I cut my teeth on textual apparatus using Alexander Souter's Greek text, first published in 1910, which puts the pericope in brackets along with notes.

Why is this a problem to Ehrman? Metzger/Aland concede that the pericope has an ancient provenance but cannot be retained because it not in the most ancient and most important extant manuscripts. Case closed! We accept the fact. Does this now mitigate against the whole of John?

Apparently so for Ehrman. He proceeds to undermine the doctrine of Christ's divinity by claiming that only John advances it and that it is an unsustainable hypothesis. But where is the work of Murray J. Harris (*Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus*, 1992) who demonstrates that the divinity of Christ is not an exceptional concept but is the foundation of New Testament theology, which is unimpeachably evident in many passages?

He then calls into question the doctrine of the trinity on grounds that Trinitarian additions in 1 John 5: 7, 8 are not in the earliest manuscripts. However, no modern translation, including the NIV and the NASB, includes those words in the text. By implication to suggest that trinitarian teaching is a late addition because of this variant is disingenuous, to say nothing of its ignoring the extensive exegetical work of Athanasius, the Cappadocian Fathers, and all who worked to formulate the Nicene and Chalcedonian Creeds on grounds of wide-ranging, solid biblical exegesis.

I am reminded of yet another nine-day-wonder when years ago at the International Patristics Conference in Oxford many of us sat mystified as two American scholars attempted to rehabilitate Arius against Athanasius. That proposal got short shrift in the ensuing literature.

Ehrman's methodology cannot stand. Beyond the provocative nature of his writings, overstatement, failure to take account of critics of his textual decisions, failure to answer critics of his earlier work, and failure to answer

questions about his interpretations suggest that *Misquoting Jesus* is simply an attempt to popularize a previously advanced set of skeptical hypotheses.

Whether in Classical Studies or Biblical Studies we all must deal with received texts. It is amazing that new discoveries relating to biblical studies have for over a century tended to push the dating of received texts closer and closer to apostolic times, such data reinforced often by archaeological discoveries. Textual studies

such as those published and on-going at Tyndale House, Cambridge, England, have tended to reinforce confidence in the authenticity of the texts we have.

We have far more texts, and older texts, for Old Testament and New Testament studies than we have for studies in the Classics. My love of study of Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and Epicurus and his heritage (which reaches into apostolic times and called for rejoinder by the Apostle Paul) is not blunted by the fact that most of our sources originate from mid- or late-medieval times.

My experience and suggestion is to follow the advice of the University of Virginia philosopher and educator E. D. Hirsch (*Validity In Interpretation*, 1967) that we accept a received text, confident that future work will gradually refine it, and work toward grasping its meaning not tearing it apart. Tearing apart does not educate. Give credence to authorial intent, Hirsch urges. To grasp the sense is to educate oneself.

### **A Universe of Meaning: The Bible's Transforming Paradigm**

The failure of modern nine-day-wonder critics, in contrast to Christianity's antagonists when the Apostles carried the Gospel into the ancient world, is that they and the media who mindlessly feature them are nit-pickers. They are too shallow. They don't get to the essentials. And the essentials embrace key feature elements of human existence and of life in this universe. The Bible presents a world-view; its message comprises a transforming paradigm for modern human beings and society.

This is true in two important practical respects: First, the Bible furnishes a set of guidelines for personal behavior; standards which define good and evil, right and wrong. Second, the Bible sets forth a set of practical guidelines for society, for governance; a set of standards for public policy.

Consider, first, biblical guidelines for personal behavior:

While the Bible is replete with ethical teaching, the Decalogue as a set of standards and the Book of Proverbs as a set of maxims embrace what I mean. At Sinai the Israelites were brought into a covenant relationship with God, which the "Ten Words," the Ten Commandments, epitomize. Idolatry of whatever kind is proscribed. They must worship the one and only true God of the universe whose covenant with them entails concrete ethical and moral precepts (Exodus 34:6-7).

Thus the Bible conveys this seminal truth: that in the universe which God has created right and wrong stand for objective characteristics which attach directly and inalienably to acts and their consequences. Moral judgments are more than

culturally fashioned and biologically induced responses, defined situationally as that which is right in any one person's eyes. They relate to the rightness or wrongness of acts which are normed by what God wills; neither capriciously nor arbitrarily, but reflecting God's own nature as holy, just and good.

From many sources in Israel's life, the Book of Proverbs presents practical maxims on how to live morally, in harmony with others, a life pleasing to God. It is a manual for living which praises the surpassing worth of wisdom and highlights the tragedy of folly. These are basic principles to guide the prudent person who has a powerful sense of dependence upon God (Proverbs 3:5-12). The good life is the moral life, which contrasts with a life geared purely to amoral behavioral responses. Wisdom leads to pursuit of that which is good (Proverbs 6:20-23). Rejection of moral standards opens one to the pitfalls of moral impurity, violence, dishonesty, duplicity, deviousness, insincerity.

In the past men like Benjamin Franklin taught America practical morality, though today's ethos eschews criticism of anyone's behavior. But what is wrong with the following, from Proverbs: be concerned for the poor (22:22-23), avoid violent persons (22:24-25), retain societies landmarks (22:28), avoid covetousness (23:4), guide and discipline children (19:18), refrain from drunkenness and gluttony (23:20-21), honor parents (23:22), flee immorality (23:26-28), seek good friendships and shun bad ones (24:1-2, 19-20)?

Second, what about matters of public policy?

On this matter the message of the prophet Amos is pivotal. Bear in mind that, as Amos prophesied in the mid-eighth century B.C.E., his fundamental public policy thesis is *let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream* (Amos 5:24), which was uttered centuries before the Milesian philosophers speculated about the nature of reality, or Athenians such as Plato and Aristotle debated the nature of justice.

While he urges compassion for the poor and oppressed, he argues that the fundamental issue concerning social evils is not inequality. Inequality is the result; injustice is the cause. If there were justice, freedom and opportunity there would not be so many poor.

His list of evils is astounding: genocide, barbarism, ethnic cleansing, judicial bribes, excessive penalties, arbitrary government, extortion, fraud, perjury, exploitation, fraud, moral and religious corruption, curtailing freedom of speech and, generally, subversion of justice.

In Amos justice, righteousness, and that which is right are correlatives. Justice (*mishpat*, 5:7, 15, 24; 6:12) is that which is one's due. Righteousness (*tsadaq*, 5:7, 24; 6:12) is that which is equitable or right; in societal matters it identifies that which is due, equitable, or right in the execution of social, judicial and

political obligations. Right (*nakoach*, 3:10) means that which is right, straightforward, upright. It is our obligation (5:14-15) to seek good (*tubh*) not evil (*ra'a*).

Amos was a keen observer of human affairs and well informed about evils within the life of his own people the Israelites, and of surrounding nations. His indictment is unsparing, especially about the fraud of celebrating religious festivals while exploiting the oppressed. Amos was a tract of the times for many centuries in the rise of Christian Europe which helped move Europe from barbarism to civilized societies and helped America, in part from its British Christian heritage, to develop a constitution that honored the dignity of humans created in the image of God.

Further, Amos is among the first of the prophets to say that God is not only Lord of Israel but also of history. All nations are seen to be responsible to God. Thus the teleological character of history is declared. God is not removed from the movement of history and he will achieve his purposes. And though Amos sounds solemn warnings, his final word is one of hope based on God's unchanging justice and unending love (9:11-15).

Unlike their forefathers, modern American evangelicals have been pushed to the fringe of American culture. Early- and mid-nineteenth century evangelicals in Britain were strong enough to disestablish the Church of England, but instead of pursuing political power they devoted themselves to abolishing slavery, caring for the sick and widows and orphans, feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless during the social and economic upheavals associated with the Industrial Revolution, and seeking to diminish the abuse of women. Our American evangelical forefathers were part of the mainstream of American culture.

Today's evangelicals, usually despised by left-wing progressives who enjoy the social benefits of past evangelical compassion and are cynically pandered to for their votes by some on the right, ought to renew their God-given mandate to create a revolution against today's exploitation, the abortion of uncounted millions of innocents, the redefinition of marriage, divorce, the staggering illegitimacy rate, the tragedy of enormous numbers of fatherless children, inadequate education of our children, overseas poverty, ethnic cleansing, and genocide. But this can best happen not by political clout in Washington or in the courts. Acquiring political power does not equip one to change America morally and spiritually.

The hatred of George W. Bush so palpable in the media has as much to do with snobbish despising of evangelical faith as any other factor. The philosophical materialists and transcendentalists have not and, indeed, cannot produce moral change in America. Only the willfully blind fail to see in our world that religious terrorism, mafia-type economies, repression and exploitation of women and girls, ethnic cleansing, caste systems, transcendentalist myopia in the midst of

unspeakable poverty and suffering, walk hand in hand with religious, economic and metaphysical systems that America's cultural and academic secular reactionary elite like to play with but do not comprehend. Absorption with comparative religion has become a variegated quilt that covers a multitude of sins.

Change can come about only by seeding the main segments of American culture with key biblical ideals and values. If Mel Gibson can roil and challenge thinking in Hollywood with his film *The Passion of the Christ*, even temporarily, then others can do it in politics, business, education, the media, science, medicine, the judicial system, and social services. Abortion and divorce are receding in numbers, but the rate of change in these and other social evils could quicken if evangelicals again enter the main-stream of American life, exhibiting lives of goodness, intelligence, balance and compassion -- in short, Christ-infused principles - and then slowly by give and take, and by judicious compromises, seek to turn America toward higher ideals.

But there is more to the transforming Biblical paradigm, beyond distinctive personal moral teaching and the concept of justice in regard to public policy: it is philosophically distinct and, in my judgment, the paradigm of choice for the future of mankind.

That we are now supposed to be in the post-Christian era suggests the loss of the biblical hermeneutic; we are witnessing a massive demonstration of unbelief the spirit of which is self-conscious use of power without faith. And anyone who proposes to limit power in line with faith is mocked. Despite secular rejection of them, it is time to ask whether Biblical categories are in fact the viable intellectual alternative for the future.

Christianity's "way of arranging the world" is what overtook the ancient world views, in a world richly furnished with ideas, and it is instructive to note parallels with today's mind set.

In apostolic and post-apostolic times during the inception and rapid expansion of the Christian faith, Christians were confronted by two large philosophical traditions: Transcendentalism and Materialism.

First, Transcendentalism characterized the religions of the Empire, but was centered chiefly in the Idealism of the ancient philosophical schools. These tended to denigrate the empirical world and sought release from earthbound existence to behold the divine (Platonists, Gnostics, Manicheans, Neo-platonists, among others). Fundamentally their views were *inimical to full-blown individual personhood*. For them, God is impersonal reason. Human personality is a transient epiphenomenon which will soon be cured by death and re-absorbed into infinite transcendent reality. Freedom is an illusion. In modern times, the parallels include various forms of Panentheism (Paul Tillich) and Process Philosophy (A. N. Whitehead).

The other major ancient philosophical tradition was the materialistic atomism of Leucippas, Democritus and Epicurus: all that exists is matter in motion. This yields a philosophy that is totally deterministic and fatalistic and, when put into psychological and ethical forms, totally hedonistic. Its exact parallel in our time is the Behaviorism of Ivan Pavlov and B. F. Skinner. For them, as well, human freedom is an illusion. This view denies the existence of the soul or spirit and views the termination of human life as the end of everything. The hedonist model of the good life is, “eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die.” This is what the media in America foster today.

Karl Marx created a parallel economic and social theory out of the traditional materialist categories and, while he rejected teleology in favor of historical determinism, he nevertheless espoused a gospel of the inevitable movement of human history toward a classless society.

It is time to draw the contrast between these two deterministic models - Transcendentalist and Materialist – and the Biblical model.

The Biblical model is indeed a manifesto: it rejects determinism, whether metaphysical, psychological or economic. God is the creator of the universe. Human beings have a spiritual nature. They are created for freedom and are responsible to God for their actions and their stewardship of the world.

The Christian view centers on three important points: First, the nature of reality derives from the creative act of God. It is essentially moral and spiritual in nature, fashioned for persons and interpersonal relations. The whole world is the object of God's love and concern. Its genius is not the behavioristically conditioned ant-heap, but the creation of free human beings in Christ who will know and serve God righteously.

In other words, conservation of humanity and stewardship of the created order is inherent in the biblical model, but has no intellectual foundation in either Transcendentalism or Materialism. Thomas Kuhn, physicist and philosopher of science, has said that science proceeds by occasional paradigm shifts. It is time for the West to shift away from the reductionist tendencies of the modern materialist view of human nature and re-affirm the truth of the biblical model: that each human being has a spiritual nature which is created in the image of God, and that recognition of this truth affords the best protection of human beings as free persons from modern manipulators who propose re-fashioning humanity biologically, psychologically and socially into their motor-affective response reconstruction of human nature.

## **Enhancing the Role of the Bible in Modern Evangelical Life**

The most important factor regarding the Bible in evangelical life is its use privately and in public worship *in the hands of the people*. At issue are four key factors: how to facilitate the internalization of the content of Scripture, how to affirm key Scripture doctrines, how to conserve faith in the authenticity of the Scriptures and in their being the norm of the Christian faith, and how to best propagate the biblical message.

Habits of private use are mostly shaped by the role of the Bible in public worship. About this one can register concern about aspects of modern evangelical worship practices.

To begin with, which Bible (translation) to use? This is a most perplexing question. Currently there is no resolution in sight, given the plethora of translations and paraphrases available. I will by-pass paraphrases, the use of which I discourage whether for private or public use. These often reflect the ideological slant of the paraphraser, and in use they often reflect the predilections of the reader who is looking for the rendering of a text to confirm a previously formed opinion.

As to translations, the NIV is the most commonly used modern version. Though the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB) often yields a more literal translation it has not enjoyed the circulation of the NIV. The same can be said for the *New King James Version* (NKJV). The use of the RSV and its successor, the NRSV, and the *New English Bible* (NEB) among evangelicals is limited.

The many available translations inhibit the internalization of scripture. An important aspect of the KJV heritage was its *common use in the hands of the people* during public worship. The many translations now in the hands of the congregation militates against congregational responsive reading. Projecting the reading on to a screen or printing it in the church bulletin, does not facilitate familiarization with the pages of the Bible as does having one in one's own hands in the pew.

Internalization of Scripture is best facilitated through familiarity which is fostered by repeated exposure to a commonly used translation. And the translation must be lyrical enough to facilitate memorization, as well as accurate enough to merit memorization. In my judgment modern translations are not designed as literature for oral reading and easy memorization. That was a key aspect of the private and public use of the KJV. I cannot imagine memorizing the Twenty-third Psalm or 1 Corinthians 13 in anything but the KJV.

At this point I offer a personal anecdote: Following the conversion of my parents to personal Christian faith in Canada at my age ten, I remember the first day I was taken to Sunday School. For a period of two years the leaders of the Sunday School sponsored a Memory Work Contest. As my parents were new converts, it appeared to them that the only thing to do was that their children should enter the contest and win! So my sister and I spent each Saturday morning memorizing upwards of 12-20 verses of Scripture to recite the next day.

During those months I committed about 1000 verses of Scripture to heart. This created a reservoir of instruction on the back shelves of my mind that has proved to be life-directing. Included were the Ten Commandments, many of the Psalms (including the entire 119<sup>th</sup> Psalm), Isaiah 53, the Beatitudes, parts of the Gospel of John, and many parts of the Epistles, including 1 Corinthians 13.

Consider Acts 2:41-42: upon their conversion and baptism, new converts *devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers*. Add to this Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 where Paul speaks of *addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*. Liturgical practices not only reinforce faith in one's head, they deposit a rich store of truth in the heart.

Such worship practices were common in the evangelical tradition of recent generations, whether Baptist, Methodist, Congregationalist, Presbyterian, Reformed, Christian Missionary Alliance, Pentecostal, or Independent churches. The Bible was not detached from worship, such as a text thrown up on a screen to reinforce the point of a topical sermon. It was integral to all that went on in worship as reflected in prayers, responsive readings and expository sermons. The hymns, especially, reflected biblical language and motifs, without unseemly familiarity with God, such as some who today refer to God as “the Guy upstairs.”

What I speak of embraced many differing liturgical patterns, whether that of Baptists and others who for generations used the Ira D. Sankey collection of hymns *Sacred Songs and Solos* which originated with the Dwight Moody revivals, or more traditional denominational hymn books, or other traditions of music such as Black Gospel Music, or Blue Grass. Worship had its confessional base which emphasized the greatness of God, the divinity and saving work of Christ on the Cross, the fellowship of the saints, and the call to holy living and committed Christian service. It must be, as Rick Warren warns in the *Purpose Driven Life*, “not about you, but about God.”

Here are suggestions on how to increase the use of the Bible in public worship:

1. Utilize biblical sentences as a call to worship such as: Psalm 1:1-2; 8:1, 3-4, 9; 19:1-4; 23:1-3; 24:3-5; 32:1-2, 11; 34:1-3; 40:1-3; 89:1-2; 100; Isaiah 40:28-31; 45:5-7; 55:1, 3; 61:1-2a; 66:1-2; 1 Corinthians 1:3.

2. Utilize biblical benedictions and blessings at the end of the service such as: Numbers 6:24-26; Psalm 4:6b, 8; 73:23-26; John 14:27; Romans 1:7b, 11:33-36; 16:20b; 1 Corinthians 16:23; Galatians 1:3-5; Ephesians 1:2, 17-20a, 6:23-24; Philippians 4:4-7.

Such sentences can be adapted and printed or projected for joint congregational reading.

3. A congregation should be trained to know the books of the Bible and be able to find them quickly. It should not be thought undignified from time to time to jointly recite the O.T. books and the N. T. books as an exercise, or have young children lead the congregation in such a recitation. While identifying the page number of a passage in the Bible may be helpful to persons totally at sea on how to find the passage for a point in the sermon or for a congregational reading, that should be a muted announcement. Congregations should develop familiarity with the Bible so that they can instinctively and quickly find the passage in the Bible in hand.

4. Re-emphasis of at least the two key Christian annual festivals is in order, namely, Christmas to celebrate the birth of Christ, and Easter to celebrate Christ's resurrection. In some churches these have become so muted that traditional, biblically-based Christmas carols and hymns concerning Christ's passion and resurrection are unfamiliar. I recommend also extensive use of biblical passages in the church services and sermons associated with these festivals. It seems in recent years that other special observances have taken precedence over those of the traditional church year, such as women's events, men's events, youth events, social service events, and many others.

5. Brief expository series, and Bible biography series, along with informing historical and geographical reference, are splendid aids to increase Bible literacy.

6. I recommend that the church decide on a translation which will be placed in the pews or hymn book racks behind the chairs. Whatever translation or paraphrase people use as a personal Bible is not at issue. Joint congregational use is important in conveying solidarity as to what the Bible means to Christians as joint members of Christ's body.

Whether one of the newer Bible translations will become dominant to most Christians in the English-speaking world remains yet to be seen. For biblical teaching to embed itself in the minds and hearts of the people a church ought to settle on one translation and use it regularly in all the venues of worship and teaching so that its language becomes "second nature" to the people. The Bible in the hands of the people is its best defense, conservation, and propagation.

How can teaching of the Bible be maximized in church life? Small groups do not reach all, or even most people in any given congregation. The decline of Sunday

School in many churches and loss of expository preaching in favor of topical preaching has been disastrous for levels of biblical knowledge among many in modern times. This is true despite the enormous increase in the circulation of new translations and paraphrases of the Bible and the publication of Christian literature some of which has reached the best seller lists.

The cure for absorption with pet themes, narrow-mindedness and tunnel vision as to grasping the message of the Bible is canon-wide study and appreciation of the plenary scope of the teaching of the Scriptures. Systematic book by book study sets the message of the Bible in its historical contexts and makes the application to today all the more incisive -- the concepts are not merely lifted out of context, bare-bones. Consistent, canon-wide study is the best cure for narrow, mind-shackling, brain-washing obsession.

But what should be one's attitude to the scriptures in light of the never-ending modern tension between scholarly and devotional uses of the Bible? It is quite remarkable how derisively dismissive secularists are in academic circles whenever the word "Bible" is heard. This attitude is simply proof of sustained ignorance of one of the most potent intellectual and cultural influences in the history of mankind. No one can think of himself or herself as an intellectual who does not know the contents of the Bible. To be an educated person the study of the scriptures purely as classical literature which has profoundly affected the development of western civilization is mandatory.

My advice: take the biblical texts as we have them and study them with care. Give even a modicum of credence to authorial intent. Leave the weightier academic questions about manuscripts, variant readings, source criticism, form criticism, in abeyance. This is no different from my taking Plato's *Republic*, or Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, or Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations* at face value and then striving diligently to grasp what the author has written in the text I have in hand (or, for that matter, what the editors of the text have compiled). Bear in mind that in the case of the canonical scriptures, we have manuscript copies which extend the range of likely early textual authenticity far beyond anything available in classical studies. Give credence to the text, and diligently search out its sense in the form in which we have it.

Along with other teaching programs, I urge return to a Canonical Curriculum strategy. By this I mean that each minister, each lay person, resolve that at some point in life he or she will make a serious study of each book of the Bible. And, that in the case of each book, one should prepare several pages of notes on the historical background of the book and author, outline the literary and story structure of the book, and make notes on its major themes and permanent values.

I have found this to be a rewarding aspect of church ministry. If you log in to my website [[www.drsmstheology.com](http://www.drsmstheology.com)] you will find a BIBLE tab. Under that tab are files named Canonical Curriculum where there are notes on each book of the

Bible. These were developed in connection with pastoral ministry in an attempt to convey the structure and content of the Bible. If I were to teach such a series today, would I revise them? Of course! It takes hours and hours of study to prepare such material, but it is eminently profitable to do so both for the doer and the listener.