

the Peoples'
BIBLE

the Peoples'
BIBLE

*New Revised Standard Version
with the Apocrypha*

Editors

Curtiss P. DeYoung

Wil Gafney

Leticia Guardiola-Saenz

George "Tink" Tinker

Frank M. Yamada

Fortress Press
Minneapolis

New Revised Standard Version Bible Copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America

Up to five hundred (500) verses of The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) Bible text may be quoted or reprinted without the express written permission of the publisher, provided the verses quoted neither amount to a complete book of the Bible nor account for 50% or more of the written text of the total work in which they are quoted.

When the NRSV text is quoted, notice of copyright must appear on the title or copyright page of the work as follows:

The Scripture quotations contained herein are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., and are used by permission. All rights reserved.

When quotations from the NRSV text are used in non-saleable media, such as church bulletins, orders of service, posters, transparencies, or similar media, the initials (NRSV) may be used at the end of each quotation.

Quotations or reprints in excess of five hundred (500) verses (as well as other permission requests) must be approved in writing by the NRSV Permissions Office, The National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115-0050.

Contents

<i>To the Reader</i>	xii
<i>Introduction to the Peoples' Bible</i>	###
<i>How to Use the Peoples' Bible.</i>	###

Articles

<i>Culture and Identity</i>	###
<i>The Bible as a Text of Cultures</i>	###
<i>The Bible as a Text in Cultures</i>	
<i>Introduction</i>	###
<i>African American</i>	###
<i>Latina/o</i>	###
<i>Native American</i>	###
<i>Asian American</i>	###
<i>Euro-American</i>	###
<i>Jesus and Culture</i>	###
<i>The Bible and Empire</i>	###
<i>The Bible as Instrument of Reconciliation.</i>	###
<i>Views of God</i>	###
<i>Bible, Culture, and Gender</i>	###
<i>Responsible Christian Exegesis of Hebrew Scripture</i>	###

The Old Testament

Introduction to the Pentateuch	3
Genesis	8
Exodus	61
Leviticus	104
Numbers	135
Deuteronomy	177
Introduction to the Historical Books	216
Joshua	221
Judges	247
Ruth	274
1 Samuel	280
2 Samuel	313
1 Kings	341
2 Kings	372
1 Chronicles	402
2 Chronicles	430
Ezra	464
Nehemiah	475
Esther	490
Introduction to Wisdom and Poetry	500
Job	506
Psalms	542
Proverbs	637
Ecclesiastes	669
Song of Solomon	678

Introduction to the Prophets	686
Isaiah	692
Jeremiah	762
Lamentations	829
Ezekiel	839
Daniel	###
Hosea	###
Joel	###
Amos	###
Obadiah	###
Jonah	###
Micah	###
Nahum	###
Habakkuk	###
Zephaniah	###
Haggai	###
Zechariah	###
Malachi	###

The Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books

Tobit	###
Judith	###
Esther (Greek)	###
The Wisdom of Solomon	###
Sirach	###
Baruch	###
The Letter of Jeremiah	###
Azariah and the Three Jews	###
Susanna	###
Bel and the Dragon	###
1 Maccabees	###

2 Maccabees ###
 1 Esdras ###
 The Prayer of Manasseh ###
 Psalm 151 ###
 3 Maccabees ###
 2 Esdras ###
 4 Maccabees ###

The New Testament

Introduction to the Gospels and Acts ###
 Matthew ###
 Mark ###
 Luke ###
 John ###
 Acts ###

Introduction to Pauline Letters ###
 Romans ###
 1 Corinthians ###
 2 Corinthians ###
 Galatians ###
 Ephesians ###
 Philippians ###
 Colossians ###
 1 Thessalonians ###
 2 Thessalonians ###
 1 Timothy ###
 2 Timothy ###
 Titus ###
 Philemon ###

Introduction to the General Letters and Revelation ###
 Hebrews ###
 James ###
 1 Peter ###
 2 Peter ###
 1 John ###
 2 John ###
 3 John ###
 Jude ###
 Revelation ###

Additional Resources

Art Gallery ###
Bible Subject Guide ###
Maps ###
Bibliography ###
Credits ###

To the Reader

This preface is addressed to you by the Committee of translators, who wish to explain, as briefly as possible, the origin and character of our work. The publication of our revision is yet another step in the long, continual process of making the Bible available in the form of the English language that is most widely current in our day. To summarize in a single sentence: the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible is an authorized revision of the Revised Standard Version, published in 1952, which was a revision of the American Standard Version, published in 1901, which, in turn, embodied earlier revisions of the King James Version, published in 1611.

In the course of time, the King James Version came to be regarded as “the Authorized Version.” With good reason it has been termed “the noblest monument of English prose,” and it has entered, as no other book has, into the making of the personal character and the public institutions of the English-speaking peoples. We owe to it an incalculable debt.

Yet the King James Version has serious defects. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the development of biblical studies and the discovery of many biblical manuscripts more ancient than those on which the King James Version was based made it apparent that these defects were so many as to call for revision. The task was begun, by authority of the Church of England, in 1870. The (British) Revised Version of the Bible was published in 1881-1885; and the American Standard Version, its variant embodying the preferences of the American scholars associated with the work, was published, as was mentioned above, in 1901. In 1928 the copyright of the latter was acquired by the International Council of Religious Education and thus passed into the ownership of the Churches of the United States and Canada that were associated in this Council through their boards of education and publication.

The Council appointed a committee of scholars to have charge of the text of the American Standard Version and to undertake inquiry concerning the need for further revision. After studying the questions whether or not revision should be undertaken, and if so, what its nature and extent should be, in 1937 the Council authorized a revision. The scholars who served as members of the Committee worked in two sections, one dealing with the Old Testament and one with the New Testament. In 1946 the Revised Standard Version of the New Testament was published. The publication of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, containing the Old and New Testaments, took place on September 30, 1952. A translation of the *Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical* Books of the Old Testament followed in 1957. In 1977 this collection was issued in an expanded edition, containing three additional texts received by Eastern

Orthodox communions (3 and 4 Maccabees and Psalm 151). Thereafter the Revised Standard Version gained the distinction of being officially authorized for use by all major Christian churches: Protestant, Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox.

The Revised Standard Version Bible Committee is a continuing body, comprising about thirty members, both men and women. Ecumenical in representation, it includes scholars affiliated with various Protestant denominations, as well as several Roman Catholic members, an Eastern Orthodox member, and a Jewish member who serves in the Old Testament section. For a period of time the Committee included several members from Canada and from England.

Because no translation of the Bible is perfect or is acceptable to all groups of readers, and because discoveries of older manuscripts and further investigation of linguistic features of the text continue to become available, renderings of the Bible have proliferated. During the years following the publication of the Revised Standard Version, twenty-six other English translations and revisions of the Bible were produced by committees and by individual scholars--not to mention twenty-five other translations and revisions of the New Testament alone. One of the latter was the second edition of the RSV New Testament, issued in 1971, twenty-five years after its initial publication.

Following the publication of the RSV Old Testament in 1952, significant advances were made in the discovery and interpretation of documents in Semitic languages related to Hebrew. In addition to the information that had become available in the late 1940s from the Dead Sea texts of Isaiah and Habakkuk, subsequent acquisitions from the same area brought to light many other early copies of all the books of the Hebrew Scriptures (except Esther), though most of these copies are fragmentary. During the same period early Greek manuscript copies of books of the New Testament also became available.

In order to take these discoveries into account, along with recent studies of documents in Semitic languages related to Hebrew, in 1974 the Policies Committee of the Revised Standard Version, which is a standing committee of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., authorized the preparation of a revision of the entire RSV Bible.

For the Old Testament the Committee has made use of the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (1977; ed. sec. emendata, 1983). This is an edition of the Hebrew and Aramaic text as current early in the Christian era and fixed by Jewish scholars (the “Masoretes”) of the sixth to the ninth centuries. The vowel signs, which were added by the Masoretes, are accepted in the main, but where a more probable and convincing reading can be obtained by assuming different vowels, this has been done. No notes are given in such cases, because the vowel points are less ancient and reliable than the consonants. When an alternative reading given by the Masoretes is translated in a footnote, this is identified by the words “Another reading is.”

Departures from the consonantal text of the best manuscripts have been made only where it seems clear that errors in copying had been made before the text was standardized. Most of the corrections adopted are based on the ancient versions (translations into Greek, Aramaic, Syriac, and Latin), which were made prior to the time of the work of the Masoretes and which therefore may reflect earlier forms of the Hebrew text. In such instances a footnote specifies the version or versions from which the correction has been derived and also gives a translation of the Masoretic Text. Where it was deemed appropriate to do so, information is supplied in footnotes from subsidiary Jewish traditions concerning other textual readings (the *Tiqqune Sopherim*, “emendations of the scribes”). These are identified in the footnotes as “Ancient Heb tradition.”

Occasionally it is evident that the text has suffered in transmission and that none of the versions provides a satisfactory restoration. Here we can only follow the best judgment of competent scholars as to the most probable reconstruction of the original text. Such reconstructions are indicated in footnotes by the abbreviation Cn (“Correction”), and a translation of the Masoretic Text is added.

For the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books of the Old Testament the Committee has made use of a number of texts. For most of these books the basic Greek text from which the present translation was made is the edition of the Septuagint prepared by Alfred Rahlfs and published by the Württemberg Bible Society (Stuttgart, 1935). For several of the books the more recently published individual volumes of the Göttingen Septuagint project were utilized. For the book of Tobit it was decided to follow the form of the Greek text found in codex Sinaiticus (supported as it is by evidence from Qumran); where this text is defective, it was supplemented and corrected by other Greek manuscripts. For the three Additions to Daniel (namely, Susanna, the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Jews, and Bel and the Dragon) the Committee continued to use the Greek version attributed to Theodotion (the so-called “Theodotion-Daniel”). In translating Ecclesiasticus (Sirach), while constant reference was made to the Hebrew fragments of a large portion of this book (those discovered at Qumran and Masada as well as those recovered from the Cairo Geniza), the Committee generally followed the Greek text (including verse numbers) published by Joseph Ziegler in the Göttingen Septuagint (1965). But in many places the Committee has translated the Hebrew text when this provides a reading that is clearly superior to the Greek; the Syriac and Latin versions were also consulted throughout and occasionally adopted. The basic text adopted in rendering 2 Esdras is the Latin version given in *Biblia Sacra*, edited by Robert Weber (Stuttgart, 1971). This was supplemented by consulting the Latin text as edited by R. L. Bensly (1895) and by Bruno Violet (1910), as well as by taking into account the several Oriental versions of 2 Esdras, namely, the Syriac, Ethiopic, Arabic (two forms, referred to as Arabic 1 and Arabic 2), Armenian, and Georgian versions. Finally, since the Additions to the Book of Esther are disjointed

and quite unintelligible as they stand in most editions of the Apocrypha, we have provided them with their original context by translating the whole of the Greek version of Esther from Robert Hanhart’s Göttingen edition (1983).

For the New Testament the Committee has based its work on the most recent edition of *The Greek New Testament*, prepared by an interconfessional and international committee and published by the United Bible Societies (1966; 3rd ed. corrected, 1983; information concerning changes to be introduced into the critical apparatus of the forthcoming 4th edition was available to the Committee). As in that edition, double brackets are used to enclose a few passages that are generally regarded to be later additions to the text, but which we have retained because of their evident antiquity and their importance in the textual tradition. Only in very rare instances have we replaced the text or the punctuation of the Bible Societies’ edition by an alternative that seemed to us to be superior. Here and there in the footnotes the phrase, “Other ancient authorities read,” identifies alternative readings preserved by Greek manuscripts and early versions. In both Testaments, alternative renderings of the text are indicated by the word “Or.”

As for the style of English adopted for the present revision, among the mandates given to the Committee in 1980 by the Division of Education and Ministry of the National Council of Churches of Christ (which now holds the copyright of the RSV Bible) was the directive to continue in the tradition of the King James Bible, but to introduce such changes as are warranted on the basis of accuracy, clarity, euphony, and current English usage. Within the constraints set by the original texts and by the mandates of the Division, the Committee has followed the maxim, “As literal as possible, as free as necessary.” As a consequence, the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) remains essentially a literal translation. Paraphrastic renderings have been adopted only sparingly, and then chiefly to compensate for a deficiency in the English language—the lack of a common gender third person singular pronoun.

During the almost half a century since the publication of the RSV, many in the churches have become sensitive to the danger of linguistic sexism arising from the inherent bias of the English language towards the masculine gender, a bias that in the case of the Bible has often restricted or obscured the meaning of the original text. The mandates from the Division specified that, in references to men and women, masculine-oriented language should be eliminated as far as this can be done without altering passages that reflect the historical situation of ancient patriarchal culture. As can be appreciated, more than once the Committee found that the several mandates stood in tension and even in conflict. The various concerns had to be balanced case by case in order to provide a faithful and acceptable rendering without using contrived English. Only very occasionally has the pronoun “he” or “him” been retained in passages where the reference may have been to a woman as well as to a man; for example, in several legal texts in

Leviticus and Deuteronomy. In such instances of formal, legal language, the options of either putting the passage in the plural or of introducing additional nouns to avoid masculine pronouns in English seemed to the Committee to obscure the historic structure and literary character of the original. In the vast majority of cases, however, inclusiveness has been attained by simple rephrasing or by introducing plural forms when this does not distort the meaning of the passage. Of course, in narrative and in parable no attempt was made to generalize the sex of individual persons.

Another aspect of style will be detected by readers who compare the more stately English rendering of the Old Testament with the less formal rendering adopted for the New Testament. For example, the traditional distinction between *shall* and *will* in English has been retained in the Old Testament as appropriate in rendering a document that embodies what may be termed the classic form of Hebrew, while in the New Testament the abandonment of such distinctions in the usage of the future tense in English reflects the more colloquial nature of the koine Greek used by most New Testament authors except when they are quoting the Old Testament.

Careful readers will notice that here and there in the Old Testament the word LORD (or in certain cases GOD) is printed in capital letters. This represents the traditional manner in English versions of rendering the Divine Name, the “Tetragrammaton” (see the notes on Exodus 3.14, 15), following the precedent of the ancient Greek and Latin translators and the long established practice in the reading of the Hebrew Scriptures in the synagogue. While it is almost if not quite certain that the Name was originally pronounced “Yahweh,” this pronunciation was not indicated when the Masoretes added vowel sounds to the consonantal Hebrew text. To the four consonants YHWH of the Name, which had come to be regarded as too sacred to be pronounced, they attached vowel signs indicating that in its place should be read the Hebrew word *Adonai* meaning “Lord” (or *Elohim* meaning “God”). Ancient Greek translators employed the word *Kyrios* (“Lord”) for the Name. The Vulgate likewise used the Latin word *Dominus* (“Lord”). The form “Jehovah” is of late medieval origin; it is a combination of the consonants of the Divine Name and the vowels attached to it by the Masoretes but belonging to an entirely different word. Although the American Standard Version (1901) had used “Jehovah” to render the Tetragrammaton (the sound of Y being represented by J and the sound of W by V, as in Latin), for two reasons the Committees that produced the RSV and the NRSV returned to the more familiar usage of the King James Version. (1) The word “Jehovah” does not accurately represent any form of the Name ever used in Hebrew. (2) The use of any proper name for the one and only God, as though there were other gods from whom the true God had to be distinguished, began to be discontinued in Judaism before the Christian era and is inappropriate for the universal faith of the Christian Church.

It will be seen that in the Psalms and in other prayers addressed to God the archaic second person

singular pronouns (*thee, thou, thine*) and verb forms (*art, hast, hadst*) are no longer used. Although some readers may regret this change, it should be pointed out that in the original languages neither the Old Testament nor the New makes any linguistic distinction between addressing a human being and addressing the Deity. Furthermore, in the tradition of the King James Version one will not expect to find the use of capital letters for pronouns that refer to the Deity--such capitalization is an unnecessary innovation that has only recently been introduced into a few English translations of the Bible. Finally, we have left to the discretion of the licensed publishers such matters as section headings, cross-references, and clues to the pronunciation of proper names.

This new version seeks to preserve all that is best in the English Bible as it has been known and used through the years. It is intended for use in public reading and congregational worship, as well as in private study, instruction, and meditation. We have resisted the temptation to introduce terms and phrases that merely reflect current moods, and have tried to put the message of the Scriptures in simple, enduring words and expressions that are worthy to stand in the great tradition of the King James Bible and its predecessors.

In traditional Judaism and Christianity, the Bible has been more than a historical document to be preserved or a classic of literature to be cherished and admired; it is recognized as the unique record of God’s dealings with people over the ages. The Old Testament sets forth the call of a special people to enter into covenant relation with the God of justice and steadfast love and to bring God’s law to the nations. The New Testament records the life and work of Jesus Christ, the one in whom “the Word became flesh,” as well as describes the rise and spread of the early Christian Church. The Bible carries its full message, not to those who regard it simply as a noble literary heritage of the past or who wish to use it to enhance political purposes and advance otherwise desirable goals, but to all persons and communities who read it so that they may discern and understand what God is saying to them. That message must not be disguised in phrases that are no longer clear, or hidden under words that have changed or lost their meaning; it must be presented in language that is direct and plain and meaningful to people today. It is the hope and prayer of the translators that this version of the Bible may continue to hold a large place in congregational life and to speak to all readers, young and old alike, helping them to understand and believe and respond to its message.

For the Committee,
BRUCE M. METZGER

Introduction

Why *The Peoples' Bible*?

The United States is rapidly becoming a nation of widely different cultures with a multiplicity of worldviews. Similar diversification is evident around the globe, particularly in major cities. By the midpoint of the twenty-first century, whites of European descent are expected to constitute less than 50 percent of the total U.S. population—in a nation with a plurality of races, ethnicities, and cultures.

It is easy for the members of any dominant majority group to imagine themselves at the center of things and others as peripheral. Given a long history in which European conquest and colonialism were intertwined with Christian missionary efforts among other lands and peoples, including North America, and given the particular history of slavery, conquest, and wave after wave of immigration that has produced the present diversity in the United States, it has long been possible for white Christians of European descent to imagine that the Bible was “theirs” more than it belonged to others. They could read themselves into the biblical story, spontaneously identifying themselves with the people of God. But the rich diversity of communities of faith has now made impossible the assumption that any one people “owns” the Bible. We are pleased to present *The Peoples' Bible*, a study Bible that speaks to this new reality.

Multicultural perspectives and culture-critical methods are squarely at home in contemporary biblical scholarship. But until now, teachers and religious leaders who have wanted to explore these issues with their students and congregations have necessarily relied on “extra” resources—texts or commentaries alongside a study Bible, for example. The inevitable impression is that the questions raised in multicultural and culture-critical scholarship are somehow extraneous questions, brought by marginalized “others” to a Bible that remains transcendent, universally authoritative, and ethnically neutral.

The Peoples' Bible shatters the misperception that the Bible is somehow color- and culture-blind. Through informative and stimulating articles and introductions by renowned biblical scholars from richly diverse backgrounds, thought-provoking text-boxes, and a beautiful four-color gallery that highlights the myriad ways in which our cultural backgrounds determine our perceptions, *The Peoples' Bible* opens our eyes to the complex interactions of

peoples, at cultural crossroads through centuries of history, that gave rise to our Bible. This resource draws us into a new encounter with Scripture as the product of many cultures, at home in many cultures, and shows that the Bible really is a peoples' Bible.

The Peoples' Bible seeks to reach a mass audience of people who have often felt left out and voiceless in their encounter with other study Bibles. These include people at the grassroots as well as people in the academy. In order to give voice to those who have been silenced by dominant narratives in Western culture, *The Peoples' Bible* offers some of the best insights of scholars from a wide array of cultures and ethnicities, writing in accessible language. The editorial team and writers are comprised of scholars from communities traditionally underrepresented in mainstream biblical scholarship in the United States, whose perspectives have consequently been underrepresented in study Bibles as well: African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinas/os, and Native Americans. Some white interpreters who have a track record offering perspectives rarely heard have also contributed to this study Bible, and the editors have sought a balance of men and women writers as well.

The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Bible has been selected by the editors and the publisher as the translation for *The Peoples' Bible*. This choice was made because of the NRSV's wide acceptance for accuracy in translation from the original languages of the Bible and for its effort to use gender-inclusive language to communicate in a modern idiom.

The Perspective of The Peoples' Bible

The Peoples' Bible envisions the Bible as a crossroads: a place of both collision and of convergence. On the journey of biblical interpretation there are collisions between one or another culture and Scripture, between cultures themselves, between dominant and marginal perspectives, and across imbalances of power in society. These realities are reflected here as scholars often present multiple perspectives on a biblical text. Yet the Bible is also a place of convergence where people meet at the crossroads, finding points of common ground and shared interest.

The Peoples' Bible gives the Bible back to the reader and invites a peoples' interpretation of Scripture through each reader's own unique social lens. Readers will resonate with voices speaking from life settings similar to their own. Biblical narratives will engage readers in ways that prompt reflection on their own life journeys. How we read the Bible, like our understanding of life itself, is affected by many dimensions, including our age, gender, race, culture, socioeconomic class, religion, ability, sexual preference, and nation of origin. *The Peoples' Bible* taps into this reservoir of feeling and insight to inform the reader's understanding

of these ancient texts. Studying the Bible with only one's own set of lived experiences or educational viewpoints limits the possibilities for gaining meaning from biblical texts. This study Bible brings together the interpretive lenses of scholars from many peoples, whose many perspectives produce a mosaic of wisdom and affirmation. The reader's own view is enriched by the vast cultural diversity of scholarly knowledge offered in *The Peoples' Bible*.

Not only does *The Peoples' Bible* offer the reader the space to explore Scripture from multiple social locations, it also invites a fresh discussion of the critical issues facing citizens of the twenty-first century. Many people have rejected biblical faith, believing that it has no power to address contemporary racism and injustice. The writers in this study Bible engage with passion the Bible's potential for social justice and liberation, originally meant for times long ago yet still proclaiming a timely word today. They also describe how the biblical authors struggled with the limitations of their own settings as they tried to interpret God's will and work. The essays and introductions in *The Peoples' Bible* speak with a refreshing candor about how, throughout history, the Bible has been manipulated and misused to support colonization, slavery, genocide, ethnic cleansing, sexism, and a host of other forms of oppression. The residue of oppression still marks much current biblical interpretation and theological musing. The publication of *The Peoples' Bible* marks a new era of inclusion and freedom in which all peoples and all voices are welcome to the table of biblical interpretation—a process that we hope will serve as a catalyst for a more just society and a reconciled human family.

How *The Peoples' Bible* is Different

In order to appreciate the wealth of meaning in Scripture, it is often necessary to recognize and set aside, at least momentarily, our own culture-bound assumptions so that we can understand the perspectives of other people. This study Bible embraces multiple cultural approaches that reflect the current cultural mosaic in the United States. It relies on established historical-critical, literary-critical, and social-scientific methods, but also on the perspectives of postcolonial, feminist, and Afrocentric criticism, to name a few. *The Peoples' Bible* highlights interpretations that emerge from diverse and particular contexts.

We are committed to the possibility that all may learn to read the Bible as though we have never read it before, from social locations where we have never stood before. For example, men may learn to read Scripture through the eyes of women; those accustomed to reading the Bible from the perspective of the dominant culture may read through the eyes of those at the margins; and so on. Precisely because biblical interpretation differs from one cultural perspective to the next, and from one social location to the next, any of us who wish to gain a deeper understanding of the Bible must involve ourselves in what may well feel like a risky

endeavor: to listen to the Bible by listening to one another. It is toward that end that we are pleased to offer *The Peoples' Bible*.

The editors

George “Tink” Tinker: I am an enrolled member of the Osage (*Wazhazhe*) Nation and professor of American Indian Cultures and Religious Traditions at Iliff School of Theology. I have taught here for nearly twenty years, bringing an Indian perspective to a predominantly Euro-American school. As an American Indian academic originally trained in biblical studies (Ph.D., Graduate Theological Union), I am committed to a scholarly endeavor that takes seriously both the liberation of Indian peoples from their historic oppression as colonized communities and the liberation of white Americans, the historic colonizers and oppressors of Indian peoples.

Wil Gafney: I teach the “scriptures of Israel”—by which I mean a wealth of literature including the Hebrew Bible (the scriptures of contemporary Judaism); the ancient Jewish writings treasured by many Christians as the Apocrypha or Deutero-canonical biblical writings; the Greek translation of Jewish scriptures made in North Africa, the Septuagint; the Samaritan Pentateuch; and the writings represented in the Dead Sea Scrolls. As a black feminist with post-colonial commitments to and beyond the African Diaspora, my interest in these overlapping bodies of literature and their languages leads me to explore how translations, theories, and practices either open up or cover up biblical texts. I am an Episcopal priest who is a member of two congregations, the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas and the Dorshei Derekh Reconstructionist (Jewish) Minyan, both in Philadelphia.

Frank M. Yamada: I am Sansei, third-generation Japanese American, who grew up on the West Coast of California, which locates me one generation after the internment of more than 200,000 Japanese and Japanese Americans during World War II. I grew up in a nominally Buddhist home, before converting to Christianity when I was in college. I received my training as a scholar at a Protestant seminary, where historical criticism was the dominant form of investigation. Ironically, this is also where I began to develop interest in the destabilizing practice of postmodern biblical interpretation. All of these forces of cultural conflict and fusion are reflected in my identity—a hybrid construction that seeks to refuse oversimplified characterizations of Asia or America in my Asian American body. Because of my identity, I am often drawn to conflicts and contradictions in the biblical text, seeing them not as a problem to be fixed but as difficult and sometimes painful openings into another people's understanding of the world and God.

Leticia Guardiola-Sáenz: Just as the Bible has shaped the way I read and understand my

life, my life has shaped the way I read and understand the Bible. Through my experiences as a Latina woman of Mexican heritage, born and bred in the bicultural borderlands between Mexico and the United States, I have come to appreciate and read the Bible as a hybrid text where many borders, voices, and meanings converge. So, as a reader, believer, and lecturer of the Christian Scripture, I find myself constantly negotiating and contesting the meanings and stories of the Bible as I seek to responsibly interpret and appropriate its message in a culture and time that is thousands of years and miles away from its original context. Ultimately, my goal as an informed reader of the Bible is to empower minority readers as agents of historical change in the ongoing process of decolonization and liberation, to dismantle oppressive interpretations and to offer inclusive and transformative readings that can bring about justice and liberation for all of God's creation.

Curtiss Paul DeYoung: I am a white male of Dutch and English ancestry who is a citizen of the United States, ordained in the Church of God (Anderson, Ind.), and professor of Reconciliation Studies at Bethel University. My biblical interpretation has been transformed from a de facto Eurocentric bias to a more multicultural perspective through theological training at Howard University School of Divinity and years of reading biblical scholars and theologians from Native American, Asian, Latin American, African, Arab, and African American perspectives. My racial self-understanding was interrupted at age fifty with the genealogical discovery of a black ancestor—one drop of African blood. My cultural self-understanding has been affected by socialization in African American communities and by the consciousness raised by multiple visits to South Africa and Palestine/Israel. As a person with race, class, and male privileges in the United States, I have committed my life to social justice and reconciliation. This collision of birthright privilege and experiential transformation informs my interpretation of the Bible.

How to Use The Peoples' Bible

This Bible was developed to help students and readers understand how people from different cultures, from different parts of the world, read and understand the Bible. No single, exclusive way to approach the Bible is proposed here, because there are so many possible ways to interpret its writings. Rather, *The Peoples' Bible* gathers the voices of different interpreters from different social locations as a way of encouraging students and readers to recognize that all Bible interpreters are people whose cultures of origin and social locations influence their scholarship. Similarly, *The Peoples' Bible* encourages students and readers to reflect on how their cultures and social locations continue to shape them as Bible readers and interpreters.

In general, *The Peoples' Bible* is intended to help each reader find his or her own voice in and through the text, and also to hear the voices of others. This is done best when the Bible is read and studied in the midst of socially diverse groups and communities, where a multiplicity of voices can come alive. Many resources in this study Bible encourage this process.

The editors have invited a wide range of scholars to contribute overviews of the major sections of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Apocrypha, and the Second (traditionally, New Testament), and to introduce each book of the Bible. The reader is encouraged to read the relevant section overview and book introduction prior to studying a certain text or an entire book. This helps to set the stage for informed and inclusive interpretation. Text boxes have been placed throughout the books of the bible to draw the reader's attention to particular scriptural passages that offer examples of how culture and interpretation intersect. These can be occasions for individual reflection—*How does this voice resemble my own? How is it different?*—and for group discussion as well: *How have the historical experiences of different peoples shaped the ways we hear the Bible? How do they challenge assumptions we have taken for granted? Does our encounter with the Bible help us recognize the ways we establish our own identities at cultural crossroads today, whether through connection with others or through contrast and conflict?*

A number of articles raise issues or suggest strategies for interpretation that readers may apply to the larger narrative of the Bible, not just to particular texts, books, or sections. Several essays delve deeply into the role of culture in the biblical narratives and how culture affects our present-day view of the Bible. These essays place the reader at a crossroads where the perspectives of Native American, Latina/o, Asian American, and African American cultures meet. They alert us to the nuances of particularity and to the possibilities for conflict and collision, as well as for convergence and community, in the process of interpretation. The impact of culture is also noted in the diversity of views of the biblical God, and in the ways a culturally rooted Jesus of Nazareth was transformed over history to serve processes of cultural domination. Other essays explore the ways traditional forms of interpretation have sanctified exclusivist worldviews; the role played by one or another empire in shaping biblical history and subsequent interpretation; and the tensions present when Christians set about to interpret the Hebrew Scriptures. An article discussing the Bible as an instrument of reconciliation moves from the realm of theory to that of action and activism.

Visual resources have been selected to enhance the reader's experience. Readers will find the maps helpful for relating the biblical stories to actual landscapes. A color art gallery provides angles of vision into the biblical narratives that are sometimes inaccessible through words alone.

Using *The Peoples' Bible* in the Classroom

Professors of biblical studies or religion who wish to bring multicultural perspectives and the diversity of interpretive options into the classroom will find *The Peoples' Bible* a welcome resource.

- Instructors who have shaped their courses around the histories that produced the biblical writings will want to rely on the section and book introductions, which emphasize the social and historical dynamics behind the text and on articles discussing the Bible as a text of culture, the role of empires, and the biblical characterizations of God.
- Instructors wishing to emphasize the literary character of the biblical writings will also want to use the section and book introductions and the text boxes to direct their students' attention to particular aspects of the text that have caught the ear, and eye, of one or another community.
- Those wishing to teach methods of biblical interpretation may note that *The Peoples' Bible* is a study Bible with a difference. By design, the text of the Bible printed here does not include the headings, marginal notes, or running commentary that in other study Bibles can give the impression that a particular passage has a single, authoritative

meaning. Here the section and book introductions are designed to invite students into diverse encounters with the biblical text. Students should think of the writer of each introduction, not as making authoritative pronouncements on the meaning of a text, but as offering to accompany the reader with an informed, but nevertheless personally inflected perspective.

- Teachers who intend to use a survey or introductory textbook in their course will see that the articles in *The Peoples' Bible* recognize the importance of historical- and literary-critical methods. Teachers who intend to assign only this New Revised Standard Version or another version of the Bible for their courses will appreciate the succinct attention these articles give to the importance of history, identity, and culture in the formation of the biblical writings and in their subsequent interpretation.

Instructors may wish to use specific classroom techniques with *The Peoples' Bible*. For example:

- An instructor may wish to draw attention to the distinctiveness of one or another writer's perspective, asking students: *How does the writer's cultural background, the experience of his or her people, shape his or her reading of the Bible? And how does your reading reflect your sense of social and cultural identity?*
- The text boxes may be used as occasions for classroom conversation: *How does the perspective of the writer draw us into the biblical text? How does the writer open up a new insight into the text? How might the experience of other peoples provide different insights?*
- The images in the art gallery might be used to focus attention in a more intuitive, nonverbal way. *Which images are more familiar? Which less? Which images draw you into a connection with another culture? Which draw you into a different experience of the Bible?*
- The introductory articles might be relied upon to focus students' reading and discussion of the biblical materials. For one or another biblical book, students might be asked: *How are different understandings of God evident in the text? How have the dynamics of the rise and fall of empires shaped the text? Or: Have Christians read this text differently from Jews or others? How might any of us come to read the text differently today?*
- Instructors who wish to incorporate the Bible as a resource in courses on social justice, peace or reconciliation studies, or similar courses in a humanities curriculum might well do something similar. They might rely on the articles on the Bible in cultures and the Bible as an instrument of reconciliation and ask: *How has this text been taken up and wielded as an instrument of harm in conflicts between ethnic groups, between nations, or between social classes? How has the text served as a resource for healing and reconciliation? How might it serve as such today?*

Using The Peoples' Bible in Congregational Settings

Congregational leaders and teachers will find *The Peoples' Bible* a valuable resource for worship, education, and mission. Preachers may find that regular use of *The Peoples' Bible* alerts them to the different ways the Bible—and things said about it from the pulpit—may strike the ears of persons from different backgrounds and social locations. Congregations may wish to adopt *The Peoples' Bible* as their pew bible as a sign of welcome and an occasion for opening their shared life to others at the margins.

Bible teachers in the congregation, working with youth and adults alike, may appreciate the way *The Peoples' Bible* highlights the perspective of the reader and stimulates exploration and question, rather than providing set answers.

Finally, those who seek to call their congregations outward into greater engagement with a divided and troubled world may find in *The Peoples' Bible* a useful spur to mission. Here is a Bible that acknowledges the diversity of ways, hurtful and healing alike, in which different groups and peoples have experienced sacred Scripture. Here is a Bible that challenges the assumption that any one group may possess Scripture as its own, or control its interpretation. Here is a Bible that may invite readers more deeply into an encounter with a God who wishes to be recognized as the creator of *all* the peoples of the earth and to be known as those peoples learn to live with one another in ever greater harmony.



Articles

