

THE BIBLE IN THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

SBL Press

BIBLE AND ITS RECEPTION

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Edited by

Claudia Setzer and David A. Shefferman

SBL Press



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ABBREVIATIONS

AAR	American Academy of Religion
ARV	American Revised Version (1901)
BAGD	Bauer, Walter, William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker. <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.
BAL	<i>The Bible in American Life</i> (2017)
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
DOMA	Defense of Marriage Act (1996)
ERV	English Revised Version (1885)
GPBS	Global Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship
JAAR	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JNABI	<i>Journal of the National Association of Biblical Instructors</i>
JR	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
KJV	King James Version (1611)
MOBIA	Museum of Biblical Art (New York City, closed 2015)
MOTB	Museum of the Bible (Washington, D.C.)
NAB	New American Bible (1970)
NABRE	New American Bible Revised Edition (2011)
NCBCPS	National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools
NCV	New Century Version (1987)
NIV	New International Version (1978)
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible (1985)
NKJV	New King James Version (1982)
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version (1989)
RBS	Resources for Biblical Studies
RSV	Revised Standard Version (1952)
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
TED	Technology, Engineering, and Design

TTR *Teaching Theology and Religion*

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INTRODUCTION

CLAUDIA SETZER AND DAVID SHEFFERMAN

Before 1976, the state of scholarship on the Bible in America was, in Mark Noll's words, "decrepit." This Bible, it seemed, was everywhere and nowhere. It informed almost every historical period, social movement, and community identity. Yet its ubiquity made it hard to look at from a critical distance.¹ The Society of Biblical Literature responded with a publication effort to correspond with the centennial celebration of the founding of the Society in 1980, producing nineteen volumes by the end of 1986, with more to come. Central to that effort was the six-volume series *The Bible in American Culture*, edited by Edwin S. Gaustad and Walter Harrelson.² The volumes focused on American education; social reform; American arts and letters; law, politics, and rhetoric; popular culture; and Bible and Bibles (translations and versions).

This volume provides a one-volume update to the earlier series by Gaustad and Harrelson. Some of the original categories have changed, some have been added, and the definition of a specifically *American* expression of biblical ideas wavers in our global information age.³ Given

1. Mark A. Noll, "Review Essay: The Bible in America," *JBL* 106 (1987): 493–509.

2. The series included David Barr and Nicholas Piediscalzi, eds., *The Bible in American Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982); Ernest Sandeen, ed., *The Bible and Social Reform* (Philadelphia: Fortress; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982); Giles Gunn, ed., *The Bible and American Arts and Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983); James Turner Johnson, ed., *The Bible in American Law, Politics, and Political Rhetoric* (Philadelphia: Fortress; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985); Allene Stuart Phy, ed., *The Bible and Popular Culture in America* (Philadelphia: Fortress; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985); Ernest Frerichs, ed., *The Bible and Bibles in America* (Minneapolis: Fortress; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).

3. As a point of departure and in a manner consistent with the earlier volumes in the series, we begin here by using *America* and *American* to refer to the distinctive history of

the ubiquity of the biblical presence in our culture and the multiplicity of its expressions, our volume must be too brief and can merely point the way toward whole fields of research.

Noting the immensity of the subject in the 1980s, Noll called this effort only “the beginning of the beginning,” and so it has been. Numerous edited volumes and sourcebooks on the general topic have appeared in the last decade alone.⁴ Some works look at the Bible in the shaping of the historical and political narrative of the United States. No consensus emerges on the Founding Fathers’ debt to biblical ideas in their thought and rhetoric.⁵ Others consider the Bible’s place in public debates over contemporary issues including immigration, poverty, and the teaching of evolution, with a look back at some historical debates over slavery and women’s suffrage.⁶

Paralleling developments in the humanities as a whole, feminist and womanist interpretations of the Bible emerged as distinct fields in the late 1970s and 1980s, followed by the establishment of gender as a mode of analysis.⁷ Recovery of historical feminist writings from the nineteenth century

the United States, recognizing it is one country within the larger Americas. We encourage readers to chart the destabilization of these terms across the essays in this volume.

4. Claudia Setzer and David A. Shefferman, eds., *The Bible in American Culture: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2011), Mark A. Chancey, Carol Meyers, and Eric M. Meyers, eds., *The Bible and the Public Square: Its Enduring Influence in American Life* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014); Paul Gutjahr, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); and Philip Goff, Arthur E. Farnsley, and Peter Thuesen, eds., *The Bible in American Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), which includes a sociological approach, looking at who reads the Bible, how often, and which versions.

5. Mark A. Noll has completed *In the Beginning Was the Word: The Bible in American Public Life 1492–1783* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), the first in a multivolume work that will bring us to the present day. Daniel Dreisbach has focused on the biblical ideas that informed the Founding Fathers thought and rhetoric in his book, *Reading the Bible with the Founding Fathers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). Continuing the examination of the interweaving of biblical principles and politics, Paul D. Hanson presents *A Political History of the Bible in America* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015). A shorter, popular version of the same broad-strokes approach is Jon Meacham’s *American Gospel: God, the Founding Fathers, and the Making of a Nation* (New York: Random House, 2007).

6. See, for example, Frances Flannery and Rodney A. Werline, eds., *The Bible in Political Debate: What Does It Really Say?* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016).

7. Some general works include Julia O’Brien, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Gender Studies* (New York: Oxford, 2014); and Marion Ann Taylor, ed., *Handbook of Women Biblical Interpreters* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012).

appear in general works and journals. The voices and stories of first-wave thinkers like Sarah Grimké, Sojourner Truth, Anna Julia Cooper, Frances Willard, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and many others are regularly examined and contextualized. Second-wave feminist scholars have engaged the Bible to a degree that can hardly be summarized.⁸ The fruits of such work are visible in the many feminist commentaries on the Bible.⁹

African American engagement is intertwined with the experience of slavery, where the Bible was used as a “poison book,” in Allen Callahan’s words, to justify the institution, but also as a font of liberation for African Americans who claimed the book as their story. Callahan chronicles the complex career of the biblical text in African American culture, while Emerson Powery and Rodney Sadler illustrate the favored texts and uses of the Bible among the enslaved in the antebellum period.¹⁰

An interdisciplinary effort headed by Vincent Wimbush resulted in a collection of essays on African Americans and the Bible, as well as the development of the Institute for Signifying Scriptures, a research center in California that considers the interplay of social and political factors in production and use of scriptures.¹¹ Several commentaries offer black perspectives, including the significance of Africa in the Bible, as well as the experience of the African diaspora.¹²

8. One attempt is Claudia Setzer, “Feminist Biblical Interpretation,” in Gutjahr, *Oxford Handbook of the Bible in America*, 163–83.

9. See Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley, eds., *The Women’s Bible Commentary*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012); the Wisdom Commentary Series, an ongoing project of feminist interpretation of every book of the Bible, published by Liturgical Press; and Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Andrea L. Weiss, eds., *The Torah: A Women’s Commentary* (New York: URJ Press; Women of Reform Judaism, 2008).

10. Allen Callahan, *The Talking Book: African Americans and the Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Emerson Powery and Rodney Sadler, *The Genesis of Liberation: Biblical Interpretation in the Antebellum Narratives of the Enslaved* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016).

11. Vincent L. Wimbush, ed., *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures* (New York: Continuum, 2000).

12. Hugh R. Page Jr., Randall C. Bailey, and Valerie Bridgman, eds., *The Africana Bible: Reading Israel’s Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009); Brian K. Blount, Cain Hope Felder, Clarice J. Martin, and Emerson Powery, eds., *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007).

Scholarship around different social concerns continues to percolate. The contemporary Black Lives Matter movement and its effect on biblical studies is the subject of a forum in a recent issue of the *Journal of Biblical Literature*.¹³ The Museum of the Bible in Washington, DC, has provoked controversy as some question its neutrality and argue it privileges a Protestant Christian and evangelical stance.¹⁴ Environmentalists both critique the Bible's role in climate degradation and harness its power to effect reform. *The Green Bible*, an NRSV that highlights verses relating to nature, God's creation, and stewardship, appeared in 2008. Projects of both biblical interpretation and advocacy have created a field called ecological hermeneutics.¹⁵ The public interest in the history of Jewish-Christian relations and the role of New Testament interpretation in anti-Semitism partially explains the popularity of a commentary on the New Testament written entirely by Jewish scholars, now in its second edition.¹⁶

As this brief survey of the field suggests, scholarship on the Bible in America since 1976 has been much more robust than the previously decrepit state of the field that troubled Noll. Yet, the exponential expansion of perspectives and content in recent decades has only intensified one of the characteristics of the field that Noll identified. The Bible's presence in and influence on the so-called American experience is fraught with paradox. Scripture surfaces widely but inconsistently: in some cases, its role seems clear and profound, while, in others, the Bible appears to play no—or only a small and superficial—part.

The contributors here illuminate some common themes. First, a number of them call attention to a kind of biblical nostalgia, a longing for an earlier golden age of piety and biblical literacy that ostensibly contrasts with our more secular present. Second, several authors noted a similarly reverential attitude toward the Constitution as iconic and unchanging.

13. Wil Gafney et al., "JBL Forum: Black Lives Matter for Critical Biblical Scholarship," *JBL* 136 (2017): 203–44.

14. See Candida Moss and Joel S. Baden, *Bible Nation: The United States of Hobby Lobby* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017); Jill Hicks-Keeton and Cavan Concannon, eds., *The Museum of the Bible: A Critical Introduction* (Minneapolis: Fortress Academic, 2019).

15. *The Green Bible* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2008); David G. Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment: Toward A Critical Ecological Biblical Theology* (London: Equinox, 2010).

16. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Z. Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Third, the definition of an *American* biblical expression is murky. Authors and artists reflect distinctly American experiences, but their audiences are global. These questions about the fluidity of boundaries arise acutely in a world now structured by digital code. Fourth, the digital revolution has accelerated shifts in forms and formats. The Bible is no longer just a book. Finally, a stable *idea* of the Bible persists, with its attendant authority and singularity.

A Brief Overview

Lori Anne Ferrell notes a preservationist impulse in many of the new translations, combined with ingenuity and variety in format (“The Bible and Bibles in America”). The last half of the twentieth century brought the release of the New King James (1982), New Jerusalem Bible (1985), New Century Version (1987), New Revised Standard Version (1989), and Today’s New International Version (2005). She notes that the titles imply not radical revision but “mildly updated fidelity to what has always been.” What has changed is the variety of formats and the carefully calibrated appeals to niche markets, driven by consumerism. Traditional texts are embedded in teen magazines like *Revolve*, which intersperse the material with make-ups tips and articles like “Are You Dating a Godly Guy?” or the *Journal the Word Bible*, with pages to write personal reflections, *Women of Color Study Bible*, *God’s Little Princess Devotional Bible*, *The Green Bible* for environmentalists, and more. The expansive material universe of Bible production reflects an America in constant geographic and demographic flux, “a roving and restless nation of natives, nomads, exiles, and immigrants,” but the American iterations of the Bible tend to support social stability over social reform.

Jeffrey S. Siker shows that the burgeoning of technology has changed the Bible experience itself (“The Bible and Digital Media”). Harnessing of digital forms has aided dissemination of the Bible in myriad ways. Biblical material is accessible via the digital app YouVersion, ebooks, Twitter, Facebook pages, and the like. He notes that these multiple forms have changed the shape and authority of the Bible itself. Now it is “a Bible that has in many ways lost its covers,” softening notions of canon, authority, and fixed meanings. A reader (or listener) can compare translations, look up commentaries, watch videos, and generally choose what is congenial to her own world view. Siker calls the result a “stable instability.” Siker notes that

American evangelical interests are prominent in the move to digital forms, ensuring that certain narratives take precedence. Accordingly, Ferrell's and Siker's analyses also trace the ongoing dynamic around the question of Americanness between shifting borders.

Biblical themes and American experience are most obvious—and especially fraught—in popular culture. Jason A. Wyman Jr. notes that the Bible itself *is* popular culture, a best-seller that appears in print, tablets, podcasts, teen magazines, and more (“The Bible and Popular Culture”). As Ferrell and Siker also suggest, that culture is increasingly global but develops with distinctly American characteristics in US contexts. Wyman's analysis goes beyond recognition of the ubiquitous popular presence of the Bible and its elements in American life. He focuses instead on multifaceted forms of engagement in popular culture. Not merely limited to occasional biblical phrases or verses, hip-hop lyrics amplify themes of liberation theology and prophetic critique. Exodus liberation, Deuteronomistic judgment, and the comfort of the psalms, become part of what Anthony Pinn calls “nitty-gritty hermeneutics” adapted to the streets.¹⁷ These streets are the streets of major American cities, so reflect the experience of young people in a divided America. The American quality of the lyrics is not the scrubbed-clean version of exceptionalism but the protest against systemic racism.

In his essay on “The Bible in American Literature,” M. Cooper Harriss digs even deeper into many of the same themes. Harriss establishes a clear link between forms of structural discrimination and enduring efforts to control meanings of *America* and *American* through entrenched notions regarding the Bible and its cultural influence. Specifically, Harriss delineates—and challenges—the idea that “biblical exceptionalism” pervades American literature and that we should interpret that pervasiveness as evidence of a self-conception that unites our culture. Harriss, directly engaging Giles Gunn's *The Bible and American Arts and Letters* (1983), notes that the volume unfolds around the proposition that the Bible is “America's Book.” Harriss takes issue with a presumed *American* singularity (a “cheap *unum*”) imposed on heterogeneous and contradictory actualities (a living “*pluribus*”). He illuminates another reality, that

17. Anthony Pinn, “Rap Music and Its Message: On Interpreting the Contact between Religion and Popular Culture,” in *Religion and Popular Culture in America*, ed. Bruce David Forbes and Jeffrey H. Mahan, 3rd ed. (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 391.

recent American literature is *differently* biblical and “defies, takes exception to, the very property that makes it exceptional.” As evidence of such developments in recent decades, Harriss offers analysis of novels by Toni Morrison and Octavia Butler as well as other exemplary works of fiction that break down reified conceptual boundaries (e.g., elite culture/popular culture, secular/religious, white/black, American/un-American). As Harriss concludes, “American literature has by no means abandoned the Bible. Instead, it no longer peddles such an historically narrow interpretation of the Bible’s Americanness.”

Aaron Rosen takes a similar tack to generate similar questions in “The Bible and Visual Art in America.” Considering John Dixon’s 1983 essay “The Bible in American Painting” as a helpful point of departure, Rosen shows how “the terrain looks dramatically different thirty-five years later.” Rosen focuses first on the increasingly contested boundaries of art and argues for the expansion of the field beyond Dixon’s focus on painting. Rosen also explores the hybridity and capaciousness of the Bible in visual art, which he notes is just one part of larger visual culture that includes nonrepresentational biblical art, comics (or comix), and digital media. Disputes over what gets to be called art are often ciphers for political and cultural positions. “*Art* is not the only thorny term in the search for the Bible in American art,” Rosen notes. “*American* is also less self-evident than it might first appear.” As he explains, scholars and more casual observers alike now wonder more openly and reflexively what counts as American. Does such an identity depend upon one or more locations (of the artist’s birth, of her upbringing, of her production, of the art world that receives, reviews, and sells her work)? Does the classification arise from artistic responses to particular issues or experiences? Or does American designate a particular style or ethos?

In addressing the field of music (the boundaries of which, like art, continue to spawn vigorous debate), Joseph Orchard operates from the “safe” assumption that “the Bible maintains a presence in American music” (“The Bible and American Music”). But, like Rosen, Orchard asserts that, “beyond identifying works as being written by a composer of American heritage, or significantly exposed to American culture, defining a work as American is somewhat elusive.” In Orchard’s survey, the only discernible pattern in compositional music by Americans in recent decades is individualism. “One effect of individualism, or diversity,” Orchard suggests, “is the undermining of any sense of a canonic repertoire. There is no typically American composer, except to the degree that they are unique.” Orchard

notes the weaving of contemporary contexts and biblical themes in works like *The Gospel according to the Other Mary*, *El Niño*, and Harbison's *Abraham*. He laments a loss of biblical awareness and would like to see more of a biblical presence in contemporary music. While biblical motifs are identifiable in compositions for Christmas and liturgy, he notes no particular musical identity for the Bible.

A more clearly American set of ideas appears in the areas of law and politics, as described by Steven K. Green in "The Bible, Law, and Political Rhetoric." Because of its grounding in the Constitution, American law is more clearly circumscribed and distinct from other nations. Our political rhetoric, flowing from particular issues and broadly differing understanding of our country's mission and meaning, has a uniquely American flavor. The paradoxes that emerge are rather about ideals versus realities. While references to the Founding Fathers as using biblical bases are common, one searches hard to find them. An idea that American law is based on the Bible, or at least on a higher law, derived from God, persists, despite limited evidence. Green identifies two versions of natural law that feed understandings. While John Locke and other Enlightenment thinkers developed a secular version of the idea that did not stress divine origins, British common law via William Blackstone made more of its higher origins. Both versions trade places over time in judicial and public understandings. Green notes recent surveys of the American public that show 63 percent think the Founders intended a Christian nation and 55 percent think the Constitution established it as such. Even the decision in the case of *Glassroth v. Moore*, which ordered the removal of a monument with the Ten Commandments from the Alabama state courthouse (put up by Judge Roy Moore), paid lip-service to the importance of the Ten Commandments as the basis of American law. Despite the popularity of ideas of religious foundation of law, Green notes the lack of evidence to support it in founding documents or legal decisions. When the occasional reference does appear, it is usually as an allegory or rhetorical flourish. It would seem the *idea* of biblical influence is more prevalent than the reality.

Other kinds of paradoxes emerge when one considers the Bible's appearance in political rhetoric and rhetorical statements about the law. Green shows no correspondence between politicians' use of the Bible and their own apparent piety. At times they seem inversely related. Green credits Franklin Roosevelt with ushering in a generalized rhetoric that cites the Bible as part of a civil religious discourse. With Ronald Reagan, references to God and the Bible in presidential rhetoric "skyrocketed,"

with presidents from both parties invoking the text. But no straight line links the apparent religious commitment of the speaker to use of the Bible. Jimmy Carter, one of the most religiously active presidents, was very cautious in his use of the Bible. Abraham Lincoln, on the other hand, was no church-goer or openly professing Christian but showed a deep and subtle use of the Bible in his writings. The Bible's place in political rhetoric is commonplace but correlates with neither the personal piety of the politician, nor with a particular vision of our nation's role in history.

In his examination of the role of the Bible in a narrower sector of public life and civic formation—namely, the sphere of K–12 education in the United States—Mark A. Chancey shows how the Bible always has been—and remains—a delimited influence and inconsistent presence in elementary and secondary education (“The Bible and the Curriculum of American Public School [K–12] in the Twenty-First Century”). As in the broader field of law and politics, the Constitution serves as the main factor for the Bible's circumscribed role. Chancey suggests that changing demographics, including waning attachments to religion, combined with the legal constraints create popular notions—and, in many cases, curricular practices—based on a presumed Bible ban in schools.

Despite a popular notion that the Bible is banned from public schools, the result of the decision in *Abington v. Schempp* (1963), only school-sponsored devotional reading of the Bible was judged a violation of the First Amendment. That ruling, as well as subsequent court rulings, affirmed the positive value of study of the Bible as central to American history and literature. This includes the influential *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971), which established the “Lemon test,” declaring the intent of using the Bible for religious versus secular purposes as decisive in First Amendment cases.

Still, as Chancey delineates, the *Schempp* ruling shaped several competing trends. The 1980s and 1990s produced a range of active and visible campaigns for increased attention to the Bible in schools. Educators, civil liberties organizations, and religious groups devised curricula: The National Council on the Bible Curriculum in Public Schools, begun in 1993, leaned towards a conservative Christian view; the Biblical Literacy Project (2005) showed more recognition of diverse views; an in-progress curriculum associated with the Museum of the Bible in Washington, DC, has been criticized as promoting an uncritical understanding of the Bible. These efforts continue into the present. From his own professional perch, Chancey calls on biblical scholars to follow up on the call in *Abington v. Schempp* for more and better critical study of the Bible by

helping to develop effective resources for use in elementary and secondary education.

In shifting the focus to higher education, Davina C. Lopez also calls attention to long-running debates around the role of biblical studies and to what such discussions reveal about the wider American culture (“But Is It Useful? The Perennial Problem of American Biblical Scholarship and Higher Education”). Lopez’s discussion begins with the proposition that “the Bible has endured as a presence in American higher education not only because of its contents, but also because it functions as a lightning rod for curricular controversies, disciplinary and community identities, and institutional power relationships.” More pointedly, Lopez sees American higher education and biblical studies as mutually constitutive. She situates biblical scholarship—and discussions of its value and role in higher education—within a broader rhetoric of utility in American culture: “Discourses about usefulness comprise a common defensive characterization of biblical scholarship—and the humanities as a whole—in the neoliberal, largely anti-intellectual, capitalist landscape that houses American higher education. The question ‘but is it useful?’ haunts many of us working in the humanities.”

As Lopez also demonstrates, the rhetoric of usefulness—necessarily tied to conceptions of authority and power—has a long history that originates in the nineteenth century when biblical scholars and American universities sought to justify their value to each other and to the public. Past and present debates about the utility of biblical studies in/and American higher education are especially important now as a way of unsettling unifying myths that not only simplify and misrepresent the past but, in so doing, consolidate institutional and structural authority. Like other contributors, Lopez notes the persistence of an “alluring” narrative of “a golden age of true piety and biblical literacy” put forth to contrast with a decline in both.

Similarly, Lopez rejects a simple narrative of the history of biblical scholarship. Its image of biblical scholarship has often suffered in these discussions, as if it led to decline in attitudes towards biblical authority. Some have rejected the teaching of Bible as not serving the goal of usefulness, while others called to restore the teaching of more traditional attitudes of biblical authority. No homogenous narrative of biblical scholarship in America is evident, rather something more distinct and contentious.

In “The Bible and Social Reform: Musings of a Biblical Scholar,” Emerson B. Powery also unsettles a whole series of homogenized narratives

regarding the Bible's influence in American culture. Powery echoes Lopez and others by suggesting that the profound impact of scripture on developments in US history is less historical reality and more of a myth born of nostalgia or willful ignorance. He shows that, regardless of the Bible's role in the past, contemporary social-reform movements in the United States seek biblical endorsement far less often than movements like abolitionism and women's rights did in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For instance, in contrast to the famous biblical imagery used by Dr. Martin Luther King and others to galvanize the Civil Rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s, the Bible appears infrequently (if at all) in the recent Black Lives Matter campaign. Powery argues that, in fact, the Bible now is folded into initiatives to maintain social control as often as it is to produce social change. For example, the dissenting opinion in the Supreme Court 5 to 4 decision to overturn the Defense of Marriage Act in 2015, *Obergefell v. Hodges*, contained some religious overtones, as well as a lament about the absence of an evangelical voice on the court. Biblical literalism and constitutional originalism often go together, or, as John Kutsko puts it, are "a match made in heaven."¹⁸

In light of these patterns, and with an eye to Ernest Sandeen's volume in the original series,¹⁹ Powery shifts attention back to different corporeal realities. He addresses the Society of Biblical Literature's body of members (biblical scholars) and, at the same time, connects their work to living forms. Citing the work of scholar Richard Newton, Powery insists that "biblical interpretation matters because of its potential impacts on real bodies." Even if the Bible appears noticeably absent from current movements, Powery suggests that biblical scholarship *can, should be*, and in some cases *is* central to social reform in the United States. He discusses biblical scholars who promote more self-conscious and constructive use of their work to address problems of race, immigration, climate change, and more in the public square. Public conversations on social issues occur in radio programs like Rodney Sadler's in North Carolina, where he interviews biblical scholars (e.g., Brian Blount and Diana Swancutt), blogs by Wil Gafney and Bart Ehrman, and articles in *The Huffington Post* and *The Daily Beast* by Candida Moss, to name just a few. In a recent issue of the

18. John F. Kutsko, "The Curious Case of the Christian Bible and the U.S. Constitution: Challenges for Educators Teaching the Bible in a Multireligious Context," in Goff, Farnsley, and Thuesen, *The Bible in American Life*, 244.

19. Sandeen, *The Bible and Social Reform*.

Journal of Biblical Literature, for example, Gafney notes that “it cannot be said that that all lives matter in the Bible, nor can it be said that of those lives that do matter, they matter equally.”²⁰ Ethnic conflict in the Bible provides an analogy to the race conflicts of today.

Still, Powery cites Sandeen’s earlier insight to remind us that biblical scholarship—like the Bible itself—“cannot be defined simply as either a conservative or progressive force in social reform.”²¹ This claim holds true on a broader scale. The articles here show that the Bible belongs to no single group or political position. As Powery adds, “the Bible takes no sides, or, some may claim, the Bible seems to take both sides.”

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20. Wil Gafney, “A Reflection on the Black Lives Matter Movement and Its Impact on My Scholarship,” *JBL* 136 (2017): 206.

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