back to the disciples and earliest Christian leaders, but he considers them to be fakes, insofar as their literary style and theological ideas diverge from those early texts that he considers normative. He offers only a few examples: the Gospel of Peter, the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Matthias, and the Acts of Andrew and John. Apparently there were many others, too many for him to list conveniently. And again, we can be sure that his assessment of them as heretical was itself disputed by those who embraced them in their communities. Otherwise, why mention them at all?

History is usually written by the powerful. Canons too. Eusebius and Athanasius were certainly among the most influential Christian leaders of the fourth century, as Christianity came to be identified with Roman state power under Emperor Constantine and, in the process, developed parallel structures of government and control. They were no doubt instrumental in establishing a narrower theological orthodoxy in what was by then a Christian empire, and in ruling out those Christian texts that did not fit well within that orthodoxy. Yet even during their time, after Christianity had become the religion of the state, three hundred years since Jesus's time, scriptural network cultures continued to thrive, thereby resisting centralized, top-down attempts to close the canon definitively. Roman Christianity had a loose canon at best.

The Story of the Good Book

Remembering What's Lost

A massive obelisk towers above the Piazza Santa Maria Maggiore on the Esquiline Hill in Rome. On its tiptop, overlooking the ancient ruins of the Forum and the Colosseum a mile away, stands a most imposing bronze statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary. When I first beheld her, having just huffed up the hill from the Forum, I thought she was an emperor or crusader saint. Broad-shouldered and muscular, she carries the baby Jesus like a rugby ball in her left arm while extending her right hand toward her audience below. Erected in the sixteenth century, it is an imposing image of the church as masculine, patriarchal power.

A stone's throw down the hill from Mary Maggiore is the modest church of Santa Pudenziana, now the Filipino center of the Roman Diocese. One of the oldest churches in Rome, its construction began in the fourth century. Its floor is several feet below the city's modern-day street level, so you have to walk downstairs to the main door. Buried beneath it is another, earlier level of occupation: an ancient Roman complex believed to be the remains of a first- or early-second-century Christian house church. Excavations during the late nineteenth century revealed a series

of rooms connected by narrow hallways along with the remains of a thermal bath system. Many of these areas were badly damaged or filled in when the church's foundations were built centuries later. The excavation area has now been deemed structurally unsound and is closed indefinitely.

The docent was kind enough to take me to a poorly lit back area where there were two small holes in the floor that offered partial views of the ancient space. She slid back the wrought-iron grate covering one of them, and I peered down with a flashlight. I saw a small room with a floor of round, flat stones. On one wall was a narrow archway leading I know not where. I looked into the other hole and saw even less, a stone shaft leading down into seemingly bottomless blackness.

What extremely partial windows onto the past! They reveal very little, almost nothing. I tried in vain to imagine life down there, before churches, before cathedrals, before the Holy Roman Empire, before a follower of Jesus could even have imagined such a melding of religious faith and state power so boldly proclaimed by the obelisk of Santa Maria Maggiore.

I did visit other, somewhat more whole, remains of what might have been early house churches in Rome. Beneath the nearby twelfth-century Basilica San Clemente, for example, is an older basilica whose construction dates back to the fourth century. Beneath it are two large complexes of rooms and hallways divided by a narrow alley. In the first century, they probably comprised two separate houses. Legend holds that one of them was the house church of Saint Clement, an influential early church leader and author of a letter that was widely influential among early Christians. One problem with this claim: the only religious space found thus far among the earliest remains is a small, second-century temple dedicated to the service of the Persian god Mithras. Built to resemble a cave, it is a windowless space with a

low, arched ceiling and raised benches along the walls where initiates shared ritual meals during services. On the east end is a stone podium on which is carved a depiction of the young, energetic Mithras slaughtering a bull whose tail looks like a shock of wheat, representing springtime fertility. A religion based on rites of initiation, Mithraism was popular in Rome, especially among the military, until the fourth century, when the newly Christianized empire eradicated it.

On the nearby Aventine Hill is the church of Santa Prisca, built over what was long believed to be the first-century house church of Prisca and Aquila, the couple mentioned in Paul's letters and in the book of Acts. In 1934 Augustinian Fathers from the adjacent monastery began excavations in search of remains. What they found was another late-second-century Mithraeum, very similar to the one under San Clemente. Again, no signs of that early Christian community, only of another religious import, which thrived alongside Christianity for centuries.

These and other ancient remains shed no more light on earliest Christianity than do the iron-grated holes in the floor of Santa Pudenziana. More than anything else, they convey the attendance of an indeterminate past. They testify to what has been irrevocably lost. They bear witness to the presence of an absence that shapes us in ways we can never articulate. Being accountable to them means never forgetting what's been forgotten. It also means resisting the temptation to project the present into the silent gaps of the past, pretending that the way we are is the way they were.

Scrolling Down to the Book

In the house churches of the early decades of Christianity, most of the copies of Jewish Scriptures and early Christian writings

would have been scrolls and, increasingly by the second century, codices. As we have seen, scrolls were the dominant medium for literature throughout the Greco-Roman world at that time. Codices were used primarily as notebooks for lists and writing practice. They were usually made with one or more wooden pages that were hollowed out and filled with an effaceable surface like wax. Later, as they came to be used for literary works, they were made by stacking sheets of papyrus or parchment together, folding them down the middle, and stitching them together along the fold. So one sheet made two leaves with four pages, and a quire of four sheets would make sixteen pages. These quires could then be stacked together and bound into larger books.

The media revolution of the book was a slow and mostly quiet one. It took a good three centuries. During most of that time, scrolls and codices coexisted. The earliest reference to the use of a codex for literature comes from a Roman poet named Martial who, writing in the 80s CE, recommends that his poems be kept in a small codex with parchment pages. Interestingly, archaeological evidence suggests that early Christian communities may have been among the earliest adopters of the new medium. Most, though not all, surviving Christian manuscripts dating as far back as the second century are papyrus codices. The oldest, which dates to the first half of the second century, is a tiny fragment of a codex of the Gospel of John. Intact, it measured about eight inches square and contained about 130 pages.

The prevalence of the codex among early Christian manuscripts of the second and third centuries stands out sharply against the larger Greco-Roman cultural context of the same period. There, the vast majority of literature continued to be published in scroll form. So striking is the contrast between Christianity's apparent preference for the codex and its larger literary-culture's preference for the scroll during this time that some historians believe that the codex was essentially a Christian innovation.

Why this Christian propensity for the codex? Some reasons were probably practical. Codices were somewhat cheaper to produce, since they allowed for text to be written on both sides of each sheet. Still, other inefficiencies in early Christian manuscript production suggest that such savings were not the primary motivation. More importantly, a single codex could hold more writing than a reasonably sized scroll. One of the oldest Christian codices, dating to around 200 CE, includes all of Paul's letters in its 208 pages. A scroll with all of Paul's letters would have been absurdly long and unwieldy.

Perhaps the predominance of the codex in early Christian scriptural culture is rooted in the very origins and early spread of the movement itself. It has been suggested that Paul and his disciples used small codices in order to publish and disseminate his letters in highly portable and handy form (a single sheet folded over two or four times to make eight or sixteen pages). It has also been hypothesized that Jesus's disciples, as well as the followers of other rabbis during his time, used simple codices like handy notebooks in order to write down the sayings of their teacher.

Whatever led to the unique rise of the codex among early Christians, the new medium was profoundly influential on the scriptural culture that developed around and by means of it. Above all, it facilitated new practices of reading. A scroll prescribes a linear reading experience. You start in one place and continue to scroll along in one direction. You don't easily jump back and forth in the text. Cross-referencing is not practical. Nor is reading short passages from different parts of the text (*testimonia* may have originally emerged as a remedy to this problem). Codices, by contrast, readily accommodate random access. A reader can easily jump backward or forward in the text, or between two different texts in the same codex, without losing her place. She can even bookmark related passages to read together, one after another. In this way, the codex encourages readers and

hearers to discover intertextual connections. This particular feature of the codex probably appealed especially to early Christian communities interested in relating different passages to one another by means of cross-referencing.

Still, early Christian codices were not like modern books, especially in their storage capacities. The longest were not more than two hundred pages, and most were considerably smaller than that. Given that they were intended for public reading, moreover, their handwritten scripts were quite large. The technology of the codex did not reach the point of being able to hold anything close to an entire canon of Jewish and Christian Scriptures until the fourth century. Nor was there any such thing as a closed canon of those Scriptures until that time. The closing of the canon and the binding of it into a single big book seems to have gone hand in hand.

It is no coincidence that this establishment of the Bible as a single closed canon of Scriptures for all Roman Christians, and the concomitant establishment of a narrower Christian orthodoxy, took place in the century after Constantine's conversion, as Christianity ascended to state power. As the imperial religion, its increasingly hierarchical structures not only enabled but encouraged greater regulation and uniformity.

The main point I want to make here is that neither Jesus nor his followers nor Paul nor any of the authors of any of the texts now in the New Testament, let alone any Christians who lived during the first three hundred years of Christianity, could possibly have imagined the Bible, a single book containing a closed canon of Jewish and Christian Scriptures. It was both physically and socially impossible. Not only were there just too many different varieties of Christianity with too many different important writings with too many variants in too many different languages; there was simply no medium to bear anything close to

that large of a library. It took the twin emergences of a top-down imperial Christianity and a big enough book to make the Bible possible.

Scattered Throughout the Whole World

By the fourth century, the technology of the codex had reached the point that it was possible, if still not very practical, to hold a body of literature as large as the Christian canon of Scriptures in a single volume. What would such a book have looked like? The earliest known Christian Bible, Codex Sinaiticus, dates to the mid-300s. Reconstructed from loose pages found in a waste bin in the library of Saint Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai in 1844, it would have been about twenty inches high and seventeen inches wide and would have contained about 700 pages of parchment. That's a lot of animal hide. Analysis of the handwriting indicates that three or four different scribes wrote the text. Needless to say, not only was this Bible book large and cumbersome; it was very expensive to produce. Even this complete Bible book, moreover, is not identical in contents to the canon as we now have it: its Old Testament includes some Apocryphal Jewish texts but is missing others that eventually were included, and its collection of Christian Scriptures includes two texts that eventually did not make the canonical cut: the Letter to Barnabas and an abbreviated version of an early Christian text known as the Shepherd of Hermas.

The invention of the big codex did not lead to the immediate publication of the Christian Bible as a big book. In fact, most Bible manuscripts dating to the fourth and fifth centuries were not whole Bibles but collections of certain biblical texts — the Psalms, for example, or the four Gospels. As is well known thanks to novelist Dan Brown, Constantine commissioned Eusebius in

322 to produce fifty copies of the "sacred Scriptures . . . written on prepared parchment in a legible manner, and in a convenient, portable form, by professional transcribers thoroughly practiced in their art." None of those copies survive, but it is likely that they were Gospel Books, not whole Bibles or even whole New Testaments. It would have been impossible at that time to produce a conveniently portable codex of anything more. Moreover, as Eusebius himself made clear in his catalogue of "undisputed," "disputed," and "heretical" Christian writings (discussed earlier), the canon of the New Testament was not yet fixed.

Nor did the media invention of the big book and the concomitant rise of Christianity to imperial power mean that biblical texts were suddenly standardized and made uniform from one copy to the next. Biblical manuscripts of the late fourth century were widely and significantly different from one another. It was this fact that led Pope Damasus, who avidly sought to make Rome the center of Christendom, to commission Jerome, at that time an up-and-coming theologian and grammarian, now remembered as the patron saint of Bible translators and librarians, to study all the various versions of Scriptures and establish a single authoritative Latin edition from them. In his preface to his edition of the Gospels, Jerome clearly recognized the challenge.

> You ask me to . . . sit in judgment on the copies of the Scriptures which are now scattered throughout the whole world . . . The labour is one of love, but at the same time both perilous and presumptuous; for in judging others I must be content to be judged by all; and how can I dare to change the language of the world in its hoary old age, and carry it back to the early days of its infancy?

The task was especially daunting given that there were so many significantly different Old Latin translations being used in Rome.

So many, in fact, that Jerome complained, "There are almost as many forms of texts as there are copies!"

By the time of his death in 420, Jerome (probably working with a team of translators and scribes) had produced an entire Bible written in the Latin of his time. His primary sources were the Greek and Hebrew texts that he had been able to collect, but he also consulted Old Latin versions. The result was the basis of what eventually became the standard Vulgate ("common" or "popular") Bible for all of Western Christendom.

Still, it would be wrong to suppose that, as soon as Jerome finished his edition, Western Christianity had finally found its single, established, authoritative version of the Bible (even if it wasn't original but based on comparing various earlier versions). Not at all. For one, whole Bibles, including all of the Old and New Testament texts in a single bound volume, were still relatively rare. The oldest surviving whole Vulgate Bible, known as the Codex Amiatinus, dates to the beginning of the eighth century. The sheer size of this volume gives some clue as to why, practically speaking, such whole Bibles were rare: it is twenty inches high, a little over thirteen inches wide, seven inches thick, has over two thousand pages, and weighs about seventy-five pounds.

For more than a century after Jerome, the Old Latin codices of Christian Scripture, which he had complained were unreliable, remained dominant. Only very slowly, by around the seventh or eighth century, did his Vulgate gain clear preeminence. Evidence for this gradual takeover by the Vulgate is found in surviving manuscripts. There are about 370 biblical manuscripts or fragments in Latin that date to earlier than 800. Only about a third of those dating to the fifth century are from the Vulgate. By the sixth century, however, there are twice as many Vulgate manuscripts as Old Latin ones. By the eighth century, there are twelve times as many.

Jerome's Vulgate itself was never fixed and changeless. At some point after his death, several additions were made to it. Passages from his other writings were copied into it as introductory prologues to various books. Even more significantly, Jerome's canon was altered. He had excluded Apocryphal books such as Baruch and Tobit, because, although they appeared in the Greek manuscripts of the Septuagint (used by Greek-literate Jews as well as Christians), they did not appear in his Hebrew manuscripts, which he believed were more original. Yet all the Vulgate Bibles that have survived include them. Jerome had not translated them, and so these Apocryphal parts of the Vulgate Bible must have come from the Old Latin versions. Ironic, since these unreliable versions were the very problem that the Vulgate was intended to remedy.

Beyond these additions to Jerome's authorized Vulgate Bible, there are many variants among the early copies of the Vulgate that have survived. Some are minor, but others are quite significant. Some of the oldest known manuscripts of this Bible include the letter to the Laodiceans, an epistle that must have been regarded as canonical by some authorities and not by others during the early centuries of Roman Christianity. Another very early Vulgate Bible has the four Gospels edited together into a single, harmonized narrative. Even with the Vulgate, then, there was a significant degree of instability. It would be more accurate to talk about the Vulgates than the Vulgate.

After Gutenberg

We might have expected the invention of the printing press and the rise of print culture, with the Bible at its center, to give the Bible the fixity and permanence that had been sought since Jerome a thousand years earlier. Mechanical printing, after all,

made it possible to produce thousands of copies of one book, each identical to the next. But for that fixity to be achieved, there would need to have been a single, original book to mass-produce. When it came to Christian Scriptures, there was no such thing.

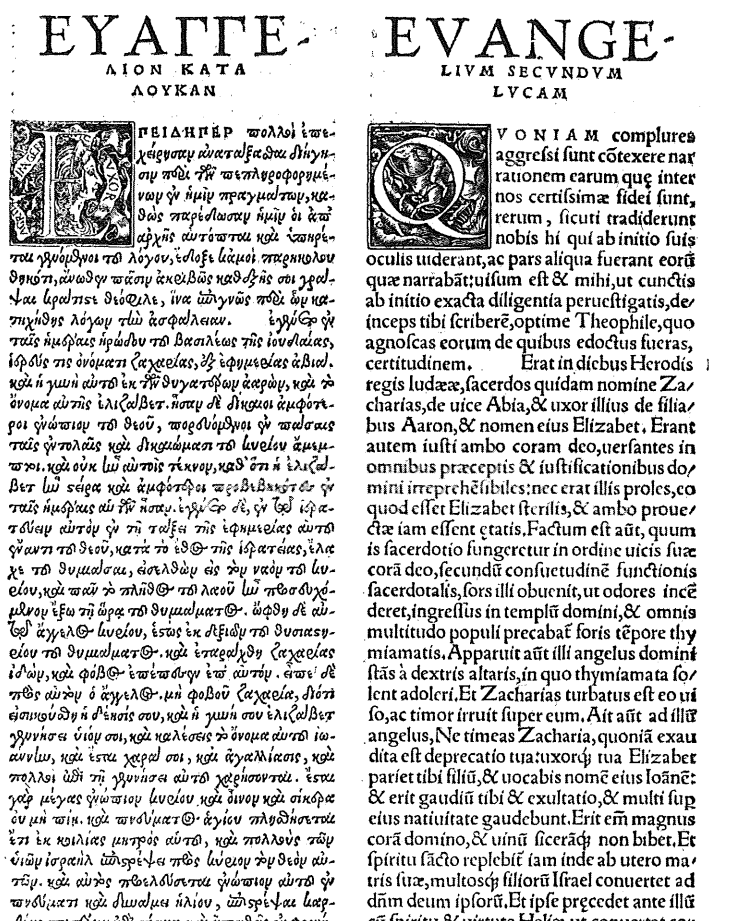
Gutenberg's first Bible, published in 1456 with a print run of about 185, was a Vulgate Bible based on one of several widely available manuscript versions. This "Gutenberg Bible" has become an icon of the print culture that he inaugurated. As printing businesses began popping up throughout Europe, however, it quickly became clear that there were many more sales to be made by publishing translations of the Bible into common-day languages. Within two decades of Gutenberg's first Bible, there were nine German Bibles in print. By the mid-sixteenth century, as Protestantism gained momentum, many different Bibles would appear in many other modern languages as well, and these would be made from different "original" manuscripts in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew.

Indeed, the Protestant Reformation was as much a media revolution as it was a theological revolution. It was in many respects a biblical-literacy movement, aimed at making the Bible as readily available and accessible as possible in order to make real the ideal of a "priesthood of all believers." At the same time, print culture was quickly transforming Bibles and other books from collectable manuscripts into tradable commodities. They were no longer held strictly within the domain of wealthy and powerful patrons who commissioned expensive hand copies of whole Vulgate Bibles, Gospel Books, and Psalmodies for churches, monasteries, and the homes of the literate elites. They were mass-produced consumer items. So emerged the business, both theological and capitalist, of publishing Bibles for the masses.

Not only did the print revolution enable the proliferation of many new Bible translations; it also helped foster a more acute

awareness of the problems of biblical translation, since it soon became clear that there was no single original from which to translate. Especially influential in this regard was the great Catholic theologian and linguist, Erasmus. In 1516 he published *Novum Instrumentum,* which was the first print edition of the New Testament in Greek. The book had two columns per page: the beautifully designed Greek text on the inside column and Erasmus's Latin translation of that text on the outside column. His translation frequently diverged significantly from the Vulgate, thus implicitly challenging its authority and reliability. That challenge was softened by the book's original title: *Novum Instrumentum,* "new instrument," indicating that the text was meant to be a research tool for scholars rather than a rival edition of the New Testament. Two years later, however, he republished it under the title *Novum Testamentum.* The clear message was that the Vulgate was not the definitive embodiment of Christian Scriptures, but one among other fallible witnesses to them.

Then, in 1522, a team of Spanish scholars directed and funded by Cardinal Jiménez de Cisneros of Spain completed the six-volume, polyglot (multilingual) edition of the Bible known as the Complutensian Polyglot Bible (after its city of publication, Complutum, the Latin name of Alcalá de Henares, Spain). It remains as one of the towering monuments to print culture. I have had the rare opportunity to examine an original copy for myself, and I can attest: not only is it one of the grandest and most ambitious achievements of sixteenth-century biblical scholarship; it is also a work of great bookish beauty. Its Old Testament, published in four volumes, incorporates seven different columns of text written in four different languages using five different type fonts. On the inside top left is the Greek Septuagint with an interlinear, word-by-word Latin translation. Next to that is the Latin Vulgate version of the Old Testament. Next to that is the Hebrew. And next to that, on the far right, is a narrow column of



ΕΥΑΓΓΕ-
ΛΙΟΝ ΚΑΤΑ
ΛΟΥΚΑΝ

ΕΠΕΙΔΗΠΕΡ πολλοὶ ἐπεχείρησαν ἀνατάξασθαι διήγησιν περὶ τῶν πεπληροφορημένων ἐν ἡμῖν πραγμάτων, καθὼς παρέδοσαν ἡμῖν οἱ ἀπ' ἀρχῆς αὐτόπται καὶ ὑπηρέται γενόμενοι τοῦ λόγου, ἔδοξε κἀμοὶ παρηκολουθηκότι, ἄνωθεν πᾶσιν ἀκριβῶς καθεξῆς σοι γράψαι κράτιστε θεόφιλε, ἵνα ἐπιγνῷς περὶ ὧν κατηχήθης λόγων τὴν ἀσφάλειαν. ἐγένετο ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἡρῴδου τοῦ βασιλέως τῆς Ἰουδαίας, ἱερεύς τις ὀνόματι Ζαχαρίας, ἐξ ἐφημερίας Ἀβιά. καὶ ἡ γυνὴ αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῶν θυγατέρων Ἀαρών, καὶ τὸ ὄνομα αὐτῆς Ἐλισάβετ. ἦσαν δὲ δίκαιοι ἀμφότεροι ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ, πορευόμενοι ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ἐντολαῖς καὶ δικαιώμασι τοῦ κυρίου ἄμεμπτοι. καὶ οὐκ ἦν αὐτοῖς τέκνον, καθότι ἦν ἡ Ἐλισάβετ στεῖρα καὶ ἀμφότεροι προβεβηκότες ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις αὐτῶν ἦσαν. ἐγένετο δέ, ἐν τῷ ἱερατεύειν αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ τάξει τῆς ἐφημερίας αὐτοῦ ἔναντι τοῦ θεοῦ, κατὰ τὸ ἔθος τῆς ἱερατείας, ἔλαχε τοῦ θυμιάσαι, εἰσελθὼν εἰς τὸν ναὸν τοῦ κυρίου, καὶ πᾶν τὸ πλῆθος τοῦ λαοῦ ἦν προσευχόμενον ἔξω τῇ ὥρᾳ τοῦ θυμιάματος. ὤφθη δὲ αὐτῷ ἄγγελος κυρίου, ἑστὼς ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου τοῦ θυμιάματος. καὶ ἐταράχθη Ζαχαρίας ἰδών, καὶ φόβος ἐπέπεσεν ἐπ' αὐτόν. εἶπε δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸν ὁ ἄγγελος. μὴ φοβοῦ Ζαχαρία, διότι εἰσηκούσθη ἡ δέησίς σου, καὶ ἡ γυνή σου Ἐλισάβετ γεννήσει υἱόν σοι, καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἰωάννην, καὶ ἔσται χαρά σοι, καὶ ἀγαλλίασις, καὶ πολλοὶ ἐπὶ τῇ γενέσει αὐτοῦ χαρήσονται. ἔσται γὰρ μέγας ἐνώπιον κυρίου καὶ οἶνον καὶ σίκερα οὐ μὴ πίῃ. καὶ πνεύματος ἁγίου πλησθήσεται ἔτι ἐκ κοιλίας μητρὸς αὐτοῦ, καὶ πολλοὺς τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ ἐπιστρέψει πρὸς κύριον τὸν θεὸν αὐτῶν. καὶ αὐτὸς προελεύσεται ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ ἐν πνεύματι καὶ δυνάμει Ἠλίου, ἐπιστρέψαι καρδίας πατέρων ἐπὶ τέκνα, καὶ ἀπειθεῖς ἐν φρονήσει δικαίων, ἑτοιμάσαι κυρίῳ λαὸν κατεσκευασμένον. καὶ εἶπε Ζαχαρίας πρὸς τὸν ἄγγελον. κατὰ τί γνώσομαι τοῦτο; ἐγὼ γάρ εἰμι πρεσβύτης. καὶ ἡ γυνή μου προβεβηκυῖα ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις αὐτῆς. καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς ὁ ἄγγελος, εἶπεν αὐτῷ. ἐγώ εἰμι Γαβριὴλ, ὁ παρεστηκὼς ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ. καὶ ἀπεστάλην λαλῆσαι πρός σε, καὶ εὐαγγελίσασθαί σοι ταῦτα. καὶ ἰδοὺ ἔσῃ σιωπῶν, καὶ μὴ

EVANGE-
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QVONIAM complures aggreſsi ſunt cõtexere narrationem earum quę inter nos certiſsimæ fidei ſunt, rerum, ſicuti tradiderunt nobis hi qui ab initio ſuis oculis uiderant, ac pars aliqua fuerant eorũ quæ narrabãt: uiſum eſt & mihi, ut cuncta ab initio exacta diligentia perueſtigatis, deinceps tibi ſcriberẽ, optime Theophile, quo agnoſcas eorum de quibus edoctus fueras, certitudinem. Erat in diebus Herodis regis Iudææ, ſacerdos quidam nomine Zacharias, de uice Abia, & uxor illius de filiabus Aaron, & nomen eius Elizabet. Erant autem iuſti ambo coram deo, uerſantes in omnibus præceptis & iuſtificationibus domini irreprehẽſibiles: nec erat illis proles, eo quod eſſet Elizabet ſterilis, & ambo prouectæ iam eſſent ętatis. Factum eſt aũt, quum is ſacerdotio fungeretur in ordine uicis ſuæ corã deo, ſecundũ conſuetudinẽ functionis ſacerdotalis, ſors illi obuenit, ut odores incẽderet, ingreſſus in templũ domini, & omnis multitudo populi precabat foris tẽpore thymiamatis. Apparuit aũt illi angelus domini ſtãs à dextris altaris, in quo thymiamata ſolent adoleri. Et Zacharias turbatus eſt eo uiſo, ac timor irruit ſuper eum. Ait aũt ad illũ angelus, Ne timeas Zacharia, quoniã exaudita eſt deprecatio tua: uxorq; tua Elizabet pariet tibi filiũ, & uocabis nomẽ eius Ioannẽ: & erit gaudiũ tibi & exultatio, & multi ſuper eius natiuitate gaudebunt. Erit enim magnus corã domino, & uinũ ſicerãq; non biber. Et ſpiritu ſancto replebit iam inde ab utero matris ſuæ, multoſq; filiorũ Iſrael conuertet ad dñm deum ipſorũ. Et ipſe præcedet ante illũ cũ ſpiritu & uirtute Heliæ, ut conuertat corda patrũ in filios, & inobedientes ad prudẽtiã iuſtorũ, ut paret dño plebẽ perfectã. Et dixit Zacharias ad angelũ, Quo argumẽto iſtuc cognoſcã? ego enim ſum ſenex, & uxor mea prouectæ ætatis eſt. Ac reſpondens angelus dixit ei, Ego ſum Gabriel, qui aſtiti in cõſpectu dei, miſſuſq; ſum ut loquar ad te, & hæc tibi læta nũciẽ. Et ecce futurũ eſt, ut ſis tacit⁹ nec

First page of the Gospel of Luke in Erasmus's *Novum Testamentum* (1535 edition). The left column is the Greek text, and the right column is Erasmus's own translation (*secundum,* "second") into Latin, implicitly challenging the authority of the Latin Vulgate version. *Courtesy of the Special Collections Research Center, Kelvin Smith Library, Case Western Reserve University*

verbal roots corresponding to the Hebrew text. On the bottom left is an Aramaic paraphrase of the Torah, known as Targum Onkelos. Next to that is its Latin translation. And on the far right is a narrow column of Aramaic roots from the Targum. The New Testament, published as the fifth volume, is simpler but no less visually striking. It has parallel columns of Greek and Latin Vulgate, with the words in each version keyed to the other for easier comparison and cross-referencing. At the end of the volume is a Greek dictionary. The sixth volume includes a Hebrew and Aramaic dictionary and grammar guide for use with the Old Testament.

The sizes and appearances of the different fonts were designed to signal the status of each text relative to the others. Because Greek was the original language of the writings of the New Testament, for example, the Greek font for that text is larger, rounder, and more ornate than the one used for the Greek text of the Septuagint, since it is a translation. Likewise, the Latin font of the interlinear translation of the Septuagint (a translation of a translation) is smaller and plainer than that of the Vulgate translation. And the Hebrew font of the Old Testament is larger than that of the Aramaic paraphrase of the Targum.

Several other polyglot Bibles, produced by teams of scholars in other parts of Europe, followed over the next century and a half. The largest, known as the Paris Polyglot (completed in 1645), boasted ten volumes and included seven different versions of biblical literature (or parts of it) in six different languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, Latin, Old Syriac, and Arabic. The most highly regarded and influential, however, was the six-volume London Polyglot (1657), also known as Walton's Polyglot after its lead scholar, Brian Walton. Compiled, edited, and annotated by an all-star team of biblical scholars and linguists, its Old Testament includes nine different versions: the Hebrew, the Greek

Septuagint, the Latin Vulgate, the Aramaic Targum, the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Old Syriac version known as the Peshita, an Arabic version, and an Ethiopic version of the Psalms and Song of Songs, as well as two other versions of the Targum and a Persian translation. Its New Testament includes the Greek and Latin Vulgate versions along with many variants found in other ancient Greek, Syriac, Latin, Ethiopic, and Arabic manuscripts, along with a Persian version of the four Gospels.

On one of my visits to the archives of the American Bible Society in New York, I was allowed to browse the early rare manuscripts of its Scripture Collection. The curator and resident scholar is Dr. Liana Lupas, a Romanian American woman who is as warm and collegial as she is formal and erudite. The collection is her domain, and she knows it like the back of her hand. We started with the obvious: early English Bibles. She smiled slightly and pulled down a few extremely rare volumes from a nearby shelf. No doubt she expected me to start with those. But when I asked about the early polyglots, her face lit up. She quickly escorted me to the dimly lit back of the room. They were all there. She pulled out first editions of Erasmus's *Novum Instrumentum,* the Complutensian Polyglot, and the London Polyglot from the shelves and laid them open on the floor for me to explore. Kneeling before them, she gave me extensive guided tours of each volume, revealing as much about their beauty and craft as their literary contents. There are no better illustrations of the term "magnum opus." These were mammoth scholarly projects that demanded aesthetic as well as intellectual passion and rigor. They were all-encompassing works, demanding one's whole heart, mind, and strength.

On the front page of *Novum Instrumentum,* Dr. Lupas pointed out a beautifully handwritten Latin inscription. Although written by a later owner of the book, I think it captures the spirit of Erasmus and other early Bible editors and translators of the

age. It reads, "*Ubi non est deus, ibi no lux: ubi non est lux, ibi non est veritas: ubi non est veritas, ibi sum variae opiniones, ubi sum variae opiniones, ibi est error.*" I'm sure Dr. Lupas, a classics scholar, could translate it more faithfully than I, but I think this is its gist in English: "Where there is no God, there is no light: where there is no light, there is no truth: where there is no truth, there are various opinions: where there are various opinions, there is error." Truth is enlightenment, and enlightenment is of God. Shedding light on what passes as truth is not only permitted; it is necessary, the highest calling.

It was in this spirit of enlightenment that what began with Erasmus had, in a little more than a century, given rise to massive, multiversion, multilanguage critical editions of biblical literature like the London Polyglot. These works were revolutionizing biblical criticism and translation, empowering scholars everywhere to study and compare all the available biblical manuscripts and variants for themselves, to assess the value of various ancient and modern translations, and to produce new ones. Translating from Hebrew and Greek manuscripts, they could claim that their translations were superior to the Vulgate, which had been corrupted over the centuries. They were doing essentially what Jerome had done, but translating into present-day vulgates. In the process, they were drawing greater and greater attention to the

Opposite: Brian Walton's six-volume masterpiece, the London Polyglot Bible (1657), includes thirteen different columns in eight different languages for every biblical verse of the Torah. Pictured here is the left-hand page of the full spread for the first fourteen verses of Genesis. It includes, from left to right, starting at the top: (1) the Hebrew, with an interlinear Latin translation; (2) the Latin Vulgate; (3) the Greek Septuagint, with variants from other versions of the Septuagint noted at the bottom; (4) a Latin translation of the Septuagint; (5) the Syriac version; and (6) a Latin translation of the Syriac. On the facing page (not pictured) are seven more versions of the same biblical verses: (7) the Aramaic Targum; (8) a Latin translation of the Targum; (9) the Samaritan Hebrew version; (10) the Samaritan Aramaic version (11) a Latin translation of the Samaritan Hebrew; (12) the Arabic version; and (13) a Latin translation of the Arabic. *Courtesy of the Special Collections Research Center, Kelvin Smith Library, Case Western Reserve University*

fact that there was no single original. In the centuries since, that problem has been exacerbated by the discovery of many, many more early manuscripts, which have turned the quest for originals into an endless, if not impossible, task.

Like Jerome, moreover, many of these scholars raised questions about the boundaries of the canon itself. Remember that Jerome had excluded the Apocryphal books from his Vulgate Bible because they did not appear in his Hebrew manuscripts, but only in the Greek Septuagint. After his death, others added them back in. Now many Protestants, also working from Hebrew versions in their translations of Jewish Scriptures, were pushing these Apocryphal books back out. Many seventeenth-century editions of English Bibles, for example, didn't include the Apocrypha. The practice was common enough by 1615 that Archbishop Abbot prohibited stationers from publishing a Bible without it under penalty of a year in prison. Indeed, some more radical reformers were going so far as to question the canonical status of other, more central biblical books. Martin Luther himself said that he hated the book of Esther, that James was "an epistle of straw," and that he saw no evidence of the Holy Spirit's inspiration in Revelation. Although he did not dismiss them from the canon, later editions of his German Bible did exclude the Apocrypha.

In response to growing criticisms of the Vulgate as inaccurate and corrupt, the Roman Catholic Church under Pope Sixtus V (the same pope who erected the obelisk of Santa Maria Maggiore) commissioned a group of biblical scholars to produce a new standard edition of it based on careful comparison of many early manuscripts, the Codex Amiatinus prominent among them. First published in 1590 and then revised and republished in 1592, the "Sixtine Vulgate" became *the* Bible of Roman Catholicism for the next three and a half centuries. Of course, Roman Catholicism was by then one of many Christianities in the West, so its

official Bible was but one of a great many others now being, to borrow Jerome's image, "scattered throughout the whole world."

The print revolution lent a sense of fixity, closure, and immutability to the idea of the book. As Walter J. Ong famously observed, the printed book "encloses thought in thousands of copies of a work of exactly the same visual and physical consistency." And what was true of books in general was especially true of The Book of books, that is, the Bible. Yet the reality of the Bible in the age of Gutenberg has been quite the opposite: it has led to the proliferation of more Bibles in more forms and translations than ever.

Multiplying the Leaves

Many new translations of the Bible included extensive notes and commentaries intended to lead readers toward certain interpretations and away from others. These in turn led competitors to produce Bibles with alternative perspectives. Different Bibles were arguing with each other.

The very popular Geneva Bible (1560), for example, produced by English Puritan reformers who had fled to Switzerland to escape the persecutions of Queen Mary, often spun its translations and notes in a strongly antimonarchical direction, implying affinities between England's rulers and those of Israel's enemies like Babylon and Egypt. In its marginal notes on the story of the Exodus, for example, it takes pains to point out that the Hebrew midwives were being obedient to God by disobeying Pharaoh's order to kill all newborn Hebrew baby boys, although they should have done so openly: "Their disobedience herein was lawful, but their dissembling was evil." Commenting on Pharaoh's subsequent command that any Hebrew boys be tossed into the river as soon as they're born, another marginal note adds, "When tyrants can not prevaile by craft, they brast [burst] forthe into

open rage." In fact, this sense of identification with the Israelites as God's people oppressed by an ungodly monarch is clear from the moment one opens the book. On its title page is an illustration of the Israelites about to cross the Red Sea, with Egyptian cavalry (dressed very much like contemporary English military) hot on their heels. Around the engraving are the words of two biblical passages, each offering the promise of divine liberation from ungodly, oppressive powers: "Feare ye not, stand stil, and beholde the salvation of the Lord which he will shewe to you this day. The Lord shal fight for you: therefore holde you your peace" (Exodus 14:13–14), and "Great are the troubles of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth them out of all" (Psalms 34:19).

Other notes identified the enemy of God's people as the Roman Catholic Church. A note in the book of Revelation, for example, explicitly identifies the beast that will rise from the bottomless pit as the pope. Later editions of the Geneva Bible added even more vehemently anti-Catholic commentary. The 1598 edition includes notes to Revelation that call Pope Gregory VII "a most monstrous Necromancer" and "a slave of the devil." Talk about a values-added Bible! Creating the Bible in one's own image appears to be as old as the Bible-publishing business itself.

The Geneva Bible was by far the most popular English Bible for more than a century, during which time about two hundred different editions of it were published. It was, moreover, what the Pilgrims and Puritans brought with them to America, and it was the Bible that Puritan-educated leaders like Benjamin Franklin and John Adams read. It was also the Bible of Shakespeare and John Bunyan, and no doubt helped inspire the anti-Royalists in the English Civil War. Still, some of its notes, especially those that supported disobedience against unjust laws and monarchs, concerned those in positions of power. King James I, for example. Although a Protestant, he complained that notes such as

those found in Exodus were "very partiall, untrue, seditious, and savouring too much of daungerous and trayterous conceites."

Indeed, the King James Version, so often touted as the purest and holiest of all English Bibles, was born of the royal desire for a counterrevolutionary, unannotated alternative to the Geneva Bible. The work of fifty-four translators commissioned by King James and published in 1611, this "Authorized Version" was the officially sanctioned Bible of England. Given this vested interest, it's not surprising that the government imposed strict copyright laws controlling who could publish it and how. Only certain publishers were licensed to print it, and there were requirements and restrictions on its appearance. Most significantly, no notes or illustrations were permitted.

Yet, as you might have guessed by now, unlicensed but ambitious printers soon found profitable ways around these copyright laws. Some purchased Bibles printed by licensed printers, took them apart, inserted illustrations and other value-adding content, and then rebound and resold them at higher costs. Early examples from the 1630s include the Gospel harmonies handmade by the well-known Anglican minister Nicholas Ferrar. These Bibles were actually made by cutting up pages of a printed Authorized Bible and pasting them, along with illustrations, onto blank pages in a new book. Still other printers sold as "commentaries" or "annotations" books that happened to include all or nearly all of the text of the King James Bible. Some included only scant notes, which were placed in such a way that they could then be easily cut out by binders before binding. Other printers added maps and illustrations that allowed them to categorize their Bibles as educational material, thereby avoiding copyright restrictions.

Still others imported English Bibles that were printed in other countries, often underselling the licensed printers. Not surpris-

ingly, some protested that these imports suffered from a lack of quality control and were full of misprints. In an imported Bible from 1682, for example, a passage from Deuteronomy about divorce addresses a situation in which a husband "ate," rather than "hate," his wife. But such protests were undermined by errors in licensed Bibles. The most well known was the so-called Wicked Bible, published in 1631 by the King's Printer, Robert Barker. It omitted a rather significant "not" in the Seventh Commandment: "Thou shalt commit adultery"!

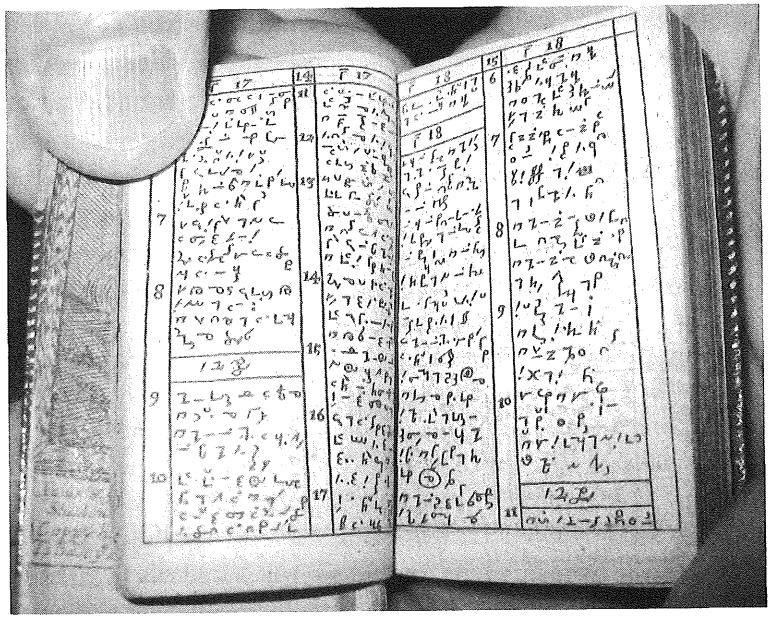
We get a fascinating window onto this fiercely competitive early Bible market in an anonymous four-page tract called *Scintilla; or A Light Broken into Darke Warehouses,* published in 1641 by Michael Sparke, a Puritan bookseller, frequent copyright infringer, and strong critic of the aforementioned Robert Barker. In an attempt to break Barker's monopoly on the Bible trade, Sparke had been importing and selling Bibles from Holland. Barker caught wind of it, got a warrant to search the seaports, confiscated all the Bibles he could find, and sold them himself. In the tract, Sparke gives account, in real numbers, of how the "Monopolists" in their "darke warehouses" have been profiting unfairly by jacking up the prices of Bibles and other books. "But a touch of this," he concludes, "for it is too tart, and I verily beleeve picks the Subjects pockets, that eats brown bread to fill the sleeping Stationers belly with Venison and Sacke." Yet Sparke's own motives for trying to expose them are mixed to say the least. On the one hand, obviously, as a capitalist, he wants to compete in an open and fair market. On the other hand, as a Christian, he wants the Bible to be affordable, and therefore more widely available. The monopoly is making Bibles more expensive than they need to be, and thus holding back the Word. Then as now, the Bible business was both evangelistic and capitalistic, an uneasy mix of spreading the Word and selling it.

As this mixed business, whether authorized or not, continued to grow, so did the number and variety of value-added Bibles on the market. By 1800, at least one thousand different editions of the Bible in English had been published, displaying a stunning array of form and content. Here are just a few examples:

The Souldiers Pocket Bible (1643), a sixteen-page collection of brief passages, mostly from the Old Testament, used by Oliver Cromwell's Parliamentary soldiers in the English Civil War. Its subtitle is surprisingly long, given the size of the Bible itself, promising to provide "most (if not all) those places contained in holy Scripture, which doe shew the qualifications of his inner man, that is a fit Souldier to fight the Lords Battels, both before the fight, in the fight, and after the fight; Which Scriptures are reduced to severall heads, and fitly applyed to the Souldiers severall occasions, and so may supply the want of the whole Bible, which a Souldier cannot conveniently carry about him: And may bee also usefull for any Christian to meditate upon, now in this miserable time of Warre." It was revised and reprinted as *The Christian Soldier's Penny Bible* in 1693 and then again for American soldiers during the Civil War (as many as fifty thousand copies).

Seventeenth-century *dos-à-dos,* or "back-to-back" Bibles, in which a New Testament and a book of Psalms were bound back to back but with their spines reversed so they would open in opposite directions, allowing a reader to flip one book over to read the other.

The very tiny *Whole Book of Psalms in Meter According to the Art of Shortwriting* (1659), by Jeremiah Rich, one of the fathers of modern shorthand. As much a promotion of Rich's method as a Bible for reading, it's about one inch wide and two inches long. Rich created his own plates in order to print it. In 1687 another shorthand expert, William Addy, published a complete Bible in shorthand. It has 396 pages and measures about three inches wide and a little over four inches long.



The Whole Book of Psalms in Meter According to the Art of Short-writing (1659), by Jeremiah Rich, one of the fathers of modern shorthand. *Courtesy of the Scripture Collection, Library of the American Bible Society*

Solomons Proverbs (1666), a complete reshuffling of all the verses from the biblical books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes by Anabaptist theologian and politician Henry Danvers. He organized them under an alphabetical list of subjects ("Adversity," "Adultery," and so on).

A multivolume Bible, "Paraphras'd: With Arguments to each Chapter, And Annotations thereupon," by popular author and churchman Symon Patrick (d. 1707). Here the biblical text is integrated with Patrick's own extended paraphrases, the only difference being that the biblical text is in italics. Thus it is almost impossible to read the biblical text on its own, separate from Patrick's interpretive expansions.

The New Testament in Greek and English (1729), by William Mace, who created his own, otherwise unknown Greek edition, "corrected from the Authority of the most Authentic Manuscripts."

Mr. Whiston's Primitive New Testament (1745), a new translation by the well-known author and translator of the Jewish historian Josephus, William Whiston. Although apparently never completed, this New Testament was intended to include several noncanonical early Christian and Jewish scriptures, such as the Shepherd of Hermas, the Epistles of Ignatius and Polycarp, and a homily on Hades by Josephus.

The Family Testament, and Scholar's Assistant (1767; first edition 1766), whose long subtitle explains that it is "calculated not only to promote the reading of the Holy Scriptures in families and schools, but also to remove that great uneasiness observable in children upon the appearance of hard words in their lessons, and by a method entirely new . . ." Significantly, this new method is not about understanding difficult meanings but pronouncing difficult spellings. Following a general introduction to spelling and reading, it offers "directions for reading with elegance and propriety." Then, at the top of each chapter, it gives the accents and syllable breaks for unfamiliar words. It's less concerned with reading comprehension than with sounding learned, not so much being biblically literate than appearing so.

Scotch preacher John Brown's very popular *Self-Interpreting Bible* (first published in 1778 with several subsequent editions) was promoted as an Everyman's Bible, offering the clear meaning of every passage "in a manner that might best comport with the ability and leisure of the poorer and labouring part of mankind, and especially to render the oracles of God their own interpreter."

Matthew Talbot's completely rearranged Bible (1800), which takes all the verses of the Old and New Testaments out of their original contexts and puts them into thirty subjects, or "books"

(e.g., "Deity," "Christ," "Holy Days"), which are then subdivided into 285 chapters and 4,144 sections, "whereby the dispersed rays of truth are concentrated, and every Scriptural subject defined and fully exhibited."

So much for *sola scriptura.*

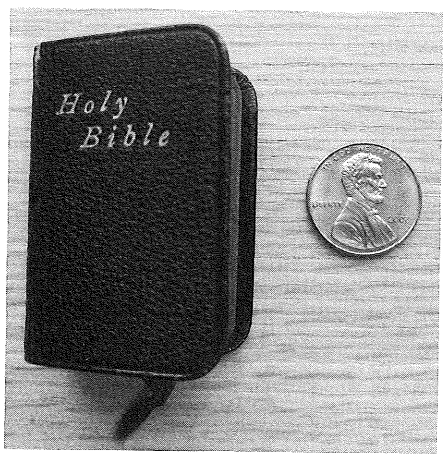
In many respects, the Bible society movement, in the form of the American Bible Society and its sister organization, the British and Foreign Bible Society, began in reaction to this expanding market of value-added Bibles. Both were nonprofit and both were committed to the widest possible circulation of the Bible in the Authorized Version "without note or comment" — "cheapening and multiplying the leaves of the Tree of Knowledge and of Life" in order to get the Bible into as many hands as possible, believing that doing so was the answer to all the world's problems.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the ABS resisted adding content to its Bibles or printing them in innovative formats. Reading through the minutes from its annual meetings during its early decades, I found instances in which members made creative proposals for adding value to their Bibles and thereby making them more popular. One suggested that the ABS print the Bible as a series of newspaper issues. Another suggested that index tabs be inserted at the beginning of each biblical book for quicker searching. But these and other more or less flashy innovations were consistently rejected. In the age-old evangelical dilemma of preservation versus popularization, the ABS leaned hard toward preservation.

Yet the ABS's own Scripture Collection, which is the largest in the United States, makes very clear that other publishers continued to profit by doing exactly what the ABS resisted, thereby "multiplying the leaves" in a very different sense. In many nineteenth-century Bibles, the biblical text is almost entirely overwhelmed by the various value-adding "extras" — annotations, commentaries, and "practical notes" — provided by this or that well-known scholar or churchman. In most of these Bibles, the extras make up well over half of the text on any given page.

Others introduce novel, "got to have" formats — a finely made red velvet Bible with gold trim (1850), for example, and numerous ultra-tiny "thumb Bibles," many of which include only a few pages summarizing biblical stories. One exception is David Bryce's miniature edition (1896). "Printed upon the very thinnest Oxford India paper ever made," it measures only eighteen by fifteen millimeters and includes the entire Bible on its 520 total pages. It came in a tiny metal box with a tiny magnifying glass. Of course, even with the glass, it is pretty much unreadable.

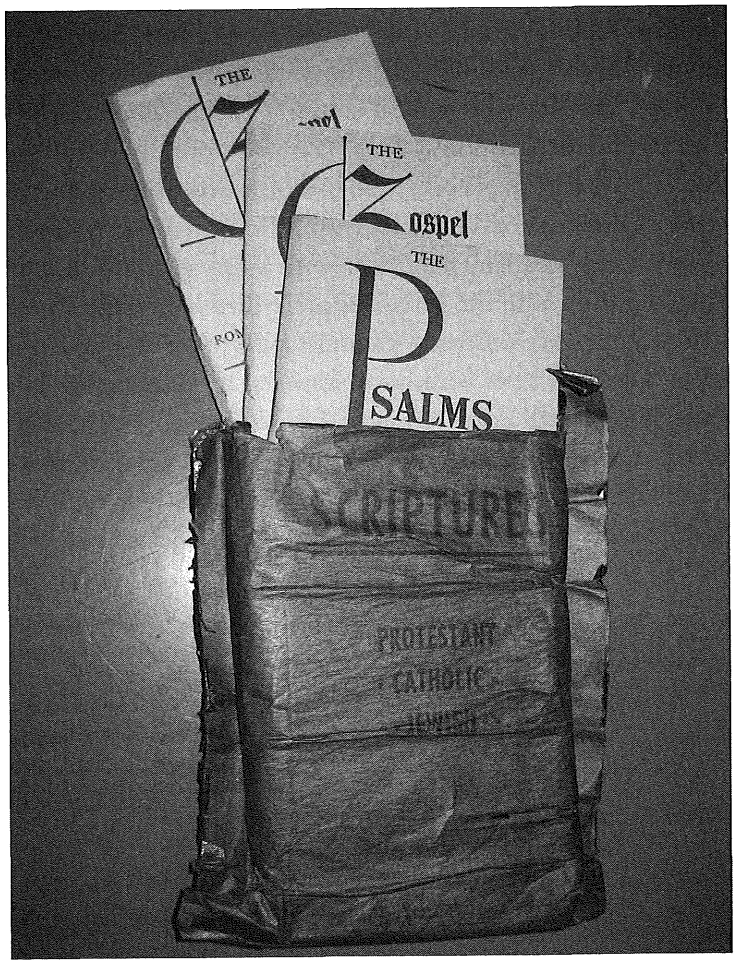
In certain extraordinary circumstances even the ABS was willing to experiment with novel formats, if not notes or comments. It published a red leather pocket-sized Bible with a leather clasp for Civil War soldiers, and small canvas editions of the New Testament for soldiers in both world wars. During World War II it and the British and Foreign Bible Society also pub-



David Bryce's thumb-sized edition of the whole King James Version Bible, printed on 520 pages (1896). It came in a small metal box with a tiny magnifying glass. *Courtesy of the Special Collections Research Center, Kelvin Smith Library, Case Western Reserve University*

lished what I believe to be the first waterproof Bible, "for Life Boats and Rafts," small packets of pamphlet-sized biblical books wrapped and sealed in aluminum and paper.

Still other Bibles offered novel versions of the biblical text itself. In 1848 Andrew Comstock published a phonetic *Δe Nw Tes-*



A waterproof "Lifeboat Bible" from World War II. This interfaith edition includes fascicles of Gospels and the Psalms wrapped in foil and paper. *Courtesy of the Scripture Collection, Library of the American Bible Society*

tament ov ør Lwrd and Sevyur JDizus Krist in his own "purfekt alfabet," which claimed to have a single printed character for every articulate sound, accent, and inflection. In 1876 Julia E. Smith published, at her own expense, the first translation of the Hebrew Scriptures and Greek New Testament by a woman. In her preface, she writes, "It may be thought by the public in general, that I have great confidence in myself, in not conferring with the learned in so great a work, but as there is but one book in the Hebrew tongue, and I have defined it word for word, I do not see how anybody can know more about it than I do." Others produced far less "word for word" editions, such as *Stories from the Bible Put into Basic English* (1933), by C. K. Ogden, the inventor of "Basic English," a simplified language comprised of 850 core vocabulary words. Parodied as "Newspeak" in George Orwell's novel *1984,* Basic English was a foreshadow of the grade-school-level vocabularies used in so many more recent Bible paraphrases.

One of the most commercially successful Bibles was the ambitious *Illuminated Bible,* a large-format family Bible published in 1846 by Harper & Brothers, which spent more than six years and $20,000 on its development. Bound in gold-embossed leather, it included over sixteen hundred lavish illustrations, most of them original, along with extensive cross-references, notes, a chronological index, a concordance, and tables of weights, measures, and biblical proper names. It also included spaces to inscribe details of births, deaths, and marriages. In a very real sense, this Bible was meant to be more than simply a part of the family. The family, indeed the world, was encompassed within it.

Many nineteenth-century portraits idealize the image of the family gathered around the father or grandfather for a brief service of Bible reading and prayer. Others picture a mother reading to her adoring child, almost as though nursing. As cultural historian Colleen McDannell comments, "Just as breast milk gave nurture and pleasure to children, so the mother's use of the Bible

fed, comforted, and delighted her progeny." In these images as in those with the patriarch at the center, parents are idealized as the pastors of their familial congregations of children, and Bible reading is their primary pastoral activity.

Supported by such images, the family Bible became the centerpiece of a form of popular American religiosity in the nineteenth century that McDannell aptly calls "material Christianity." Emerging in the Victorian era in the aftermath of the revivalism of the Second Great Awakening, material Christianity focused on physical objects to awaken powerful religious emotions, fostering devotion to certain Victorian ideals for the Christian home and family, in which the father was breadwinner and public authority figure while the mother was homemaker and domestic spiritual nurturer. At the same time, the industrial revolution was accelerating print culture, making large, ornate family Bibles more plentiful and readily affordable for a growing number of households. These factors combined to make the family Bible both the physical and iconic centerpiece of domestic Christian piety in the mid- and late nineteenth century.

Lost in Translations

At the same time as the family Bible was in ascendance, the very idea of a single, universal *translation* of the Bible for the English-speaking world was beginning to disintegrate.

Although there had been other translations available, the King James Version reigned more or less supreme from the late seventeenth century through most of the nineteenth century. That changed with the publication of the Revised Version Bible in 1881 (New Testament only) and 1885 (whole Bible). Since 1611, there had been significant discoveries of ancient biblical manuscripts, such as the Codex Sinaiticus. At the same time, scholarship in the ancient biblical languages had made great advances. Done

by an ecumenical committee of British and American translators, the Revised Bible aimed not only to update the archaic language of the Authorized Version but also to correct it in light of these discoveries and advances. Theirs was a dream of ecumenical unity among all of English-speaking Christendom. And that dream, they believed, would be realized through this ecumenically produced and therefore truly "common Bible."

But the dream quickly turned into a nightmare of greater conflict and division, especially in the United States. By calling into question the authority of the Authorized Version, the Revised Version Bible introduced (or rather reintroduced) what American religious historian Peter J. Thuesen describes as a new "Bible market" in which there was no longer a single, correct choice, not only for what edition of Bible to buy and use, but also for what translation. This raised disconcerting questions that went to the heart of biblical authority. Is any translation trustworthy? Is the task of the translator objective or subjective? Do different translations reflect different values and vested interests? Is the Bible, in English or in its original languages, subject to correction and revision? What meanings might be lost in translation? Is there one Bible or are there many? Driven by an ecumenical desire to produce a translation of the Bible that all could embrace, the Revised Version had inadvertently reopened a can of worms that had been effectively closed since the King James Version had come to dominate the English-speaking world.

Most fundamentalists initially approved of the Revised Bible. The project was, after all, consistent with its commitment to the doctrine of inerrancy, which claims that, as the literal Word of God, the Bible is without error or contradiction in its original "autographs," that is, its original manuscript form. Since we no longer have those original autographs, it is the task of the scholar to investigate all later manuscript evidence in order to determine the most reliably original text. Which had been the explicit goal

of the Revised Version committee. In time, however, several influential fundamentalists grew to distrust that committee's motives, seeing that some of its members were proponents of biblical higher criticism, discussed earlier, and those doubters returned to the King James Version. Eventually, they and many others came to embrace *The Scofield Reference Bible,* a King James study Bible published in 1909 by the influential theological and biblical inerrantist C. I. Scofield.

A half century later, another distinguished committee of biblical scholars under the umbrella of the ecumenical National Council of Churches of Christ produced a revision of the Revised Bible, called the Revised Standard Version (New Testament only in 1946; complete Bible in 1952). It, too, drew criticism from fundamentalists and soon came to be seen as the flagship of modern liberalism. One particular bone of contention was its translation of Isaiah 7:14, "Behold, a young woman [Hebrew *'almah*] will conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." Other versions had invariably translated *'almah* "virgin" to conform with the Gospel of Matthew, which quotes this verse in reference to the Virgin Birth of Jesus. In fact, the Revised Standard Version translation is correct. The Hebrew for "virgin" is *betulah,* not *'almah.* But Matthew is quoting from the Greek Septuagint, which uses *parthenos,* which does indeed mean "virgin." Such details were clearly too complicated for many critics, who were scandalized by what appeared to be a denial of the Virgin Birth. Martin Luther Hux, a Baptist minister from North Carolina, went so far as to burn that page, declaring the Revised Standard Version "a master stroke of Satan." For many, this translation soon came to represent all that was wrong with modern liberal Christianity and ecumenism.

Needless to say, the Revised Standard Version brought Christians no closer to the dream of a common Bible than had the Revised Bible. In fact, it inaugurated a proliferation of new and

competing translations. In 1959 the inerrantist Lockman Foundation enlisted a large committee to revise the American Standard Version. Twelve years later, it published the New American Standard Bible (New Testament 1963; whole Bible 1971). This form-driven, often very wooden translation quickly gained popularity over the Revised Standard Version in conservative evangelical and fundamentalist circles. It was the best-selling Bible in America in 1977, and continues to be popular among inerrantists to this day. The following year, 1978, saw the publication of the New International Version (New Testament only in 1973), which has dominated the Bible market ever since. Like the New American Standard Bible's translators, its large committee of biblical scholars and ministers were explicitly committed to biblical inerrancy and aimed to revise what many conservatives saw as problems with the Revised Standard Version (both, by the way, restored the virgin to Isaiah 7:14). But the more neo-evangelical-leaning New International Version was dramatically different in that it moved away from word-for-word translation and toward the new functional-equivalence, or meaning-driven, approach. In the wake of its success, as well as that of the loose paraphrasing style of the best-selling *The Living Bible,* the majority of new commercial translations have moved even further in that direction. And so the dream of a common Bible has been replaced by the reality of a Bible that is legion.

Not a Rock but a River

As overwhelmingly vast as it is, the Scripture Collection at the American Bible Society in New York would be much vaster had the society continued to collect every edition of the Bible in English up to the present. But during my visit, the collection's curator, Dr. Lupas, explained to me that the ABS had to stop striving for total inclusiveness in the early 1970s. "At that point," she ex-

plained, "it simply became unmanageable." Indeed. Around that time, as we have seen, the number and variety of Bibles began to grow exponentially.

Still, the difference between the early centuries of English Bible publishing and today is one of degree, not kind. All the seeds of the current distress crop were there: a wide variety of physical forms and formats, often promoting novelty over readability; voluminous value-adding "extras" attached to celebrity ministers and authors, often overpowering, even burying, the biblical text in a mass of "supplemental" notes and comments; new and alternative translations and paraphrases; and massive abridgments, reshufflings, and rearrangements. Thus we discover a puzzling paradox in our brief history of the Bible in print culture: the Bible's iconicity—the image and idea of it as The Book of books and singular, literal Word of God—has grown in tandem with its multiplication of forms. The image of oneness and the reality of manyness have developed hand in hand, each simultaneously encouraging and challenging the other.

Waiting to meet another ABS staff member in the bookstore downstairs, I overheard a conversation between two dark-suited, middle-aged ministers and a young African American woman standing next to a shelf full of edgy, newfangled, youth-oriented Bibles. "These things have charred the Bible," one man said, while the other two shook their heads in agreement. Then the woman made an interesting comment. "For me, it's about the *continualness* of the Bible. My Bible is always out, on my bed stand at night, on my desk at work. It's always there, so I can always be *in* it, in the Word; it's not for certain times or places. The Bible is always there, and has always been there." I found her words insightful on more than one level. First, it reveals something about how a lot of people feel about Bible reading, or being "in the Word." It's not a book to read and then say you've read. It's about a continual process of reading and rereading—not cover to cover, but all

around, over and over, here and there. It's an ongoing relationship. To her, I gather, the newfangled Bibles on the nearby shelf seemed to be marketed as Bibles for certain occasions and contexts, passing novelties to enjoy for a time. But I think her concern for the continualness of the Bible resonates on another level as well. It expresses a deep desire, shared by many, for *permanence* and *stability,* for *the* Bible as something that is the same everywhere and doesn't change over time.

But if there's one thing that this "story of the Book" makes clear, it is that the only constant in the history of the Bible is change. The history of the Bible is one of perpetual revolution. In that light, we might begin to think about the Bible not so much as a fixed thing but as a dynamic, vital tradition. In light of its history, the Bible looks less like a rock than a river, continually flowing and changing, widening and narrowing, as it moves downstream.

For some, thinking about the Bible as a river and not a rock is liberating. That rock has been a millstone around the neck and a tombstone that won't be rolled away. But for others, seeing it this way can be disorienting. That rock has promised solid foundation in a stormy world. Cling to it or be swept away. I remember a very bright first-year student who came to my office after the first session of my historical introduction to the Bible course. "I really liked your opening lecture, but I need to drop the course." Before I could ask why, she continued. "I know I need to look at this stuff, but I can't go there now. The Bible is my rock, even though I know eventually I'll need to face the fact that it really can't be that rock. But right now there's just too much chaos in my life." Even when we know that the Bible is not the rock we want or need it to be, it's hard to let go. Sometimes faith is not about leaping. Sometimes it's simply a matter of letting go and going with the flow, trusting that although there's no going back, there is a way forward.