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American Children Encountering the Bible: Ensuring Engagement through the American Education System and the Children's Bible

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*American Children Encountering the Bible:
Ensuring Engagement through
the American Education System and the Children's Bible*

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Religious Studies Department
May 2007

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...You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you arise...

Deuteronomy 6:5-7

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

Mark 10:13-16

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Acknowledgments

The inspiration for this Honors Project came from a paper on children's bibles I completed in Rosamond Rodman's Bible in American Culture class during the spring of 2006. At its completion, I was unsatisfied with my semester-long study of children's bibles and wanted to continue my research. I owe a debt of gratitude to Professor Rodman for convincing me to undertake this Honors Project.

A heartfelt thank you to Professor Nanette Goldman who served as my "unofficial" adviser this past year and for all her patience in reading multiple drafts and providing me with insight and support.

And a final thank you to all my friends, family members, and passersby who had to listen to me barrage them with questions such as, "did you have a children's bible growing up?" or "how did you learn the stories of the bible as a child?"

Abstract

Society and parents continue to ensure that American children are familiar with the stories of the bible. The bible is part of the American cultural milieu and has been inculcated in successive generations through schools and children's bibles. Parents in the twenty-first century have turned to adapted children's bibles as the principal means by which to teach their children the bible. This is due in large part to the bible losing its place in the curriculum of American public schools. This paper examines how children's bibles developed, why teaching the bible has been a priority, and who have been the teachers and adaptors of the bible for children.

Introduction

American society and parents have ensured that children encounter the bible.¹ This has grown out of a belief on society's part, sometimes subconsciously, to familiarize children with the stories of the bible. Though the way children explore the bible has varied over time, the American education system and children's bibles are two important ways that children have come into contact with the stories of the bible. The purpose of this paper is not to cover all forms of exposure, but to show that children's discovery of the bible occurs at interconnected points of engagement. As it will become clear, children's bibles have become a primary and preferred means by which parents teach their children the bible in the twenty-first century. This paper examines how the phenomenon of children's bibles developed, why teaching the bible has been a priority, and who have been the teachers and adaptors of the bible for children.

The transmission of the stories, morals, and central themes of the bible has been of concern for the entire history of America. In contemporary America, this is exhibited in the high demand for children's bibles, which do an able job at familiarizing children with the stories and central themes of the bible, but a poor job in developing true comprehension of the text. The majority of Americans identify themselves as Christians and millions of children have developed proficiency with the bible through religious instruction.² However, the bible and its stories—the collection of 66 books (in the Protestant Christian canon)—have transcended the boundaries of specific religious practice. The bible's stories, characters, and themes have become an important part of the

¹ Following Paul Gutjahr in *An American Bible*, I do not capitalize "bible" unless referring to a specific work. When referring to a specific bible, like *The Children of Color Storybook Bible* I will use capitalization. I will also maintain capitalization styles from quotations.

² Barry A. Kosmin, Egon Mayer, and Ariela Keysar, "American Religious Identification Survey," (The Graduate Center of the City University of New York, 2001): 10.

American cultural milieu. When parents teach the bible to their children, it can no longer be understood as simply supplying religious teachings to a new generation. Rather, assuring that children develop familiarity with the stories of the bible has become one part of a child's rearing. Teaching the stories of the bible, along with other popular western myths, is an act that bestows on American children a *lingua franca* of cultural knowledge.

When I embarked on this project, I was surprised to discover that very little research and scholarship had been undertaken on the connection between American children and the bible, how children have grasped it, and how the bible has been adapted for them into multiple formats throughout American history. It seemed like a topic ripe for investigation. Where isolated scholarship might exist analyzing one discrete area, there was no comprehensive treatment of this subject. There has been some scholarship on children's bibles and some on the bible and religion's role in America's schools. However, no one has written a definitive work on how children in America have been taught the bible, how they have come to understand it, or how it has been adapted for their usage.

Paul Gutjahr writes that answering questions about the bible's history is "made all the more vexatious by ...the 'shocking' lack of scholarly work 'describing the bible in America.'"³ Most scholars seem too busy with "the text itself" or the act of exegesis. Scholars are not as interested in how the text is constructed or understood by those who encounter it. Vincent Wimbush has argued that research, such as my project, is key to

³ Paul C. Gutjahr, *An American Bible* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 1.

biblical studies and religious studies.⁴ I hope this project can serve as a model for one way to study the bible aside from exegetical analysis. The goal of this paper is not to interpret the bible itself, but to illuminate the work it does as a cultural artifact in contemporary America. If parents and society have considered it a priority for children to experience the bible, then how have children developed their understanding of the bible and who has adapted it for them?

As a collection of known stories (and poetry, legal codes, hymns, prayers, prophecies, proverbs, maxims etc...) the bible is a common sourcebook for the transmission of shared wisdom and morality in America. It is human instinct to use stories and storytelling to convey knowledge about culture, history, and morality to future generations.⁵ Since the bible's canonization, societies have recognized it as a source of wisdom for adults and children alike, and an especially valuable didactic tool for children. I contend that American society and parents have taught their children the bible and continue to do so for three specific, yet interconnected reasons.

First, parents perceive the stories of the bible as "safe" literature. They consider bibles and the stories contained therein appropriate for children because the text is timeless, well tested, and recognized as a major source of inspiration in literature.⁶ Some might question the logic of this reasoning, when they recall such racy bible stories as David and Bathsheba or that of Lot and his daughters. With this concern in mind, many

⁴ Vincent Wimbush, "And the Students Shall Teach Them...The Study of the Bible and the Study of Meaning Construction," in *The Bible and the American Myth*, ed. Vincent Wimbush (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999): 3.

⁵ Carolyn Buchanan-Reynolds, "Discovering the Bible through Storytelling," (M.A. diss., United Theological Seminary, 2003): 1.

⁶ Deborah A. Wooten, "The Bible in Children's Literature," in *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, ed. Bernice E. Cullinan and Diane Goetz Person (New York: Continuum, 2001): 80.

modern redactors of children's bibles carefully cull which bible stories to present to children.⁷

Second, parents use the bible to instill notions of right and wrong, good and evil during their children's upbringing. This reason is ancillary to the first because "safe literature" is often perceived as being chock-full of moral teaching. Parents use the bible as a primer to teach western and American notions of morality. Prior to the 1960s, the bible was a key part of the moral education in a child's rearing, as we will see in later chapters. If children were to grow up and be productive members of American society, then partial responsibility in a child's education lay outside the home. "Victorian morality" encouraged self-control, hard work, and honesty.⁸ The role of society and the schools to instill a common "American" (read: biblical) morality waned in the 1960s when new ideals such as self-expression and self-fulfillment rose to the forefront.⁹ Morality was now understood as personal and for individual parents to impart on their children. It was no longer something to be taught in the schools. As we will see, the move away from teaching the bible in public schools gave rise to the genre of children's bibles when some parents, intent that their children be versed in the bible, desired an easy way to teach their children biblical notions of morality.

Finally, the bible is taught to children so they can gain proficiency in American cultural literacy. This reason might be the most important for parents who are not concerned with teaching "religion." Either consciously or not, they want their children to be able to understand cultural references, succeed in school, and not be culturally left

⁷ For more on how stories might be selected, see Chapters Four and Five for my discussion of modern children's bibles.

⁸ Guenter Lewy, *Why America Needs Religion: Secular Modernity and its Discontents* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1996): 120.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 121.

behind. Without a working proficiency in the bible, it would be impossible for new generations to access many aspects of our culture and share in this legacy.

Anytime a child in America comes across the bible, faces the bible, or is taught from its stories, they are “encountering the bible.” Throughout the centuries, children’s methods of encountering the bible have not been uniform. American children who are exposed to the bible share a common bond regardless of what format the bible takes: almost all bible usage by children involves a text that has been adapted for their comprehension, maturity, and attention span. As stated before, this paper cannot explore every way that children are exposed to the bible throughout American history or encouraged to understand it. However, I have chosen to analyze two key sites of biblical discovery for children: the bible in America’s education system and the children’s bible. These two methods by which children become versed in the bible demonstrate that ways of experiencing the bible are interconnected and complimentary.

Chapter 1 explores America’s religious and biblical character. It is necessary to begin here for two reasons. First, an argument about the importance of the bible in American life would be moot if America were no longer a country that paid heed to religion and the bible. And secondly, it is important to provide examples of how the bible has become integrated in American culture. This explains why many parents have ensured their children grow up with knowledge of the bible. This will also make clear why publishers have created numerous children’s bibles to meet their unrelenting demand. As this Chapter demonstrates, religion and the bible in America are alive and well.

In Chapter 2, I trace the role the bible played in America's educational system from colonial times through its removal from the public school classroom in the 1960s. In Chapters 3, 4, and 5, the development, history, and impact of the children's bible genre will be outlined. The bible in education and children's bibles may appear unrelated, but in fact, they are interconnected and compliment one another. As I will propose, the removal of the bible from the public school classroom was one reason behind the increase in demand in children's bibles from the 1960s on, which greatly enhanced and expanded the genre. Though parents have sought children's bibles to supplement their children's moral, religious, and cultural education with children's bibles after the 1960s, biblical illiteracy is at an all-time high.¹⁰ As I will observe in Chapters 4, 5, and the Conclusion, modern American children's bibles are not a sufficient replacement for true bible instruction. Their adapted stories and lack of original text leave children mostly ignorant of these foundational myths.

¹⁰ Marie Wachlin and Byron R. Johnson, "Biblical Literacy Report: What American Teens Need to know and What do They Know?", (Farifax, VA: Biblical Literacy Project, 2005)

Chapter 1: Some Figures on American Religious Expression and the Bible's Role in Contemporary America

American society is a “biblical formation.” Vincent Wimbush affirms this notion:

In so many different respects and with so many different consequences, American culture, on account of its textualization, it can be said, is a biblical formation. From the naming of children, towns, and streets as a reflection of the most superficial of registrations, to the debates on the floors of Congress as an example of the ways in which the Bible is understood as an accessible ideological playing field used in order to legitimize different sociopolitical positions...all these forms of engagement suggest that the Bible is fully implicated in the construction of the myth of American exceptionalism and divine mission.¹

America's diverse and multifaceted relationship with the bible is not a new phenomenon. It is instead an evolving aspect of American society.² Martin Marty contends that aspects of the bible are so fundamental to America that they have become like José Ortega y Gasset's *creencias*—“ideas so deep that we do not even know we hold them” and “not ideas that we ‘have’ but the ideas that we ‘are.’”³

The importance of religion (including such religious activities as bible reading and the transmission of biblical stories to children) has been questioned in the past few decades. Americans began to perceive a rise in secularism and a decline in religion fifty years ago.⁴ The myth of mounting secularism has had ramifications for American's and their religious identity, although it was not substantiated. The end of religion has been foretold since the time of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, but this marked

¹ Vincent Wimbush, “And the Students Shall Teach Them...The Study of the Bible and the Study of Meaning Construction,” 3-4.

² Mark A Noll, “The Image of the United States as a Biblical Nation, 1776-1865,” in *The Bible in America*, ed. Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 39-58.

³ Martin E. Marty, *Religion and Republic: The American Circumstance* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987): 141.

⁴ Rodney Stark and Charles Y. Glock, *American Piety: The Nature of Religious Commitment* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968): 207-208. This data comes from Gallup surveys over fifty years ago and it shows an interesting trend; that Americans perceive a rise in secularism whether or not it is the case.

the first time that society believed in its imminent demise. No historian would argue that the twenty-first century is as pious an era as the Middle Ages, but to believe the claim that modern society, awakened by the enlightenment, is devoid of belief in God or religion is also not true.⁵ We need not rely on intuition alone. Recent Gallup polls and a survey conducted by Baylor University have proven that popular perceptions of an increase in secularism are largely misguided.⁶ What follows is a brief summation of recent Gallup surveys showing that faith and different forms of religious expression are alive and well in America.⁷

Though some of this data is dated, enough of it is relative show that America is hardly lacking religion. In 1994, according to the Gallup data, 96% of Americans believed in God.⁸ In 1995, 43% of adults reported attending a worship service within the last week and 47% of teens said they attended a religious service within the last week.⁹ 76% “completely” or “mostly” agreed with the statement “prayer is an important part of everyday life.”¹⁰ 33% of adults read the bible at least once a week and 58% of teenagers

⁵ Guenter Lewy, *Why America Needs Religion*, 65-66.

⁶ Baylor University sociologist’s study show that Americans are defining their spiritual lives differently in the twenty first century and are probably as pious if not more so than previous generations. Disputing other studies from the last decade, this study also shows that a rise in secularization has not occurred, but rather was perhaps perceived due to a decline in membership to particular churches. Manya A. Brachear, “Study: Americans Not Losing Religion,” *Chicago Tribune*, 12 September 2006, accessed from <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/chi-0609120185sep12,1,2768564.story?coll=chi-newsnationworld-hed>

⁷ The Gallup survey asks questions of all Americans regarding their religious beliefs. Though America is a predominately Christian country and the bible is an important religious document for Jews and Christians, my intent in providing this data is not to skew the conversation to just those who hold the bible as sacred scripture. Nor is this conversation meant to imply that everyone in America who practices some sort of religion in America must use the bible in a religious way. I am simply providing this data to show that Americans continue to partake in religious practices and still hold religious beliefs, with the bible playing a prominent role among many diverse expressions of religion.

⁸ George Gallup, Jr., *Religion in America: Will the Vitality of the Churches be the Surprise in the Next Century?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Religion Research Center, 1996): 22.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 29; 70.

¹⁰ George Gallup, Jr., and Sarah Jones, *100 Questions and Answers: Religion in America*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton Religion Research Center, 1989): 38-39.

(ages 13-17) read the bible at least once a week.¹¹ In 1995, 58% of Americans reported that religion was “very important” in their lives.¹² This figure has been in decline since 1952 when 75% of Americans said religion was “very important” to them, however the percentage seemed to stabilize in the 1980s and even rebound in the early 1990s.¹³

One area in which the Gallup Poll has shown a change in America’s religious character is in a decline in church membership. In 1988, 65% of Americans claimed to belong to a Church or Synagogue.¹⁴ This number might seem high, but in fact, it is the lowest point in the history of the Gallup survey.¹⁵ Likewise, membership in mainline Protestant churches has declined.¹⁶ However, as the Baylor University study confirms, Americans do not need a church membership to connect them to religious expression or the bible. This is evidenced in the number of people who read the bible. It is also seen in the 75% of American adults who “would not object” to the bible being taught as literature in selective classes in public schools.¹⁷ The remarkable 94% of respondents who said that prayer, meditation or reading the bible could be “very or somewhat effective” suggests that even if Americans are no longer “belonging” to churches or synagogues in the same numbers as their parents or grandparents, they are finding different ways to express their religious and spiritual tendencies.¹⁸ This does not suggest a rise in secularism as some have implied, but rather, a reframing of faith and religious expression in America. It also

¹¹ Ibid., 40-41.

¹² Gallup, *Religion in America: Will the Vitality of the Churches be the Surprise in the Next Century?*, 53.

¹³ A comparison of data shows a sharp fall and then a stabilizing of the number of Americans who say that religion is “very important” to them. Data from 1980-1988 show a range of 52%-56% of Americans responding this way. George Gallup, Jr., *The Gallup Report No. 236* (May 1985): 22-23.

¹⁴ George Gallup, Jr., and Sarah Jones, *100 Questions and Answers: Religion in America*, 70-70.

¹⁵ The highest percentage of Americans claiming church or synagogue membership came in 1947, when 76% did so. Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 200-201.

¹⁷ Ibid., 138-139.

¹⁸ Ibid., 64-65.

suggests the role that prayer, meditation, and bible reading play in America outside an organized religious context. These activities may be understood either with or without organized religion and the structure of a church.

The conclusion derived from this data is though Americans have changed how they express religion; religious tendencies remain a vital part of American culture. For the purposes of this paper, we will focus on the place of the bible and its role in America's culture. Though the way many Americans express religion has changed, becoming more outwardly secular, our collective biblical heritage is alive and well. There is a strong "'American Myth' informing our society" that has "[retained] the Bible as one of its authorities."¹⁹ Indeed, "The Bible, in American history and in much present day culture, provided and provides as an object a basic element in the carapace of images."²⁰ The bible continues to play a large role in the lives of Americans, a vestige of the country's religious roots.

Beyond this clinical view of America's religious nature in the twenty-first century, we can look at more anecdotal evidence to understand how American popular culture and politics are deeply intertwined with biblical rhetoric and traditions. The bible is a basic part of our "literary and mythic heritage that are often alluded to without an explanation."²¹ One need not explain why the bible appears in our culture because it runs deep in Americans' subconscious.

¹⁹ David Saul, "Children and the American Myth: David Koresh, the Branch Davidians, and the American Bible," in *The Bible and the American Myth* ed. Vincent Wimbush (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999): 126-127.

²⁰ Martin Marty, *Religion and Republic: The American Circumstance*, 146.

²¹ E.D. Hirsch, *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (Boston: Houton Mifflin Company, 1987): 30.

America's connection to the bible is multifaceted. Martin Marty highlights all the adjectival uses of the noun "bible" as one indicator of how the book has become an American icon:

Bible belt, Bible camp, Bible believer, Bible Sunday, Bible week, Bible school, Bible institute, Bible college, Bible battle, Bible bookstore, Bible puzzles and crosswords and quizzes, Gideon Bible in airplane and hospital and hotel room (enhanced in the Mormon Marriott by a Book of Mormon). There are tours to Bible lands, and Bibles brought back with covers made of wood from the Mount of Olives. The Bible is a gift at rites of passage, to new mothers, in Sunday school, at confirmation, in white covers for marriages, at graduations, for *bon voyage*. Protestants who always found the Catholic practice of burying grandmothers with an object like a rosary repulsive characteristically buried grandmother with a black Bible. The family Bible is also the place between whose testaments one is always going to fill out the family tree, as ancestors once did.²²

America's distinct association with the bible surfaces in our psyches and on our soil.

When Americans flock to theme parks based on the bible, play biblical mini-golf, and erect grandiose representations of the Ten Commandments or Calvary crosses, they are exhibiting our deep connection to the bible.²³ Bible camps, recently made infamous by the documentary *Jesus Camp*, where children enjoy outdoor activities and learn the bible are another American expression of the bible on the landscape.²⁴ In another tangible expression of American's connection to the bible, the bible publishing industry prints a

²² Martin Marty, *Religion and Republic: The American Circumstance*, 153.

²³ For an interesting discussion on America's obsession with "roadside religion" and all the sites mentioned above, see Timothy K. Beal, *Roadside Religion: In Search of the Sacred, the Strange, and the Substance of Faith* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005)

²⁴ The Church camp movement has moved through a number of stages throughout American history, from its origins in purely evangelical roots to a more generic camping setting with a religious flavor. For more on bible camps, see E. Morris Sider, *Beyond our Dreams: The Story of Kenbrook Bible Camp on its 40th Anniversary* (Lebanon, PA, Kenbrook Bible Camp, 1990); Stephen F. Venable and Donald M. Joy, *How to Use Camping Experiences in Religious Education* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1998); Shelia K. Moriarty, "It Happened One Summer," in *There's More than one way to Teach Religion*, ed. Russell J. Neighbor and Mary Perkins Ryan (Paramus, NJ: Paulist Press, 1970): 214-224; Mary Reed Newland, "A Summer Vacation Bible School," in *There's More than one-way to Teach Religion*, ed. Russell J. Neighbor and Mary Perkins Ryan (Paramus, NJ: Paulist Press, 1970): 225-243.

plethora of bible editions and translations to satisfy a large demand for scriptures.²⁵ In contrast to these physical examples of the bible that literally dot the landscape, the bible has entered American life in subtler ways, as exhibited by its entry into social and political spheres. Authors have superimposed biblical narratives and imagery on to contemporary stories, creating popular religious fiction. The *Left Behind* series, which sell millions of copies and spend weeks atop the *New York Times* bestsellers list is an example of how popular religious fiction can become.²⁶ People in positions of influence have used the powerful and convincing rhetoric of the bible for years to express their sincere religious and spiritual motives.²⁷

These examples, some literal and some abstract, show how America expresses one aspect of its religiosity, namely its obsessive “biblo-centricity,” a word I have created to describe America’s deep connection to the bible. America’s connection and use of the bible in society might be so deep that they constitute *creencias*.²⁸ Americans have not embraced an overarching secularism, but instead are expressing their religiousness in new and novel ways. I believe that the bible continues to play an important role in how Americans express their faith and religion. The bible publishing industry and the bible’s role in culture and politics help elucidate the role it plays across America. With this

²⁵ See discussion below on bible printing in America.

²⁶ For a short and critical article on the *Left Behind* series see Michelle Goldberg, “Fundamentally Unsound,” *Salon.com*, 29 July 2002, accessed 26 September 2006, available from http://dir.salon.com/story/books/feature/2002/07/29/left_behind/index.html. For a lengthier and more comprehensive discussion about the popularity and complexities of the *Left Behind* series, see Bruce David Forbes and Jeanne Halgren Kilde, *Rapture, Revelation, and the End Times: Exploring the Left Behind Series* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

²⁷ For an interesting and (frankly disturbing) discussion of how Ezekiel’s vision has been used by people throughout history including Louis Farrakhan and Ronald Reagan to overthrow their perceived oppressors and use God’s given power, see Michael Lieb, *Children of Ezekiel: Aliens, UFOs, The Crisis of Race, and the Advent of End Time* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998)

²⁸ “Biblio-centricity” is not a real term, but I needed something to express the sense of the bible and its pervasiveness in America. *Creencias*, which describe deep held ideas and beliefs was developed by José Ortega y Gasset, and is used by Martin Marty in describing the role the bible plays in America.

understanding, it will be easier to comprehend how and why society has assured that children gain exposure to the bible throughout the course of American history. The mundane history of printing bibles; the peculiar creation of biblical theme parks; and the shocking use of the bible in political rhetoric—all will provide insight into America as a country firmly rooted in the bible.

America and the Bible through Printing

One particular method in which America expresses its connection to the bible is evident in the plethora of different versions of the text itself. In a country where 91% of American households own a bible and the average household owns four, it is somewhat surprising that last year bible publishers sold 25 million new copies.²⁹ If almost everyone owns a bible, then why does it continue to sell? The answer lies in the creation of niche publications. American bible publishers have made seemingly infinite variations on the same essential “book.” It is now somewhat of an American tradition to diversify the types of bibles available. A quick trip to the neighborhood bookstore or a search of Amazon.com’s online catalogue, which offers 216,491 bible products for purchase, illustrates this point well.³⁰ These specialized bibles do more than offer their readers scripture, they answer “questions from the young and old,” help those “addicted and codependent know Scripture’s ‘Higher Power,’” and are designed especially for “him and her.”³¹ There is a bible for every American’s taste. It is no surprise that in this bible rich environment, specialized bibles for children began to emerge in earnest during the late

²⁹ Daniel Radosh, “The Good Book Business,” *The New Yorker*, 18 December 2006, 54.

³⁰ An Amazon.com search of “bible” returned 216,491 books for purchase (with many more related videos, software, and toys and games available as well). “Amazon.com: bible,” accessed on 26 September 2006, available from http://amazon.com/s/ref=sr_nr_i_0/104-5765808-7616758?ie=UTF8&keywords=bible&rh=i%3Aaps%2Ck%3Abible%2Ci%3Astripbooks&page=1.

³¹ Thomas S. Giles, “Pick a Bible--any Bible?” *Christianity Today*, 26 October 1992, 26-27.

twentieth century. As we will see in later chapters, there are vast numbers of children's bibles for sale in America thanks in part to the growing specialization of the bible industry.

The history of creating various bible editions has been marked by interesting trends. As John Alden remarks in his essay on the bible in early America, "of no nation can it aptly be said as of the United States, that in its settlement and development, the Bible played a major role."³² Many early colonizers were devoutly Christian, creating a need for bibles in the colonies. Most colonizers and early Americans were Protestants who viewed the right to scripture as a God given privilege that was denied to them in Catholic Europe.³³ The drive to create bibles was not just a saintly impulse, as the American notions of "ambition, greed, and sheer adventurism...also shared a role in the process."³⁴ These were secondary motives behind a greater "zeal for realizing a Christian faith and the promises embodied in the Bible."³⁵ "Realizing the Christian faith," as Alden puts it, has evolved to realizing a common religion, much of it resting on stories and lessons derived from the bible itself.

Most of the economy of the colonies revolved around the exportation of raw goods and the importation of finished manufactured products from the European Continent.³⁶ In addition to this practical disadvantage, the bible had a special copyright status, under the "Crown Copyright." With this in place, the bible could only be printed

³² John Alden, "The Bible as Printed Word," in *The Bible and Bibles in America* ed. Ernest S. Freichs (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1988), 9.

³³ David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989): 22.

³⁴ John Alden, "The Bible as Printed Word," in *The Bible and Bibles in America*, 9.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Curtis Nettels, "The Place of Markets in the Old Colonial System," *The New England Quarterly* 6, (1933): 491.

and published by royal license.³⁷ Thus, America's first bibles were all European imports. Most of the bibles read in America after 1611 were the "new" King James Versions (KJV), replacing the Geneva Bible.³⁸ The KJV Bible would remain the primary translation in America through the twentieth century.

Early efforts at printing the bible came to the fore during the Revolutionary War with Britain. By 1777, much international trade had stopped due to the war. This included the importation of books. Notably, the most popular book of the time was the KJV Bible.³⁹ American independence sparked a drive to put previously underused energies and skills to use, such as the printing of books.⁴⁰ Due to the bible shortage, the Continental Congress responded to a request from a group of Presbyterian clergy to procure more "holy scriptures" by placing bids with five Philadelphia printers. The Continental Congress concluded that bibles should be imported from Holland or Scotland since no American publishers could produce bibles for a reasonable price.⁴¹

While the Continental Congress continued to import bibles, others were already beginning to work on the printing and publication of the bible in America. Early printed examples of the bible in America were crude. Robert Aitken printed the first English New Testament in the colonies in 1777 and in 1782 he "set type and printed 10,000

³⁷ John Alden, "The Bible as Printed Word", 14.

³⁸ David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment*, 23; Edwin A. R. Rumball-Petre, *America's First Bibles* (Portland, Me: The Southworth-Anthoensen Press, 1940). This is not to say that there were not some attempts at creating bibles in America before the Revolutionary War. Reports of Bibles printed in Boston with "falsified" London imprints in the 1750s have been rumored (Alden, "The Bible as Printed Word", 14). In addition, there is the famous example of John Eliot's translation of the bible for the Massachusetts Indians in 1693 (Alden, "The Bible as Printed Word", 15).

³⁹ Paul Gutjahr, *An American Bible*, 20.

⁴⁰ John Alden, "The Bible as Printed Word", 16.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

copies of the entire bible,” using the King James translation.⁴² These early attempts of bible printing show the new entrepreneurial activity that would ultimately spawn thousands of editions including family bibles and bibles designed for children and young adults.

At the end of the Revolutionary War, English embargoes were lifted allowing for bibles to be imported once more from Britain, but industrious Americans knew that they could produce their own bibles. To help print and publish bibles in America, the American Bible Society (ABS) was founded in 1816 with the mission to put a bible into the hands of every American.⁴³ The ABS adopted many techniques for the printing of bibles that allowed large-scale output such as stereotyping and power presses. These developments were later used for the mass production of the bible and other books.⁴⁴ Ultimately, bible printers advanced the publishing industry and brought about new technologies.

Once Americans mastered the skill of bible printing, they began to translate the text themselves, another enterprise that survives to this day. Starting in the 1800s, denominations began sparring over translations furthering the proliferation of editions.⁴⁵ The documented rise in new editions every year shows that by the mid 1800s, “America was awash in a sea of Bibles.”⁴⁶ Translation by committee was a new form of bible creation that originated in the early twentieth century designed to bring multiple

⁴² Of particular interest and perhaps discontent among advocates of the separation of church and state is the “recommendation on its behalf from the Continental Congress” that was included in its front pages. This “recommendation” from the Continental Congress has been known to furrow brows over our Founding Fathers and their implied endorsement of scripture, connecting Church and State so blatantly. Alden, “The Bible as Printed Word”, 17; Gutjahr, *An American Bible*, 21.

⁴³ Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995): 71.

⁴⁴ John Alden, “The Bible As Printed Word”, 19-22.

⁴⁵ Paul Gutjahr, *An American Bible*, 89-109.

⁴⁶ From 1830-1860 over 1,000 different editions of the bible were published in America. Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity*, 71.

denominational perspectives to the translated text. According to Kenneth Crim, unlike previous translations with an identifiable author and translator, committee translations are harder to understand because they do not have a unified voice.⁴⁷ The process of creating a bible “by committee” has become popular, as ecclesiastical organizations, interdenominational groups, and other interested parties have created hundreds of different bible editions. The American children’s bible is just one modern type of bible that has emerged from the rich American legacy of biblical production and translation. As we will see in later chapters, American children’s bibles have evolved from previous children’s bibles and within the unique American environment that is so hospitable to the creation of new bibles.

America and the Bible through Popular Culture and Politics

The bible and its stories have entered American consciousness on multiple levels. Even going so far as to spread to supermarket tabloids, as Fiona C. Black examines.⁴⁸ America has created biblical theme parks, biblical miniature golf courses, and thousands of images alluding to biblical stories. Our politicians and leaders continue to allude to stories from the bible to advance their political agenda. American culture “echoes the Bible at every level.” Accordingly politics in America has “involved reference to symbols, rhetoric, moral guidance, and an understanding of history derived from the

⁴⁷ Ketih R. Crim, “Bible Translation by Committees”, in *The Bible and Bibles in America* ed. Ernest S. Freichs (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 29.

⁴⁸ Fiona C Black, "Lost Prophecies! Scholars Amazed! Weekly World News and the Bible" in *Culture, Entertainment, and the Bible*. (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000): 20-43, has an insightful article on this occurrence.

Bible” since colonial times.⁴⁹ This section will provide a few examples of how the bible presents itself in two aspects of American society: popular culture and politics.

A key part of American popular culture is American cinema. Since the dawn of American cinema, biblical films have enjoyed great popularity.⁵⁰ Films with biblical characters, bible stories, or more generic biblical themes are produced in the form of blockbuster Disney movies as well as epic thrillers, like Cecil B. DeMille’s productions.⁵¹ Visual medias have been on the ascendancy in America. For the past fifty years, Americans have been progressing from a society based on the written word to a society consumed by visual mass media. We are “visually predisposed rather than verbally oriented” due to the rise of television and other visual media.⁵² Consequently, it is understandable to see how the bible has been adjusted for modern American society, which is so used to fleeting visuals over drawn out textual explanations. Movies and television are inundated with biblical rhetoric and imagery so that “visual renderings of events and personalities from scripture become as important in this day of presumed literacy as they were for illiterate persons of early Christians and medieval times.”⁵³

In addition to cinematic representations of the bible, the church and bible itself have become “electronic” in the twenty-first century. “Modern preachers with a national

⁴⁹ Allene Stuart Phy, “The Bible and American Popular Culture: Overview and Introduction,” in *The Bible and Popular Culture in America* (Philadelphia; Chico, CA.: Fortress Press; Scholars Press, 1985): 22; James Turner Johnson, “Introduction” in *The Bible in American Law, Politics, and Political Rhetoric* (Philadelphia; Chico, CA: Fortress Press; Scholars Press, 1985): 1.

⁵⁰ Allene Stuart Phy, “The Bible and American Popular Culture: Overview and Introduction,” 13.

⁵¹ Susan Lochrie Graham, “Some Day My Prince Will Come: Images of Salvation in the Gospel According to St. Walt” in *Culture, Entertainment, and the Bible* ed. George Aichele (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000): 76-88. For more on religious themes in Disney films, see Mark Pinsky, *The Gospel According to Disney: Faith, Trust, and Pixie Dust* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004); Melanie Jane Wright, *Moses in America: The Cultural Uses of Biblical Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) 89-127.

⁵² Ljubica D. Popovich, “Popular American Biblical Imagery: Sources and Manifestations,” in *The Bible and Popular Culture in America* ed. Allene Stuart Phy (Philadelphia; Chico, CA: Fortress Press; Scholars Press, 1985): 193.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

audience... each time they speak...[are reaching] a vastly larger audience each time than did Jesus or any of his apostles during their entire lives.”⁵⁴ This is another way Americans are inundated with the bible in the twenty-first century, due largely to new technologies.⁵⁵ The new visual medium has become both indirect—through movies and television and direct—through televangelism.

Many cultural uses of the bible remain in literary form even if one of the new entry points for understanding the bible in American culture is through visual media. Indeed, “biblical themes and ‘Christ figures’ have been effectively employed by serious men and women of letters since the beginnings of American literature” to emphasize or enhance their own work.⁵⁶ Books with religious and biblical content are very popular in America, and have been the most “frequently purchased books [in America] from the colonial period to the present.”⁵⁷ Books for adults include the ever-present *Left Behind* series among others. Children’s literature has not been spared the sway of the bible as it has “influenced authors and illustrators of children’s literature for centuries.”⁵⁸ Because many people understand the bible as “a universal common denominator for people around the world” the text itself is known as a great piece of literature, worthy of

⁵⁴ Perry C. Cotham, “The Electronic Church,” in *The Bible and Popular Culture in America* ed. Allene Stuart Phy (Philadelphia; Chico, CA: Fortress Press; Scholars Press, 1985): 103.

⁵⁵ There have been copious books and article written on televangelism. For more see Razelle Frankl, *Televangelism: The Marketing of Popular Religion* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987); Jeffrey K. Hadden and Anson D. Shupe, *Televangelism, Power, and Politics on God's Frontier* (New York: H. Holt, 1988); Jeffrey K. Hadden and Charles E. Swann, *Prime Time Preachers: The Rising Power of Televangelism* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1981).

⁵⁶ Allene Stuart Phy, “Retelling the Greatest Story Ever Told: Jesus in Popular Fiction,” in *The Bible and Popular Culture in America* ed. Allene Stuart Phy (Philadelphia; Chico, CA.: Fortress Press; Scholars Press, 1985): 40-41.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁵⁸ Deborah A. Wooten, “The Bible in Children’s Literature,” 80.

adaptation.⁵⁹ Film and literature have been just two outlets that have exposed Americans to this key cultural fixture.

Biblical motifs have also emerged in American popular music and art.⁶⁰ Slogans from the bible or pictures of Jesus appear on t-shirts, hats, and bumper stickers.⁶¹ As Stephen Prothero argues, Jesus Christ himself is seen as a mythical figure in American culture. He transcends Christianity in America and many now adopt him: “Jesus became a national icon because outsiders have always felt free to interpret him in their own fashion.”⁶²

The bible, its stories, lessons, and characters, are an important part of American film, literature, and entertainment. Though this has not been an exhaustive study of the bible in American pop culture, it does show various ways that the bible has made entries into our society and the diversity of these expressions which prove that the bible is not used by one segment of the population for one purpose, but is put to a variety of uses by a variety of people.⁶³

America’s political system and rhetoric have been shaped by the bible for as long as this country has existed. As Stephen Prothero aptly puts it, “In the colonies and the early republic, biblical wisdom was literally in the air.”⁶⁴ Mark Noll’s essay documents how the bible played a role in America right up to, during and after the Revolutionary

⁵⁹ Ibid., 80.

⁶⁰ Charles Wolfe, “Bible Country: The Good Book in Country Music” in *The Bible and Popular Culture in America* ed. Allene Stuart Phy (Philadelphia; Chico, CA: Fortress Press; Scholars Press, 1985): 85-102; Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity*, 27-38.

⁶¹ Ibid., 246-271.

⁶² Stephen Prothero, *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003): 1-16.

⁶³ I hope this encourages further reading on this subject, and there are many volumes, essays, and articles dealing solely with this topic.

⁶⁴ Stephen R. Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know, and Doesn't* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007): 59.

War.⁶⁵ The bible and religion continued to play a role in politics from the nineteenth century towards the twentieth century even after the establishment of a new nation and an enshrinement of separation of church and state in the new Constitution. Biblical and prophetic rhetoric was popular during colonial times and continued to be used by politicians who spoke of America as a “New Jerusalem” or a “city on a hill.”⁶⁶ Images of America as the “New” Israel, chosen to tame the wilderness by God have been popular self-interpretations. These began with John Winthrop’s famous speech in which he utilized the now famous rhetoric of a “city on a hill.”⁶⁷ In the nineteenth century, “the Bible certainly guided much artistic expression and popular wisdom” as politicians and other speakers borrowed extensively from biblical language in speeches and other public documents.⁶⁸ Even the United States’ Constitution, whose authors were deeply religious, owes some of its ideas and language, both the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Bible.⁶⁹

Politicians such as President George W. Bush have used biblical and religious rhetoric in speeches and written remarks.⁷⁰ In addition, Ronald Reagan was an evangelical Christian who believed wholeheartedly in the prophecies of the bible. Some may question if these politicians religious beliefs have mattered to history. Indeed, it has

⁶⁵ Mark A. Noll, “The Bible in Revolutionary America” in *The Bible in American Law, Politics, and Political Rhetoric* ed. James Johnson Turner (Philadelphia; Chico, CA: Fortress Press; Scholars Press, 1985): 29-60.

⁶⁶ Louis Weeks, “God’s Judgment, Christ’s Command: Use of the Bible in Nineteenth Century American Political Life,” *The Bible in American Law, Politics, and Political Rhetoric* ed. James Johnson Turner (Philadelphia; Chico, CA: Fortress Press; Scholars Press, 1985): 61-62.

⁶⁷ John Winthrop, “A Model of Christian Charity”, available from <http://religiousfreedom.lib.virginia.edu/sacred/charity.html>, accessed on 22 April 2007.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁶⁹ Edward McGlynn Gaffney, Jr., “The Interaction of Biblical Religion and American Constitutional Law,” in *The Bible in American Law, Politics, and Political Rhetoric* ed. James Johnson Turner (Philadelphia; Chico, CA: Fortress Press; Scholars Press, 1985): 82.

⁷⁰ President Bush is not the first president to use the bible in his speeches, nor will he be the last. However, his use of this rhetoric is well documented. See Stephen R. Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know, and Doesn't*, 49-50 and Juan Stam, “Bush’s Religious Language,” *The Nation*, 22 December 2003, accessed on 9 October 2006, available from <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20031222/stam>.

proved important in their effect on “the entire foreign policy establishment” and how the United States “responded to both national and international crises.”⁷¹ Another leader, Martin Luther King, Jr., was known for his references to the bible and biblical motif, which he used to effectively rally his supporters.⁷² On a more local level, the bible and its rhetoric has been used to justify a myriad of protests and actions as well as their counter protests in America’s history.⁷³ Abolitionists used the bible to rally for the dignity of all people, even as slaveholders used it too legitimize their practice.⁷⁴ Contemporarily, religion and the bible more specifically has been and will continue to be used in arguments over abortion, stem cell research, capital punishment, animal rights, global warming, intelligent design, birth control, euthanasia, and gay marriage to name a few.⁷⁵ Like my survey of popular culture, this brief look at the bible and politics is less than exhaustive, but offers that the bible is indeed a vibrant part of the American political system.

This cursory look at America’s religious and biblical background allows us to move to a discussion of how children become acquainted with the bible in America, first through education and later through adapted storybook bibles. Beginning with colonial times and ending with the Supreme Court’s decision to remove the bible from public

⁷¹ Michael Lieb, *Children of Ezekiel*, 101.

⁷² Scott W. Hoffman, “Holy Martin: The Overlooked Canonization of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.” in *Religion and American Culture* 10 (Summer 2000): 123-124.

⁷³ For some insight into how the bible and religious arguments can work on both sides of an argument in American discourse, see A.G. Mojtabai, *Blessed Assurance: At Home with the Bomb in Amarillo, Texas* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986). Mojtabai shows how the bible was used by both those attempting to shut down the final assembly plant of nuclear weapons in the United States and those who used the bible to support the plant’s work as it was probably ushering in the inevitable catastrophe to come.

⁷⁴ James Brewer Stewart, “Abolitionists, the Bible and the Challenge of Slavery,” in *The Bible and Social Reform* ed. Ernest R. Sandeen (Philadelphia; Chico, CA: Fortress Press; Scholars Press, 1982): 31-57.

⁷⁵ Stephen R. Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know, and Doesn't*, 5.

schools in the 1960s, Chapter 2 shows how generations of American youth were exposed to the bible as a part of their formal education and how basic literacy was intertwined with biblical literacy.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Ibid., 55

Chapter 2: Children Encountering the Bible: The Bible in American Education

American society has used formal and informal education systems to make certain that children encounter the bible throughout American history. The American educational system has never been monolithic. However for simplicity's sake, I will refer to it as one "system," though in reality, education in America has been and continues to be anything but uniform.¹ As a sourcebook for stories, moral lessons, and literature, the bible has played a key part in educating young Americans since the colonial era in a variety of educational settings, such as formal religious schools, one-house colonial schools, and informal lessons by parents. Children have grappled with and experienced the bible in the home, church, and school. The role the bible has played in education has changed significantly over the course of American history.² The bible has always been adapted for children by teachers and parents to guarantee that children will recognize and appreciate it as well as have some familiarity with the stories.

Colonial and early American education was intimately connected with teaching the bible. Parents and educators alike designed their curricula to instill a solid moral character in children, a "broad social aim" of the time. W. Clark Gilpin summarized the three goals of early American education as the pursuit of piety, civility, and learning.³ Though he asserts that through the attainment of these attributes, "knowledge of the Bible

¹ There are a vast number of books on the history of education in America, each of which establish that their work is not exhaustive. See Kenneth H. Hansen, *Public Education in American Society* (Englewood Cliffs, NY: Prentice Hall, 1963); Carl H. Gross and Charles C. Chandler, *The History of American Education* (Boston: DC Heath and Company, 1964); H.G. Good, *A History of American Education* (New York, The MacMillian Company, 1956)

² W. Clark Gilpin, "The Creation of a New Order: Colonial Education and the Bible," in *Bible in American Education: From Source Book to Textbook* ed. David L. Barr and Nicholas Piediscalzi, (Philadelphia; Chico, CA: Fortress Press; Scholars Press, 1982): 6.

³ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

was in no small measure an educational end of itself.”⁴ It was commonly believed among Protestant Christians that “bible reading would foster faith, which would foster ethical behavior, which would sustain social order.”⁵ In addition, the right to read and interpret the bible was a privilege fiercely defended. Many considered themselves still in jeopardy from European Catholic nations where bible reading was neither encouraged nor commonplace.⁶ New Americans who read the bible were understood as being good Protestants and model citizens.⁷ Children who learned to read, primarily from the bible, would “free themselves from sin and...liberate themselves from monarchs.”⁸ Civility and piety were made central in children’s education, so children would grow up to lead lives familiar with Christian morals. In-depth knowledge of the bible and religion were the “primary features of a proper education.”⁹ Education aimed to build strong character, which was “the supreme end of school instruction,” and the bible was used as the primary tool to do so.¹⁰

The majority of learning in colonial times and early America did not occur in a formal setting. Stephen Prothero, in his work on America’s religious illiteracy, maintains that “instruction in reading and religion took place first and foremost in the home” but also occurred in churches, schools, Sunday Schools, bible societies, and colleges.¹¹ The household and church played key roles in educating youth. Parents, most often mothers, taught their children how to read using the catechism and the bible through oral recitation

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Stephen R. Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know, and Doesn't*, 60.

⁶ W. Clark Gilpin, “The Creation of a New Order: Colonial Education and the Bible,” 7.

⁷ Stephen R. Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know, and Doesn't*, 60.

⁸ Ibid., 61.

⁹ “The Bible and the Common Schools,” *The Biblical World*, Vol. 20, No. 4. (October, 1902): 243.

¹⁰ Ibid., 244.

¹¹ Stephen R. Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know, and Doesn't*, 65.

and memorization.¹² Bible study in the home was commonplace among family members. Vernacular bibles produced during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries began to incorporate study guides for this purpose.¹³ Catechisms, Psalters, and liturgies were used as aides in the instruction of the bible in early America at home and the church.¹⁴

The Puritan Cotton Mather's *Bonifacius: An Essay upon the Good* contained advice for families on how to teach children the bible. It suggested that parents teach their children stories from the bible at the dinner table or provide their children rewards for memorizing bible verses.¹⁵ Mather's essay was similar to modern essays in that it taught techniques in bible education for parents concerned with proper instruction techniques.¹⁶ Mather's advice for parents provides an example of how colonial Americans adapted the bible for their children and how they partook in learning bible stories.

Most historians agree that schools in the nineteenth century continued to promote a "generalized Protestantism" and that the enterprise of American education stretching "from the early 17th century to the late 19th centuries...was a religious enterprise" where the bible played a prominent role.¹⁷ Urban centers usually had schools in early America

¹² David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgement*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989): 34.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁴ W. Clark Gilpin, "The Creation of a New Order: Colonial Education and the Bible," 16.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

¹⁶ Educators, others parents, and concerned clergy have produced a wide body of literature on how to teach and present the bible to children in the modern era. For more, see Dorothy Jean Furnish, *Experiencing the Bible with Children*; A. Roger Gobbel and Gertrude G. Gobbel. *The Bible, a Child's Playground*; Patricia Griggs, *Opening the Bible with Children: Beginning Bible Skills*; Gretchen Wolff Pritchard, *Offering the Gospel to Children* and my discussion of these books in Chapter Four.

¹⁷ David B. Tyack, "Onward Christian Soldiers: Religion in the American Common School," in *History and Education the Educational Uses of the Past*, ed. Paul Nash (Random House: New York, 1970), 212-55; Robert Michaelson, *Piety in the Public School: Trends and Issues in the Relationship between Religion and the Public Schools in the United States* (Macmillan: New York, 1970); F. Michael Perko, "Religious Education" in *Encyclopedia of American Religious Experience*, ed. Charles Lippy and Peter Williamson, (3 vols. New York, 1998), III, quoted in R. Laurence Moore, "Bible Reading and Nonsectarian Schooling: The Failure of Religious Instruction in Nineteenth-Century Public Education" in *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 86, No. 4. (March, 2000): 1582.

and many of these institutions had strong clerical ties. Such ties influenced these schools' curricula, making the bible a central part of education.¹⁸

Free, universal education was first an idea in the United States, then a practice. Common schools, the predecessors of the American public school system, emerged in the 1820s. They were created to instill children with notions of American nationalism and “Americanize” new immigrants. These institutions were imbued with a Protestant ethic that “taught students to revere George Washington as a saint and Jesus as the Christ.”¹⁹ Education in the nineteenth century continued to include the bible as a key part in the curriculum. Early textbooks like the *New England Primer*, Webster’s *American Spelling Book*, and McGuffey readers helped children achieve basic and religious literacy.²⁰ They also ensured that children gain knowledge of the bible and become culturally literate with it, developing a “*lingua franca*” across society.²¹

Understanding the bible’s role in education is significant because this was a decisive time in America’s educational “experiment.” During these years the common school evolved into the public school system we know today, a system of “free, publicly subsidized, and controlled, formal instruction and...moral education.”²² The home and church continued to play a role in education as public schools began in earnest to shape the minds of American children. However, the growth of the public school system “signaled the end of the church’s control of the people’s education and the assumption of

¹⁸ W. Clark Gilpin, “The Creation of a New Order: Colonial Education and the Bible”: 15-16.

¹⁹ Stephen R. Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know, and Doesn't*, 69-71.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 71-80.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 78.

²² John H. Westerhoff III, “The Struggle for a Common Culture: Biblical Images in Nineteenth Century Schoolbooks” in *Bible in American Education: From Source Book to Textbook* ed. David L. Barr and Nicholas Piediscalzi, (Philadelphia; Chico, CA: Fortress Press; Scholars Press, 1982): 25.

that responsibility by the state.”²³ It became inevitable for a tension to exist in the teaching of religious text and doctrine after the rise and subsequent dominance of the public school system. Nevertheless, the bible continued to play a part in the education of American youth through the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries.

Education did not become a secular institution overnight as the educational system moved under the auspices of the state. Instead it embraced much of the religious teaching that previous American educational norms had already institutionalized. It lost most of its religious vestiges by World War I.²⁴ Horace Mann, known by many as the father of the American education system, believed that “the fundamental principles of Christianity should be inculcated in the public school, even as each denomination through its Sunday schools must be responsible for inculcating its own faith and creed.”²⁵ The bible became accepted as a regular part of the public school system because of its perceived universality in Protestant belief.²⁶ No single Protestant denomination could either be agreed upon in the days of newly formed Republic, nor was a state religion truly desired, bringing about the need for a common set of values to be established for the purposes of uniting the new country. In this vacuum, a primarily Protestant value system took form. Michaelson, a scholar of religion in the public schools, acknowledges the rise of Catholic and non-Christian beliefs during the nineteenth century.²⁷ This newfound American “common religion” or “common faith” prevented any public school from teaching any specific denomination, but seemed to welcome “nonsectarian” (generic

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Stephen R. Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know, and Doesn't*, 93.

²⁵ John H. Westerhoff III, “The Struggle for a Common Culture: Biblical Images in Nineteenth Century Schoolbooks”, 27.

²⁶ Ibid., 27.

²⁷ Robert Michaelson, *Piety in the Public School*, 6.

Protestant) ideals.²⁸ The bible, understood by many educators as the perfect text for the American “common religion,” worked its way into schools through textbooks and readers, used by children in their lessons.²⁹

The religious Sunday school system emerged in the United States in the late eighteenth century. It was modeled after the English system, with the goal of providing a basic education to working class children. These schools, primarily in urban centers, were designed to teach children the basic concepts of religion and morality along with reading and writing.³⁰ As the nineteenth century progressed, more children attended public schools. Sunday schools began to be housed and supported by churches and their focus moved from cultivating basic literacy to religious literacy.³¹ Sunday schools continued to provide children with denominational instruction specific to certain religious groups.³² Sunday schools formed a “symbiotic” relationship with the common school system of the early nineteenth century, leading to the gradual decrease in the teaching of religion and the bible in the common school.³³ Sunday schools continue to be one of the most potent places for children to become proficient in the bible to this day.

The end of the nineteenth century saw a multitude of changes that ultimately brought about the removal of the bible from the public school classroom. The demise of teaching the bible in the classroom cannot be attributed solely to secularists, as many believe, but should be understood as the result of changes in attitude about religion and

²⁸ Stephen R. Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know, and Doesn't*, 94.

²⁹ John H. Westerhoff III, “The Struggle for a Common Culture: Biblical Images in Nineteenth Century Schoolbooks”, 27-30.

³⁰ Penny Schine Gold, *Making the Bible Modern* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004): 78.

³¹ Stephen R. Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know, and Doesn't*, 80.

³² Penny Schine Gold, *Making the Bible Modern*, 78-79.

³³ Stephen R. Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know, and Doesn't*, 81.

the bible.³⁴ The elimination of the bible occurred as a result of a fundamental shift in how the bible was understood in society by both people of faith, Protestants and non-Protestants, and secularists.³⁵

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there were three distinct attitudes toward teaching the bible and religion in the public school system. Some educators continued to believe in the bible as the word of God and wanted to teach students the bible in this manner. This view considered the bible as a supreme source book for morality and piety.³⁶ This view had been in use since before the American Revolution. However, in opposition to this traditional view, two new perspectives developed during this time. The first ignored or had little patience for the bible as the work of God, but continued to think of it as a good “manual for life.” This is illustrated in a statement by Justice Hagans of the Cincinnati Superior Court. He wrote in 1870 that the Bible “impresses ‘on the children of the common schools, the principles and duties of morality and justice, and a sacred regard to truth, love of country, humanity, universal benevolence, sobriety, industry, chastity, moderation, temperance, and all other virtues, which are the ornaments of human society.’”³⁷ The third attitude toward the bible simply

³⁴ Ibid., 89

³⁵ Charles R. Kniker, “New Attitudes and New Curricula: The Changing Role of the Bible in Protestant Education, 1880-1920” in *The Bible in American Education: From Source Book to Textbook* ed. David L. Barr and Nicholas Piediscalzi, (Philadelphia; Chico, CA: Fortress Press; Scholars Press, 1982): 121 and R. Laurence Moore, “Bible Reading and Nonsectarian Schooling: The Failure of Religious Instruction in Nineteenth-Century Public Education” in *The Journal of American History* 86 (2000): 1581.

³⁶ Charles R. Kniker, “New Attitudes and New Curricula: The Changing Role of the Bible in Protestant Education, 1880-1920”: 121

³⁷ From the opinion of Justice Hagans in the case of *Minor v. Board of Education of Cincinnati* (1870) as printed in *The Bible in the Public Schools* (New York: De Capo Press, 1967): 371, quoted in Michaelsen, *Piety in the Public School*, 32.

saw it as the world's "greatest literature" and tried to teach it as such without attempting to impart lessons, morals, or religion on students.³⁸

The Second Great Awakening of the early 1800s shifted America's religious character away from a textual Protestantism, to a more diverse, though still Christian, religious expression. It might seem counterintuitive, that the Second Great Awakening, a movement that encouraged more religious practice in America, actually decreased bible reading. However, this new expression, typified by new evangelical movements and the Baptist and Methodist denominations, was rooted in sincere expressions of faith and placed less emphasis on biblical literacy. Though the Second Great Awakening spread Christianity to more Americans, including former slaves, its methods did so at the price of religious literacy and more specifically, biblical literacy.³⁹ By the mid nineteenth century, many evangelical Protestants agreed with Catholics that the bible should not be taught in school, though for different reasons. These Protestants opposed Horace Mann's "watered-down" and "generic" Christianity. They instead believed that children should be taught "the one true faith." This group of Protestants believed that if that was not possible, then no faith should be taught at all.⁴⁰

Today, it is often easy to point to court challenges by non-Protestants in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as the most influential reasons behind the demise of the bible in the public school. Indeed, these challenges were legally significant in the removal of religious instruction and the bible from America's public schools. American

³⁸ It is this method that survived until today and is largely employed by educators and bible-literacy advocates who believe in the necessity of teaching the bible. See Chapter Four for more on the bible and how children learn it today in public schools. Charles R. Kniker, "New Attitudes and New Curricula: The Changing Role of the Bible in Protestant Education, 1880-1920": 121.

³⁹ Stephen R. Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know, and Doesn't*, 89-92.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 97.

Catholic officials widely believed that it was the duty of the “parents and the church, not the state” to educate their children.⁴¹ Catholics became wary of public schools because of sectarian curricula and biblical lessons. Catholic leaders argued that tax money supporting education should be turned over to the churches and parochial schools to educate Catholic children because the education being offered to Catholic children in the public schools was not adequate and was sectarian in nature.⁴² Rulings on legal challenges brought by Catholics, Jews, atheists, and others established that the bible was a sectarian book. These challenges forced educators to alter their curricula from focusing on students’ unbridled knowledge of the book to more analysis of the book.⁴³ In 1869 and 1870, Cincinnati’s Board of Education became the first public school system to prohibit “hymn singing, Bible reading, and religious education,” by removing the King James Bible from the school’s curriculum.⁴⁴

The bible has a “clearly defined role” in public education today, however this role covers more of what educators are not allowed to do with the bible than what they can do with it.⁴⁵ This developed as a result of changes to how Americans understood diversity and pluralism in the twentieth century. Cultural and religious pluralism forced the bible to be understood in a symbolic way in schools. Up to and after the Supreme Court made it illegal to teach the bible in a sectarian manner, reading the bible continued, without commentary, in “thousands of classrooms across the country.”⁴⁶

⁴¹ Michaelsen, *Piety in the Public School*, 123

⁴² *Ibid.*, 123-124.

⁴³ Charles R. Kniker, “New Attitudes and New Curricula: The Changing Role of the Bible in Protestant Education, 1880-1920”: 137.

⁴⁴ Stephen R. Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know, and Doesn't*, 98.

⁴⁵ Peter S. Bracher and David L. Barr, “The Bible is Worthy of Secular Study: The Bible in Public Education Today” in *The Bible in American Education: From Source Book to Textbook* ed. David L. Barr and Nicholas Piediscalzi, (Philadelphia; Chico, CA: Fortress Press; Scholars Press, 1982): 165.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 166.

1940s and 1950s America, the era of Eisenhower, was home to an America replete with “Judeo-Christian” values. During this time, sectarian elements of American common culture were dropped to unite Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish Americans in a “common faith” that linked them against the Nazis, Fascists, and Communists.⁴⁷ If the 1940s and the 1950s were a time for Protestants, Catholics, and Jews to unite behind the banner of “Judeo-Christianity,” then the 1960s saw the end of the “cult of commonality” in favor of the “cult of particularity.”⁴⁸ Mounting legal challenges and increasing cultural pressure to accept diversity of cultures and religious views became a potent combination. The bible eventually lost its place in the American school system with new restraints on how it could be taught and an additional desire for welcoming difference.

The debate over religion in the public sphere continues today, specifically in the public schools. With debates and growing legal challenges over the teaching of evolution and intelligent design, school prayer, and religious displays in public places, we might assume that it is entering a more vitriolic phase. Since the Supreme Court cases of the 1960s, it has been unconstitutional for children to read the bible or pray in a confessional way in America’s public schools. Since this time, the bible has held an ignominious place in the public school for educators and parents, akin to the place of Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* in some school districts, though for different reasons.⁴⁹

Three Supreme Court decisions directly affected the role of the bible in the public school: *Engle v. Vitale* (1962), *Murray v. Curlett* (1963) and *Abington Township School District v. Schempp* (1963). These three decisions had a historic impact that is still felt

⁴⁷ Stephen R. Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know, and Doesn't*, 112-113.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 114

⁴⁹ Marie Wachlin and Byron R. Johnson, “Biblical Literacy Report: What American Teens Need to Know and What do They Know?”, 26.

today. The first decision related to school prayer and the other two decided issues of bible reading in schools. One effect of these decisions was largely societal, as they affirmed the rights of cultural and religious minorities. These decisions resulted in legal maneuvering by the Court that would forever change the role of the bible in public schools. In ruling that the bible was a sectarian document and illegal for states to mandate in their curriculum, the Supreme Court applied both the First Amendment and the Fourteenth Amendment to public education.⁵⁰ The Supreme Court was able to use a broadened understanding of the First Amendment, secured through a 1940 decision that “ruled that the religious restrictions of the First Amendment were legally binding upon the States.”⁵¹ The Court also used a broadened understanding of minorities beyond African Americans (understood to be the beneficiaries of the Fourteenth Amendment) to rule that the reading of the bible in state funded schools was unconstitutional.⁵²

Since the *Schempp* ruling, there has been a drive to study the bible in a Supreme Court approved, non-sectarian way in the public schools.⁵³ Some advocacy groups, parents, and school boards have figured out ways to include the bible in their curriculum after much wrangling, debate, and continued controversy. Later Supreme Court cases affirmed the right of the bible to be taught in an appropriate history or comparative religion class.⁵⁴ Unlike earlier periods, instruction in the bible today is strictly guided and regimented and though it is legal to do so, the bible is rarely taught in American

⁵⁰ Peter S. Bracher and David L. Barr, “The Bible is Worthy of Secular Study: The Bible in Public Education Today”, 166.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Stephen R. Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know, and Doesn't*, 129.

schools.⁵⁵ In a recent Gallup survey, only 8 percent of teens reported that their schools offered an elective course on the bible and 26 percent reported that the bible was touched upon in their English or Social Studies classes.⁵⁶ The low number of bible literature classes is probably due to confusion among teachers and school boards about the legality of teaching religion. Where the bible is taught, it is done so “within the constraints of objectivity established by the Supreme Court and the need for sensitivity imposed by a pluralistic society” as a classic work of literature much in the same way that some envisioned its role at the end of the nineteenth century.⁵⁷ Teachers are careful not to violate the “Establishment Clause” of the Constitution, which states: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”⁵⁸

The Bible Literacy Project, an organization that advocates for the teaching of the bible and its influence on American culture, does not call for religious instruction in public schools. Instead, they endorse a compromise between those who advocate for the complete removal of the bible and religion in public schools and those who would teach it as a religious text. The Bible Literacy Project has affirmed the importance of the bible in America by commissioning a nonsectarian textbook to aid high school students in their study and exploration of the bible.⁵⁹ The textbook is used in a curriculum to teach the bible as literature and not in a religious or moralistic context. Any teaching of the bible that becomes too religious is not allowed and is often challenged. A recent report

⁵⁵ Ibid., 130

⁵⁶ Marie Wachlin and Byron R. Johnson, “Biblical Literacy Report”, 23.

⁵⁷ Peter S. Bracher and David L. Barr, “The Bible is Worthy of Secular Study: The Bible in Public Education Today”, 189-190.

⁵⁸ U. S. Constitution, amend. 1.

⁵⁹ “Biblical Literacy Project” website, available from <http://www.bibleliteracy.org/>, accessed December 2006.

commissioned by the organization affirms its belief in the importance of biblical literacy. Forty out of forty-one high school English teachers from around the country agreed that biblical literacy was key to students' success and that biblical literacy conferred a "distinct academic advantage."⁶⁰ Educators around the country have reached a new consensus for the integration of the bible and religious studies in public schools. They usually face resistance, much of it based on incorrect interpretations of the Supreme Court's rulings.⁶¹

This survey of the bible in the American education system has shown how teachers and schools consciously attempted to familiarize their students with the bible until it bordered on unconstitutional activity. The American education system was not static and it affected the way children came upon the bible. A new way for parents to teach their children and ensure biblical familiarity was rejuvenated as the study and reading of the bible in the classroom waned. As we will see in Chapter 3, children's bibles are hardly a new device. However, they became a popular mechanism for children and parents to experience the text of the bible following the void left by changes in public education.

⁶⁰ Marie Wachlin and Byron R. Johnson, "Biblical Literacy Report", 5.

⁶¹ Stephen R. Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know, and Doesn't*, 129-131.

Chapter 3: Children Encountering the Bible: The First Children's Bibles

The bible is the world's most translated and frequently published book. It has and will continue to have a dominating presence in Western culture.¹ It was the first book printed and has been translated into every known language. More editions and versions of the bible have been printed than any other book in the history of humankind.² The creation of special versions for specific audiences seems a natural step for the world's most read book. In contemporary America, there are bibles oriented to specific audiences or niches.

The children's bible, one of these niche publications, has become ubiquitous in America. Within the niche itself categories have developed to further subdivide the audience of "children." Some of these differences are immediately recognizable, as there are specific children's bibles that are used by Catholics, Protestants, or Jews, where the actual content of the biblical text is different.³ Some of the differences within the genre are evidenced not in the text but in ancillary features like illustration and commentary. Some are targeted towards a certain audience, like young teenage Evangelical Protestants (i.e. the Revolve series, published by Thomas Nelson).⁴ Others are more generic and aimed at a wider audience. However, the most widely recognized format is the storybook bible, which utilizes adapted, narrative, and illustrated storybook retellings of the bible for younger audiences. I will henceforth refer to such texts as children's bibles. Before

¹ As Frerichs points out, one sign of the bible's importance and timelessness in western society is the sheer fact that it has lasted so long and been retold so many times, Ernest S. Frerichs, "Introduction," in *The Bible and Bibles in America*, ed. Ernest S. Frerichs (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988): 1-2.

² Deborah A. Wooten, "The Bible in Children's Literature," 80.

³ Janet Ann Ingraham, "Bible Stories for Children: Israelites, Miracles, and Us," *Catholic Literary World* 62 (1990): 300-303.

⁴ For a detractor of this edition who believes in "presenting the truth and exposing error with the Word of God," see Terry Watkins, "Revolve Babble," from *Dial the Truth Ministries* website, accessed 6 December 2006, available from <http://www.av1611.org/kjv/revolve.html>

we take a close look at the modern form, we need to understand where children's bibles originated. Earlier "proto-children's bibles" preceded the modern children's bible. The long evolution of specially adapted children's bibles began in Europe.

It was common practice in Christian Europe to provide alternative formats of the bible to those who could not read. Paulinus of Nola, who used imagery from the bible to decorate his basilica in the fifth century believed that "peasant people, not devoid of religion, but not able to read...[could] look wonderingly around, their rude minds piously beguiled."⁵ As James H. Morey states, "Prior to and even after full-scale Reformation translations, biblical material was disseminated in the vernaculars through sermons, homilies, commentaries, universal histories, picture Bibles, the drama, and a large corpus of biblical paraphrases."⁶ As seen with Paulinus of Nola and in other examples, the bible was transmitted before and after the Reformation, even though the Reformation is popularly viewed in history as a time when the bible was freed from papal captivity.⁷

Children, the illiterate, and the laity across Europe often used illuminated bibles and bibles with illustrations or mnemonic devices. They provided a straightforward way to learn the bible.⁸ Bible summaries and catechisms were also offered to serve this purpose. The laity in the Middle Ages saw the bible as a collection of easily identifiable

⁵ Ceacilia Davis-Weyer, *Early Medieval Art 300-1150, Sources and Documents* (University of Toronto Press: Toronto, 1986): 19 in Madeline H. Caviness, "Biblical Stories in Windows," in *The Bible in the Middle Ages Its Influence on Literature and Art* ed. Bernard S. Levy (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1992): 104-105.

⁶ James H. Morey, "Peter Comestor, Biblical Paraphrase, and the Medieval Popular Bible," in *Speculum* 68, (1993): 6.

⁷ Discussion on Reformation and the children's bible to follow in this chapter. For more on how the bible was communicated in the Middle Ages in Literature and Art, see *The Bible in the Middle Ages Its Influence on Literature and Art* ed. Bernard S. Levy (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1992); David C Fowler, *The Bible in Early English Literature* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976)

⁸ Ruth B Bottigheimer, *The Bible for Children: From the Age of Gutenberg to the Present*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996): 11.

stories.⁹ Though the bible was primarily transmitted through church sermons and preaching, published bible stories could help the laity “bridge the gulf between routine hearings of a Bible passage and intelligent understanding of its meaning.”¹⁰ Early bible story collections were used as a way to fortify sermons and homilies and to ensure their remembrance. This technique is still in use today. As technology improved, the printed word reached a wider audience and both full bibles and bible storybooks became available to the laity.¹¹

European authors adapted the bible for children first.¹² During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the form of the children’s bible came into its own after centuries of bible storybooks being passed down to children.¹³ The first children’s bible was written in Latin, the language of the Church. Most children’s bibles produced by the end of the 1600s were translated from the Latin text to the local vernacular so that the laity might better comprehend them.¹⁴

Two early children’s bibles and “two books that set the outer limits of the genre of Bible story collections” were Peter Comestor’s twelfth century *Historia Scholastica* and Martin Luther’s *Passional*, published in the mid 1500s.¹⁵ These two archetypes share a number of differences, yet also some key similarities. Both books “fell prejudice to

⁹ Ibid., 38.

¹⁰ Ibid., 9.

¹¹ Ibid., 29.

¹² This paper focuses on children’s bibles in English and will not cover the whole scope of children’s bibles in America which does include a rich heritage of languages other than English being employed—including but not limited to Hebrew for young Jewish children (see Penny Schine-Gold, *Making the Bible Modern: Children’s Bibles and Jewish Education in Twentieth Century America*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), or languages for recent immigrant communities like Spanish. Bottigheimer presents an excellent summary of German, French, American, Swiss, Scandinavian, and Russian Children’s Bibles in her *The Bible for Children*, 39-52.

¹³ Ibid. This is what Bottigheimer refers to as “downward mobility.” As new books entered the family, “obsolescent” ones often entered the nursery and the hands of waiting children.

¹⁴ Ruth Bottigheimer, *The Bible for Children: From the Age of Gutenberg to the Present*, 6.

¹⁵ Ibid., 14-15.

theological and then to scholarly prejudice” and both books were attacked because of the innocent nature of their audience, “the child reader.”¹⁶ These similarities have not only linked Comestor and Luther, but also many of the authors of children’s bibles that have come after them. They established a form for adapted children’s bibles that has been repeatedly utilized.

Peter Comestor’s *Historia Scholastica* was the first abridgment of the bible that is extant. More importantly, it was wildly successful for hundreds of years, making it one of the most successful and popular books of the late Middle Ages. This is probably one reason it has survived until this day.¹⁷ The *Historia* was immensely popular, received Papal approval in 1215, and was required study at abbeys across Europe, though little is known about the man who wrote it.¹⁸ Most biographies agree that Comestor was born in Troyes, France around 1100.¹⁹ Other aspects of his life are more muddled. He was Dean of St. Peters School in Troyes and Chancellor of the School at Notre Dame in Paris sometime from 1164, ending sometime around 1180.²⁰ Comestor wrote his *Historia* sometime after resigning as Chancellor of Notre Dame, between 1169 and 1173.²¹ The precise date of Comestor’s death is unknown. Some biographers posit dates as early as 1160 and others believe it was not until 1179.²²

The original version of the *Historia* included only the “narrative parts of the bible,” like the modern form of the children’s bible.²³ Comestor’s work was originally

¹⁶ Ibid., 15.

¹⁷ James H. Morey, “Peter Comestor, Biblical Paraphrase, and the Medieval Popular Bible,” 8.

¹⁸ Ibid., 8; Saralyn R. Daly, “Peter Comestor: Master of Histories,” in *Speculum* 32 (1957): 62.

¹⁹ Ruth Bottigheimer, *The Bible for Children: From the Age of Gutenberg to the Present*, 16.

²⁰ Saralyn R. Daly, “Peter Comestor: Master of Histories,” 65-67; Ruth Bottigheimer, *The Bible for Children: From the Age of Gutenberg to the Present*, 16.

²¹ Saralyn R. Daly, “Peter Comestor: Master of Histories,” 68.

²² Ibid., 72.

²³ Ruth Bottigheimer, *The Bible for Children: From the Age of Gutenberg to the Present*, 16.

penned in Latin, but it did not remain so confined. In 1289, Guiart Desmoulins translated the *Historia* into French and altered it in the process.²⁴ Like many modern children's bibles, the *Historia* was recognized as sacred scripture by its readers, true bibles in their own right, helping children "escape the devil at death" by reading the divinely *inspired* though not *written* work.²⁵

The experience of reading the *Historia* varied greatly from reader to reader. Each edition was different based on the "presence or absence of penned marginalia," that previous readers left behind. While the side commentary would not necessarily be reproduced in a future copying of the manuscript, it would often survive, as copies of the *Historia* would be passed down. Most editions contained both "Old and New Testament stories," although some had only stories from the Hebrew Bible and some only from the Christian Bible. In general, Latin versions of the *Historia* were not illustrated, while later versions in vernacular languages contained images. Manuscript copiers used various methods to separate commentary from scriptural story. These techniques included an inked border, a white space, the word "*Glosa*" for gloss, or the Latin "dicitur (it is said)."²⁶

Our understanding of the *Historia Scholastica* and its effect on modern children's bibles is colored by an event that occurred after its creation: the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. Many scholars in the nineteenth century viewed the "hunger for scripture" as unique to a Protestant reader base.²⁷ However, the widespread success of the *Historia* indicates that there was a "considerable Catholic Bible appetite" in the late

²⁴ Ibid., 17. Desmoulins alterations included a "history of Job", a new translation of Maccabees, new commentary, and the addition of the phrase "according to the Bible."

²⁵ Ibid., 17.

²⁶ Ibid., 18-21.

²⁷ Ibid., 21.

Middle Ages as well.²⁸ *Historia Scholastica* is key to properly understanding children's bibles today because a number of the issues Comestor faced are still tackled by the authors of contemporary children's bibles. For example, Comestor's Latin text had to be altered when translated into the Vernacular. This was often done "when a text originally produced for a restricted readership [the Latin version] was prepared for a wider readership."²⁹ Similarly, many modern authors and publishers grapple with adapting original texts and the criticism that follows.

We cannot think of the *Historia Scholastica* as a single work since the use of Peter Comestor's text shifted over the centuries. It was no longer in use by 1500, due to a renewed emphasis on using the original biblical text. The *Historia* was still used in schoolrooms; though it fell out of use after the Protestant Reformation because of its reputation as a book with "Catholic origins."³⁰

The *Historia Scholastica* was joined on European bookshelves by another proto-children's bible in the sixteenth century. Martin Luther wrote the *Passional* in 1529. It was designed as a pamphlet that described the life of Christ and other important characters from the bible like Noah, Lot, and Moses. The *Passional* was written in German, illustrated, and designed for children and the laity as a *Laienbibel*. It was an early archetype of a bible written for children and others who needed a basic bible. Along with the *Historia*, we should compare it in format and function to its modern day successors.³¹

²⁸ Ibid., 21.

²⁹ Ibid., 22.

³⁰ Ibid., 22-23.

³¹ Ibid., 23.

Unlike the details of Comestor's life, the details of Martin Luther's life are well documented. He was born in 1483 in Eiseben, between Erfurt and Wittenberg. In July 1505, Luther was caught in a thunderstorm, and the traumatic event caused him to vow to become a monk. He was ordained in 1507 and from 1508-1509 he studied theology at the University at Wittenberg. In 1512, Luther became a doctor of theology and spent the next part of his life in study, preparing for his infamy. Luther's break with the Catholic Church happened in 1515/16 or 1518. In 1517 he presented his famous critique on indulgences, sealing his break from the Catholic Church. The Edict of Worms of 1521 placed Luther under an "imperial ban."³²

After his famous break from the emperor and the pope, Luther spent time in isolation. In an astonishing eleven weeks, he translated the New Testament. His translation was published in September 1522 and referred to as the September Testament of 1522.³³ Translating the bible into German was not a novelty. In fact, it had been done eighteen times between 1466 and 1522.³⁴ However, Luther's translation was the first to use the Greek original and to reject the Latin as a source.³⁵ Soon after his completion of his "September Testament," Luther set out to translate the Hebrew Bible. In 1534, the complete Luther Bible was published. It is believed that the printer of the Luther Bible, Hans Lufft, sold approximately 100,000 copies of Luther's Bible over fifty years, not accounting for reprints or illegal copies.³⁶

³² Ibid., 3-12.

³³ Ruth Bottigheimer, *The Bible for Children: From the Age of Gutenberg to the Present*, 24.

³⁴ Ibid., 25.

³⁵ Albrecht Beutel, "Luther's Life" in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, 12; Ruth Bottigheimer, *The Bible for Children: From the Age of Gutenberg to the Present*, 25.

³⁶ Albrecht Beutel, "Luther's Life" in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, 12.

Luther's translated the bible to maximize its broadest appeal and access. With this in mind, he wrote the *Passional* and other catechisms for children and less educated laity.³⁷ Unlike Comestor's *Historia*, each copy of the *Passional* was not unique, but rather, "rolled off the press [in] uniform sheets."³⁸ Each page was faced with an accompanying illustration. These were not mere decorations, but serious graphic components that held religious meanings for Luther and his audience. Though each book was the same, changes did appear in the text. Some of these alterations were by the hand of Luther and others were unauthorized changes by printers.³⁹

Luther's *Passional* fell by the wayside and was ignored until scholars "found" it in the modern era. Unlike *Historia Scholastica*, the *Passional* was not a mainstay for centuries. Perhaps due to his other works and status as a major historical figure, the *Passional* was a religious tract too advanced for its time, and Reformation-era readers were not ready for such a radical approach to scripture.⁴⁰

These early "proto-children's bibles" established an archetype and standard that later children's bibles' have followed. These conventions and standards include the careful selection of bible stories, use of simpler adapted language, and illustrations that add to the stories meaning and help in its understanding. These conventions still appear in children's bibles today. The objections and challenges that both Comestor and Luther faced from detractors who were weary of an altered biblical text are still faced by authors of children's bibles. In the next Chapter, we move from Europe to America in our exploration of bibles for children. We give pause here to keep in mind that the American

³⁷ Ruth Bottigheimer, *The Bible for Children: From the Age of Gutenberg to the Present*, 25.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 27-32.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 35-36.

interest in adapting the bible for children has not been solely a concern of Americans, but is instead a legacy inherited from Europe.

Chapter 4: Children Encountering the Bible: The American Children's Bible

At the end of Chapter 2, I reviewed the current state of biblical and religious education in America's public schools. America's schools have largely lost their roles as inculcators of the bible to children. The vast majority of children do not encounter the bible at all in public schools, much to the chagrin of scholars like Stephen Prothero who bemoan its loss.¹ High biblical illiteracy along with some recent Gallup data prove that children do not have the same access to the bible in the public schools as they once did.²

In Chapter 1, I established the premise that the bible is a part of America's shared cultural identity and not just a sectarian document for Christians and Jews. If the public education system no longer teaches the bible in a way that reaches every student, then what has taken its place? In the years following the Supreme Court decisions that altered how the bible could be taught in the classroom, it became necessary for parents to ensure that their children were becoming acquainted with the bible.³ Faced with this challenge, parents insisted upon new and innovative tools to teach biblical stories to their children. Parents, when faced with this modern problem, turned to an old device and adapted it to fit their new need: the storybook bible that has existed since Peter Comestor invented it in the twelfth century. Although storybook bibles have been used in Europe and America throughout most of the past millennium, it took the new demand of American parents and the ingenuity of American bible publishers to greatly enhance and expand the genre into what we know today. In short, we should attribute the rise of the adapted children's bible in America to two distinct yet complementary forces: one, the demands of both religious

¹ Stephen R. Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know, and Doesn't*

² See Chapter 2 for a discussion on the bible's role in contemporary education.

³ Not coincidentally, the downfall in teaching the bible in the public school was followed by what is widely regarded as a rise in specially adapted bibles for children in the 1970s and 1980s continuing through today.

and secular parents for easy ways to teach their children the bible, though for obviously different reasons; and two, the recognition of new niches by bible publishers.

The form of the American children's bible was adapted over time into what we are most familiar with today. Like other bibles printed in America, the first American children's bibles were printed in England, and imported to the colonies. In 1763, a prose bible for children containing stories from both the Hebrew and Christian bibles was published in the colonies, but it failed to sell widely.⁴ Printed in Philadelphia, the bible claimed (inaccurately) to be the first abridgment of bible stories in English.⁵ The extended title of this Bible elucidates the author's intent:

An [sic] History of the holy [sic] Scriptures. In which, the several Passages of the Old and New Testament are laid down in a Method never before attempted; being reduced to the tender capacities of the little Readers, by a lively and striking Abstract, so as, under God, to make those excellent Books take such a firm Hold of their young Minds and Memories and leave such Impressions there, both of Moral and Religious Virtue, as no Accidents of their future Lives will ever be able to blot out⁶

The market for adapted children's bibles changed after the American Revolution. In the 1780s, many publishers pirated John Newbery's *Holy Bible Abridged* from England. By 1815, printers all over the Northeast were printing the *Holy Bible Abridged*. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw the repeated pirating of popular British children's bibles for the American market. The influx of immigrant communities in the late nineteenth century and the subsequent rise in religious and ethnic diversity spurred an increase in demand for greater diversity in children's bibles. However, the majority of children's bibles printed in America through the end of the nineteenth century continued

⁴ See Chapter 1 for a discussion on the development of the bible printing industry in America; Ruth Bottigheimer, *The Bible for Children: From the Age of Gutenberg to the Present*, 45-46.

⁵ Ruth Bottigheimer, "Bible stories," in *The Cambridge Guide to Children's Books in English* (2001).

⁶ Ibid.

to be English editions, pirated from England.⁷ One notable exception was an early publication for Catholic children, Joseph Reeve's *History of the Old and New Testament*, which he penned in 1784.⁸

The family bible had a vital role in shaping American bibles and the subsequent children's bible genre that emerged in the twentieth century. The family bible held a special place in the Victorian household of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, acting as a sacred and revered commodity.⁹ Families would often gather in the morning, evening, or both to read their family bible together.¹⁰ Art and popular literature of the time portrayed the family bible as having the ability to act as a great equalizer in the household, as neither age nor class was a barrier to those who could listen to its stories. In domestic family bible reading, classifications did not matter. Instead, the ideals of the time taught that through simple attainments, such as reading the bible as a family, temperate behavior, hard work, etc., one could become a good, civilized Christian.¹¹ The importance of the family bible as an institution is clearly seen in how it carried over into the genre of children's bibles, even as family bibles declined in popularity towards the end of the nineteenth century.¹² Like the family bible, those who give children's bibles and those who receive children's bibles understand them as material possessions. Children and parents alike revere the children's bible. It is a sacred commodity and an equalizer, allowing children maximum exposure to the bible.

⁷ Ruth Bottigheimer, *The Bible for Children: From the Age of Gutenberg to the Present*, 46-47.

⁸ Ruth Bottigheimer, "Bible stories," In *The Cambridge Guide to Children's Books in English*

⁹ Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1995): 73.

¹⁰ Stephen R. Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know, and Doesn't*, 62.

¹¹ Who read the stories from the large family bible is another discussion. See McDannell for how the role of reader of the family bible shifted from father to mother. Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity*, 75-76.

¹² *Ibid.*, 81;87;100

The nineteenth and early twentieth century saw a rise in religious sectarianism, and the growth of Protestant denominational institutions.¹³ This affected the creation of children's bibles, which were often published for specific denominations.¹⁴ The rise of the denominational Sunday schools at the same time led initially to a decreased demand for storybook children's bibles and an increase demand for books with simple biblical excerpts. This was largely due to the focus of these schools as institutions where "child's Bible study was either the memorization of Bible verses or catechetical learning."¹⁵ An entire bible was not a necessary tool for a Sunday school curriculum that concerned itself with teaching only memorization. As the goals of Sunday schools evolved from rote memorization to imparting moral lessons and teaching stories, children's bibles were once again recognized as useful tools.¹⁶

As Sunday schools and parents revitalized the children's bible genre in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the texts themselves underwent a transformation by authors and publishers. Children's bibles would no longer present the entire story plots to children. Rather, the creators of children's bibles began to take advantage of the format as truly adaptive, leaving out material from stories deemed "unsuitable" for children.¹⁷ This often excludes anything relating to "sex, violence, and other behavior that would complicate perception of 'good' characters."¹⁸ Various tracks deemed offensive have fallen by the wayside over years of adapting the bible for children including "Daniel's

¹³ Ibid., 72.

¹⁴ Ruth Bottigheimer, *The Bible for Children: From the Age of Gutenberg to the Present*, 48.

¹⁵ Ernest S. Frerichs, "Children's Bibles" in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Penny Schine Gold, *Making the Bible Modern*, 190.

¹⁸ Ibid.

vision, the Song of Solomon, Amnon's incest, and David's adultery."¹⁹ Children's bibles were reconfigured to be virtuous models for children, understood as wholly safe literature. Even in this context, it is interesting to see that modern children's bibles expel sex before violence. This is exhibited in a bible pop-up book for a very young audience that reads, "David aimed his slingshot, the stone whirled through the air, the giant fell, and the Israelites sent up a mighty cheer! For now the awful giant was just a pile of bones."²⁰ It is difficult to imagine that the publisher of this children's bible also has a pop-up book recounting David's exploits with Bathsheba.

Children's bibles of the 20th century have an added element in their design as they have adapted "the stories to [fit] modern moral concerns."²¹ This has been accomplished through the purposeful deletion of material or the addition (interpolation) of material not in the original biblical text.²² Children have come to recognize the authority of the biblical text and parents have used this to insert moral lessons. As we will see in Chapter 5, the use of images and specially emphasized text guide children to a perception that bible stories carry heavy importance because they are scriptural. In other words, the sacredness of the original biblical text is transferred to the adapted storybook versions and lessons that are interjected within the text. Parents and religious authorities recognized the power of this implement and have utilized the children's bible to teach children lessons not readily apparent in the bible such as "racial harmony, ecology, kindness to animals [and] nonsexism."²³

¹⁹ Ruth Bottigheimer, *The Bible for Children: From the Age of Gutenberg to the Present*, 54.

²⁰ *David* (New York: Playmore/Waldman, 2000): 4.

²¹ Penny Schine Gold, *Making the Bible Modern*, 194.

²² *Ibid.*, 190.

²³ Allen Stuart Phy, "The Bible As Literature for American Children" in *The Bible and Popular Culture in America* (Philadelphia; Chico, CA: Fortress Press; Scholars Press, 1985): 189.

The availability of children’s bibles—adapted, narrative, illustrated storybook bibles—rose dramatically during the course of the twentieth century due to an increase in demand. This resulted in a vast library of options.²⁴ The glut of children’s storybook editions seems to Patricia Magness, a scholar of children’s literature, more akin to “telephone books than any sort of permanent treasure.”²⁵ Even if there is a wide availability and their quality varies, the bibles themselves are diverse. Like their precursors, the *Historia Scholastica*, *The Passional*, and *The Holy Bible Abridged*, each children’s bible is unique. Nevertheless, most follow an archetype. Peter Comestor’s twelfth century children’s bible and Martin Luther’s *Passional* seem to be the exemplars that most authors of children’s bibles follow. This format for children’s bibles has been modified by subsequent generations to make the text for children more exciting and appealing. Ultimately, the texts are composed of the narrative parts of the bible with adapted language.²⁶ They contain illustrations to help children understand the stories.

It is important to highlight where children’s bibles attempt to distinguish themselves. Illustration is a key element for children’s bibles to separate themselves from ordinary children’s bibles. From 1814 to 1844, the American Bible Society flooded the market with cheap bibles, forcing publishers to innovate and provide customers with different options.²⁷ Similarly, publishers today must be original to compete. Initially, children’s bibles themselves were a specialized commodity. Now due to their popularity and increased demand, the market has splintered into various niches. Each author and publisher must ensure that their children’s bible offers something unique.

²⁴ Patricia Phillips Magness and Joyce Elizabeth Potter, *A Guide to the Children’s Bible Story Books* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2001): 1.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Epistles and poetic elements (psalms, proverbs, etc) are usually the first to be excised.

²⁷ Paul Gutjahr, *An American Bible*, 36.

In the last thirty years, both religious and secular publishers have greatly increased the number of children's bibles they offer due to an increase in demand.²⁸ With so many options in the bible marketplace, bibles for children make up one large piece of the Christian retail industry. Sales of bibles by unit in Christian retail stores were up fifteen percent in 2005 from the previous year, as confirmed in an email correspondence with the Director of Information and Education of the Evangelical Christian Publishing Association on December 7, 2006. Of the top ten books sold in 2005, a children's bible was the second most popular by units sold (the same bible was the eighth most popular in 2004). Ten of the top thirty bibles sold (by units) in Christian retail stores were children and youth bibles in 2005. Ingram Book Group, the largest wholesaler of books in the United States had 4,316 bibles available in its inventory on December 9, 2006. Of these, 181 were various youth editions, including storybook bibles for children. Some of the most popular children's bibles in American publishing have sold multiple millions of volumes during their stay on bookstores shelves.²⁹ The bible is not only the best selling book of all time, but it is the best selling book of the year, every year, for as long as best selling book records have been kept.³⁰

Children's bibles have not just been popular in the religious publishing and retail industry. General trade retailers are aware of the importance of bibles sales as well.³¹ A Google search of the term, "children's bible" returns almost 2 million websites relating to

²⁸ For articles relating to the rise in publication of children's bibles, see W. Terry Whalin, "Bringing the Word to Beginners: Increasing Efforts are Underway to make the Scriptures Come Alive for Children," *The Publishers Weekly* 241 (1994): 48-49; Lynn Garrett, "Betcha Can't Own Just One," *The Publishers Weekly* 246 (1999): 33; Lynn Garrett, "The Bible Still Matters," *The Publishers Weekly* 244, (1997): 29; Thomas S Giles, "Pick a Bible--any Bible?," *Christianity Today* 36, (1992): 26-27; Neff LaVonne, "Books and Bibles for Boomers' Babies," *The Publishers Weekly* 244, (1997): 24; Neff LaVonne, "Bible Stories--Facing a Floodtide," *The Publishers Weekly* 248, (2001): 38.

²⁹ Neff Lavonne, "Bible Stories—Facing a Floodtide," 38.

³⁰ Daniel Radosh, "The Good Book Business," *The New Yorker*, 18 December 2006, 54.

³¹ Lynn Garrett, "The Bible Still Matters," 29

adapted bibles for children. Some include versions of the bible for children, illustrated bible verses, and online children's ministry sites.³² An Amazon.com search of the same query returned 7,815 products available for purchase.³³ The American Bible Society, fully digitalized for the twenty-first century, has an entire section devoted to children and the bible. Children's bibles are found in bookstores everywhere. With fourteen percent of sales, Christian Bookselling Association member stores hold a sizeable segment of the bible sales market in America, yet bibles are still purchased in a variety of other settings.³⁴ A trip to a local Target proves this. Stands with children's bibles are displayed between *Harry Potter* and the latest Michael Crichton best seller.

Because parents were wary of the complex task of teaching the bible to their children they hungered for another type of book—a manual that would help them wade through the copious offerings and instruct them how to teach their children. Alongside the children's bible, this sub-genre has trained a generation of eager parents how to teach the bible to children.³⁵ While some of these books (and articles) laud the children's bible, others warn parents to be cautious of any “bible” that is not the whole text. Such critics

³² A Google search of the term, “children's bible” on March 6, 2007 returned about 1.74 million sites with websites that linked to online versions of the bible for children, illustrated bible verses, and online children's ministry sites.

³³ The search returned almost 8,000 books, as well as music, videos, toys, and software related to the search term. “Amazon.com: Children's Bible,” http://www.amazon.com/gp/search/ref=br_ss_hs/104-9348412-3925547?search-alias=aps&keywords=children%27s%20bible (accessed 6 March 2007).

³⁴ Kimberly Winston, “Of the Making of Many Scriptures,” *The Publishers Weekly* 246 (1999): 34.

³⁵ A wide library of these books exists, usually published by Ministers or religious educators. Some of these texts include: Patricia Griggs, *Opening the Bible with Children* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986); Ethel L. Smither, *Children and the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960); Elizabeth Gangel, “Using the Bible with Children” in *Childhood Education in the Church* ed. Robert E. Clark, Joanne Brubaker, and Roy B. Zuck (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986): 381-397; Dorothy Jean Furnish, *Experiencing the Bible with Children* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990); Marion Parry, *Teaching Children the Bible* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988); Roger Gobbel and Gertrude G. Gobbel, *The Bible: A Child's Playground* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986)

fear that children might be unable to distinguish between adapted storybook retellings and the original canonized bible.³⁶

Many of these books stress that parents pick the right book. Authors provide their own methodology and suggestions. Some belabor the importance of finding an age-appropriate bible and stress that it is vital that children have their own personal edition of the bible.³⁷ This recalls the family bible and how ownership and commoditization of the bible was key to the reverence of the text. Some authors suggest the important hallmark of presenting children with an entire bible in a church ceremony where others argue for presenting children with adapted texts.³⁸ Contrary to a number of the other authors, some do suggest that bible storybooks can be useful tools and that the removal of inappropriate stories for sensitive children is an acceptable way to teach the bible.³⁹ These authors advocate that when translating and editing bible storybooks, it is important to “provide children with Bible stories which they can understand.”⁴⁰ This is to better convey the moral messages to children of all ages and leave out unsuitable material. Other authors explore the psychological effects of bible transmission. These authors are particularly interested in how biblical authority affects the receiving of moral lessons in the minds of youth.⁴¹

The process of adapting, illustrating, and publishing, which creates new bibles, is one where cultural idiosyncrasies are added and subtracted. The use of illustrations and

³⁶ Gretchen Wolff Pritchard, *Offering the Gospel to Children* (Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 1992): 40-46; Roger Gobbel and Gertrude G. Gobbel, *The Bible: A Child's Playground*, 95.

³⁷ Patricia Griggs, *Opening the Bible with Children*, 10-12.

³⁸ Elizabeth Gangel, “Using the Bible with Children”, 383

³⁹ Ethel L. Smither, *Children and the Bible*, 8; 52-59.

⁴⁰ Daniel Arichea, “Translating the Old Testament for Children: Genesis as a Test Case,” in *Practical Papers for the Bible Translator* 38, (1987): 402.

⁴¹ Dorothy Jean Furnish, *Experiencing the Bible with Children*; Marion Parody, *Teaching Children the Bible*

commentaries are provided or withheld so the reader of the bible can interact with it in a directed fashion. The creation of a bible does not happen in a vacuum, but it often effects great cultural change and/or occurs as the result of a change. Through the process of creation and multiplication, the children's bible has become thoroughly Americanized and part of the cultural milieu. As we saw in Chapter 1, America has become intertwined with the bible in all aspects of society, just as society has Americanized the bible. The modern children's bible is just one form of bible expression in a diverse biblical landscape. It represents one way that Americans have made the bible into a cultural artifact. Children's bibles are just one of many ways that children have come to comprehend and grapple with the bible. In Chapter 5, it will become clear how publishers and authors have adapted the bible for children with my analysis of two exemplars of modern children's bibles.

Chapter 5: The Modern Children Bible—Two Examples

Mary Batchelor's *The Children's Bible in 365 Stories* and Thomas Nelson Publishing's *The Children of Color Storybook Bible* demonstrate the highly engaging yet complex nature of this modern genre.¹ These two volumes fit into the category of storybook children's bibles. This is a distinct group among "children's bibles." These texts have become increasingly popular and synonymous with the term "children's bibles."² Specifically, they draw on devices first utilized by Comestor for his *Historia* and Luther for his *Passional*. They use narrative text, adapted stories, and illustration to make the bible more popular, accessible, and familiar to children.

The two bibles I analyze exemplify how children's bibles have become exciting and engaging. They exhibit the genre's calculating nature with the ultimate goal of attracting children's attention (and parents to purchase them for children.) They also demonstrate that children's bibles have become so prevalent, that they now occupy a niche unto themselves in the bible publishing industry. Their titles alone reveal how they are designed for different audiences. *The Children's Bible in 365 Stories* divides the entire bible into 365 stories, to be read each day of the year. *The Children of Color Storybook Bible* attracts a unique audience not because of a special device in its composition, but because it serves children of "African decent," a niche within the niche.³ My study of these books is not designed to be exhaustive, but is meant to provide examples of how these texts are constructed for the modern child, much in the same way

¹ See Introduction for note on "bible" capitalization.

² See Chapters Three and Four for my explanation of the history of children's bible, its evolution, and place in American society.

³ *Children of Color Storybook Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), vii. This introduction is offered to introduce the notion of a "Children of Color" bible as well as provide parents and others with a few hints on how to use the text with children.

that Chapter 3 explored the construction of the first children's bibles. In order to do this, I will analyze their use of illustration, overall format and design, and scriptural selection. It is necessary to understand all aspects about the bible outside the prose, because much weight and importance is placed upon these ancillary features.

The Children's Bible in 365 Stories, published by Lion Publishing in the United Kingdom and Cook Communications in America, is an "entirely new translation" based on the "original text." However, it does not say which "original text." In the "Introduction," Mary Batchelor, the author, explains why she chose some stories over others:

Not everything in the Bible could possibly have been squeezed into this book, so I have picked out the *most exciting* stories and the *best-loved* ones. But I chose with another purpose too. Although the Bible may seem to be a puzzling mixture of different kinds of writing, the separate parts fit together, like pieces in a jig-saw [sic], to make the whole picture. I wanted to make that picture plain.⁴ (italics mine)

Batchelor continues by stating her vaguely evangelical goal: she hopes her bible will cause children (and their parents) to eventually buy a whole modern translation after they have outgrown the storybook bible.⁵ By conditioning children to hold the bible as sacred, *The Children's Bible in 365 Stories* is designed to get children hooked on scripture. Batchelor has designed her book intentionally to expose children to the bible and ensure their literacy, in hopes that they will continue to engage with it, as they grow older.⁶

The *Children of Color Storybook Bible* is not a new translation specifically created for African American children. Rather, the text of this Bible is adapted from the

⁴ Mary Batchelor, *The Children's Bible in 365 Stories* (Oxford: Lion Publishing, 1995), i. (italics mine)

⁵ In using the word "evangelical," I am not ascribing either of these children's bibles to Evangelical Christians. However, I am simply referring to their evangelical intent (note the little "e"); that they aim to spread the gospel of Jesus or evangelize is my only point here.

⁶ Mary Batchelor, *The Children's Bible in 365 Stories*, i.

International Children's Bible.⁷ This translation, according to the *International Children's Bible* New Testament edition's preface is "not a paraphrase, but a reliable translation directly from the Greek. It's [sic] low third grade reading level makes the *ICV* the first real children's Bible."⁸ The specific use of illustration and the Bible's story selection make this particular text different. However, it is similar to other children's bible in many ways, following the conventions of the genre.

Illustration is a key part of children's bibles, beginning with Peter Comestor and Martin Luther and continuing through today. *The Children's Bible in 365 Stories* and *The Children of Color Storybook Bible* are no different, utilizing illustrations to help tell stories. Illustrations were often added to bibles to enhance their appeal and novelty to potential consumers. Paul Gutjahr, in his history of bible printing in America, wrote that publishers "both appreciated the message—and profit potential—of visual texts."⁹ In children's bibles, a similar rule seems to apply. Illustrations enhance the message and increase the likelihood that discerning consumers will purchase the book. Because parents first read many children's bibles to their children, illustrations help children understand the story. Later, when children can read the text by themselves, the illustrations enhance the interpretation of a biblical story.

The maxim, "one must never judge a book by its cover" should be ignored for this analysis. In fact, we can glean much from a close study of the covers of these

⁷ *International Children's Version*, New Testament (Fort Worth: Sweet Publishing Company, 1983)

⁸ We can only assume that for the creation of the *ICV* Hebrew Bible, the translators used Hebrew text, but since the preface of this addition is only for a New Testament addition, I can only presume! *Ibid.*, iii.

⁹ Paul Gutjahr, *An American Bible*, 47.

Bibles—like Gutjahr writes, “a book *is* judged by its cover.”¹⁰ The tone of any particular Bible can be ascertained through careful analysis of its cover’s illustration, colors, and text. *The Children’s Bible in 365 Stories’* cover depicts Jesus riding triumphantly into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey as children and disciples gleefully wave palms. This scene, taken out of the gospels, portrays a shaggy-haired Jesus with classical long hair and a straggly beard. Similar to Warner Sallman’s “Head of Christ” and other representations of Jesus as a folk hero in America, this Jesus is an easily recognizable character.¹¹ The scene depicted is not accidental. As one of the most recognizable Jesus stories in the bible, the procession into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey is also a widely accessible theme for most viewers, as well as a place where Jesus interacted with children. Thus, both in the portrayal of Jesus and the scene itself, this Bible proclaims itself. It does this for readers through its title and those who cannot read through its picture.

The publishers of *The Children of Color Storybook Bible* take a radically different approach to their Bible’s cover. Instead of depicting Jesus or another biblical scene, this Bible instead shows five smiling “children of color” arranged in a circle. Perhaps they represent the smiling beneficiaries of Christ’s love. They may be “children of color” who have benefited from this Bible and were enlightened by its stories. Where the other Bible can be understood as a Bible without any text on the cover (the title), *The Children of Color Storybook Bible* is not, by default, understood as a bible. Its cover does not bring to mind images of bibles without the title that is imprinted above it. Without a “biblical”

¹⁰ Ibid., 178. (italics original)

¹¹ Steven Prothero, *American Jesus*, 115-120. Also see David Morgan, *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) for an interesting discussion of America and religious imagery, including the ever-present “Head of Christ.”

depiction, this Bible does not proclaim itself in the same way that *The Children's Bible in 365 Stories* does. Instead, it is far subtler.

Reading the Stories and Illustrations Within

In order to analyze how the biblical stories are presented, we must also consider how the adapted biblical stories incorporate text and artwork. There is too much material in the Bibles to do an exhaustive study for this paper, but by examining one particular story and analyzing how it is told through language and picture, we might gain better insight into these particular children's Bibles. The story I analyze is the birth of Jesus. This story is itself a canon within the canon, exhibiting childhood innocence and purity. Throughout the gospels, Jesus is seen as a protector of innocence and purity, which are also central themes in children's bibles and underscore the importance of this story. Both of these children's Bibles tell the story similarly, though each has variations in language and illustration. In *The Children's Bible in 365 Stories*, the story is split into five different stories, to be read over five days.¹² In *The Children of Color Storybook Bible* the birth narrative is entitled "The Birth of Jesus" and is condensed.¹³

Illustration can be a revealing aspect of children's bibles. These particular Bibles use illustration in interesting ways. Though the story is told over a few parts, *The Children's Bible in 365 Stories* has one main image of the Jesus nativity scene.¹⁴ This picture, which covers almost an entire page, depicts Mary and Joseph admiring their

¹² The birth narrative in Batchelor's retelling comes from Luke 2 and Mathew 2. Mary Batchelor, *The Children's Bible in 365 Stories*, 279-284.

¹³ The birth narrative also comes from Luke 2 and Mathew 2. Mary Batchelor, *Children of Color Storybook Bible*, 122-125.

¹⁴ Mary Batchelor, *The Children's Bible in 365 Stories*, 280-281.

newly arrived son as shepherds and animals watch the scene in a cave.¹⁵ The image exudes religious significance. Children can understand that this scene is important due to all the people paying heed to the newborn child, Jesus.

The Children of Color Storybook Bible portrays Jesus, Mary, and Joseph in a simplistic, non-naturalistic, and cartoon-like fashion. Every character in this Bible is drawn with dark complexion. Next to them are two cows and a lamb drawn in a similar cartoon style.¹⁶ Though no one would mistake these representations for high art, they are nonetheless identifiable as Christian images. I believe that the illustrator intentionally made these depictions very cartoon-like, while still representing the Nativity scene. Unlike *The Children's Bible in 365 Stories*, which depicts the newborn baby more naturalistically and traditionally, i.e. Caucasian, the representation of Jesus and other biblical characters as “African” is risqué because depicting Jesus as dark-skinned in art is already a hot-button issue.¹⁷ A naturalistic dark skinned Jesus in this volume might be pushing the envelope too far for some conservative Christians who envision Jesus in racial and ethnic terms. Even if white, conservative Christians are not the primary audience of this book, its publisher Thomas Nelson, might be unwilling to risk controversy, as they publish volumes for various audiences. Though the depiction is non-naturalistic, Jesus still exhibits his godliness, as a halo emanates from his body. The animals seem in awe of the scene as they look at the newborn baby in wonder and amazement. The image conveys two messages: one, that Jesus’ birth was a momentous

¹⁵ This version explains that Mary and Joseph were forced to stay in a cave (with a manger), not the usual barn (with a manger) where a Shepard kept animals because there was no room at the inn. *Ibid.*, 279.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 123-124.

¹⁷ Stephen Prothero, *American Jesus*, 213-217; 219-228.

occasion; and two, that a naturalistic dark-skinned Jesus is too taboo to depict on the pages of this bible.

The text of the story is slightly different in the two Bibles. The most noticeable difference is the brevity of *The Children of Color Storybook Bible* compared to *The Children's Bible in 365 Stories*. *The Children's Bible in 365 Stories* is to be read over an entire year. Its stories are longer and more complex. The language of the *Children of Color* edition, which comes from the *ICV* version, is adapted from a "third grade text" and is simple so children can read it themselves. The majority of the textual differences lie in how much of the original story is adapted into the new storybook format.

I believe these two children's Bibles exemplify the genre. Parents provide the particular Bibles I have analyzed to children with a more religious intent. However, there are many children's bibles that are published by secular publishers. The authors and publishers of children's bibles, regardless of their religious agenda, design their texts to ensure that children encounter the bible. This engagement was lost in the public schools following the Supreme Court Decisions of the 1960s. These popularized editions show that in some cases, accessibility over knowledge is the ultimate goal. Instead of ensuring that children are truly familiar with the bible and its stories, main characters, and moral lessons, parents seem to believe that if their children are in possession of a children's bible, then they have achieved their goal. Inculcating *some* biblical material and physically bestowing children's bibles to millions of children is the new objective in the age of the adapted storybook bible. This has replaced the older aim of ensuring biblical literacy.

Ultimately, the children's bible of the twentieth century has attempted to fill a void left by the bible no longer having a place in public schools. As children's bibles became more important to parents and their children, their authors and publishers have gained a wider audience. Business people have developed great influence over how children come upon and encounter the bible, a responsibility that at one time rested with educators in schools. I will conclude this paper with a look at who in particular is adapting and creating children's bibles today.

Conclusion

Martin Marty, Vincent Wimbush, and Stephen Prothero demonstrate that America is culturally dominated by the bible. Marty and Wimbush argue that American culture reflects the bible in a multitude of ways. Marty contends that we may not even recognize the aspects of our culture that originate in the bible (*creencias*). Prothero agrees that American culture has fundamental connections to the bible yet points to a decline in religious literacy. Few scholars (if any) have written on how society and parents have prioritized teaching of the bible. The goal of this paper was not to interpret the bible, but rather to accept the role of the bible in American culture and explore how it functions as a cultural artifact for America's youth. Therefore, I have offered a unique look at how America encourages learning the bible during childhood by connecting two ideas: children encountering the bible through education and children accessing adapted storybook retellings of the bible.

I will conclude this paper with an assessment of two Christian publishers, Cook Communications and Thomas Nelson, the publishers of the two exemplars explored in Chapter 5. I will also review some points, problems, and questions for further examination. As the role of the public school in inculcating the bible diminished, the children's bible ascended and became a vital way for children to access the bible. Along with this shift came a change in whose responsibility it was to teach and adapt the bible for children. Publishing firms and parents have developed a sense of responsibility in how they prepare and teach the bible for the child reader.

The Children's Bible in 365 Stories by Mary Batchelor is published by Cook Communications in the United States (Lions Publishing in the United Kingdom). It has an unmistakable evangelical mission:

...committed to encouraging people everywhere to accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. Cook supports, promotes, and contributes to teaching and applying His two great commands—loving God and loving one another—by creating and disseminating Christian communications materials and services to people throughout the world.¹

Further exploration of their website unearths some other information that is even more informative about what this publishing firm believes the role of children's bibles to be. This section of their website, entitled "Reaching the Next Generation," states that the publisher is "reaching the next generation with vibrant books like the popular Picture New Testament. Millions of children have met Jesus Christ through these simple but effective publications."² This website also has a story about the effects of a children's bible and how it helped convert not only a young Muslim girl but her frustrated father. Cook Communications' website is not only for potential bible buyers, but also for concerned Christians who wish to give money, seeing to it that children all over the world will have access to these adapted bibles.

Thomas Nelson Publishing is a Christian publishing house whose mission states:

We are a diverse team of editors, marketers, sales associates, accountants, designers, and countless other employees, working together to improve the lives of customers. We're developing new media and methods to serve the Christian community in all its diversity. Fulfilling with passion a mission "to honor God and serve people." After more than two centuries of service, we remain faithfully and fearlessly dedicated to following in the

¹ Cook Communications website, "About Us", available from <http://www.cookministries.com/international/index.cfm?N=6.6.2.1>, accessed on 4 February 2007.

² Cook Communications website, "Reaching the Next Generation", available from <http://www.cookministries.com/international/index.cfm?N=6.6.3.1#1>, accessed on 4 February 2007.

footsteps of the godly young bookseller and publisher whose name we proudly bear.³

Thomas Nelson also publishes other bibles for children and teens, including editions that are designed as magazines (i.e. the Revolve series, mentioned in Chapter 3).⁴ The editors of this bible believe in “the infallibility of God’s word and our own human frailty.”⁵ The *Children of Color Storybook Bible* states in its introduction: “Most parents hope their children will come to love the Lord. We can help by providing them with the stories they love and understand, explaining to them how much God loves each and every one of them, and most importantly, by being a spiritual model for them.”⁶ This differs slightly from Mary Batchelor’s Introduction for *The Children’s Bible in 365 Stories*, in which she does not present her evangelical goals so obviously, but does say: “Jesus shows us exactly what God is like. Best of all, he put right the mess we have made of ourselves and our world by accepting death on our behalf.”⁷ Both of these publishers and their publications are decidedly for a Christian readership.

Throughout this paper, it has been interesting to note similarities and differences among the texts of children’s bibles. In the twenty-first century, we can broaden our comparison to publishers as well. As I just established, both of these publishers have “evangelical” mission statements, but only one has an overtly evangelical bent in its Introduction, *The Children of Color Storybook Bible*. Ironically, it is the Bible published

³ Thomas Nelson website, “Ongoing Mission”, available from http://www.thomasnelson.com/consumer/dept.asp?dept_id=1118918&TopLevel_id=100000 , accessed on 6 March 2007.

⁴ Daniel Radosh, “The Good Book Business,” 54.

⁵ *Children of Color Storybook Bible*, v.

⁶ *Ibid.*, vi.

⁷ Mary Batchelor, *The Children’s Bible in 365 Stories*, i.

by Cook Communications, the company with the more evangelical website, *The Children's Bible in 365 Stories*, that seems less evangelical in its Introduction.

As I have demonstrated throughout this paper, American children have been exposed to the bible in a variety of ways. Parents and society have purposefully taught their children the bible to ensure their familiarity with it, and so they develop knowledge of its stories, characters, and themes. We can no longer understand the bible as simply scripture for Christians and Jews. In the twenty-first century, through a process of adaptation and cultural appropriation, the bible has become an American artifact.

The three reasons I believe that society has prioritized the bible's dissemination to American youth include: the bible's perception as safe literature; its role as a moral guidebook for children; and the foundational nature of the bible's role in American culture.

To articulate how children encounter the bible, I created the language of "encountering the bible" as an easy catch phrase. Every time an American child discovers the bible, becomes acquainted with it, or is taught it, indeed, they are "encountering the bible." Exposure to the bible has come in a variety of formats, and I highlighted how loci of discovering the bible are related. Encountering the bible through America's education system and children's bibles are just two ways children come upon the bible. These two loci of learning the bible are interrelated because children's bibles in America ascended due to the termination of religious and biblical instruction in the public schools. Highly adapted children's bibles have become the preferred means by which to teach children. Many different methods of teaching the bible have used similar devices to ensure that children have access to the bible. These include, among others, the adaptation of the story

for their audience, censoring the story for both age appropriateness, and including illustrations to aid in comprehension.

I will end this paper with a caveat regarding America's incessant need to over simplify. As Americans adapt, squeeze, and package the bible into bite-sized morsels for children to digest, studies continue to show that biblical literacy is surprisingly low among high school students. This comes even as high school teachers and college professors exclaim the importance of biblical knowledge.⁸ Though children's bibles and other adapted retellings of the bible have proliferated, most American children are bereft of biblical literacy. If children read children's bibles as they read picture books, then the efficacy of children's bibles to impart stories and morality is probably not long lasting. Even though the children's bible is ineffective, America is so aware of its biblical heritage as Marty, Wimbush, and Prothero expound, that we may be *afraid* to not teach our children the bible. However, as we have grown into a modern, pluralistic, and visually predisposed era, we also seem unable to teach the bible in such a way that ensures its comprehension. As children's bibles continue to proliferate and niche bibles continue to grow in their variety, I believe that it will come at the price of literacy. Children will have access to adapted and illustrated children's bibles that their parents will buy for them in hope that they become familiar with the stories. But true biblical literacy will not be achieved if parents continue to use adapted children's bibles as the primary means to teach their children the bible.

⁸ Stephen R. Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know, and Doesn't*; Marie Wachlin and Byron R. Johnson, "Biblical Literacy Report: What American Teens Need to know and What do They Know?"; Marie Wachlin and Byron R. Johnson, "Biblical Literacy Report II: What University Professors Say Incoming Students Need to Know," (Front Royal, VA: Biblical Literacy Project, 2006)

More studies are necessary to garner what children know, where they gained their knowledge, and how and why their parents chose to teach them the bible to further assess the role of adapted bible stories and measure the level of biblical literacy. With this knowledge, further research could be done to explore other ways that children in America have encountered the bible and continue to. A comprehensive survey of multiple methods of exposure, including but not limited to; how children have learned the bible in education, children's bibles, bible camps, Sunday school instruction, and popular culture lessons like "Veggie Tales" would offer a broader understanding of the various ways children in America grow up exposed to the bible, why teaching the bible has remained a priority, and who adapts the bible. With this would come a better appreciation for the important social and cultural role the bible continues to play in America.

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