Praise for *Does Scripture Speak for Itself?*

From common sense realism in the nineteenth century to the Museum of the Bible, American Protestants, and white evangelicals in particular, have approached the Bible with a kind of willful naïveté, confident that they understand its meaning. In their “close reading” of the Museum of the Bible, Jill Hicks-Keeton and Cavan Concannon demonstrate that any approach to the Bible is complicated by allegiances, prejudices, economics, privilege, and cultural location. This is a very worthy and thought-provoking book.

– Randall Balmer, Dartmouth College

*Does Scripture Speak for Itself?* uses one book and one museum to unpack with incisive reflection the manifold ways that white evangelicalism has leveraged a particular rendering of biblical Christianity for political gain. Combining business history with exegesis, cultural analysis with media studies, ethnography with sharp scrutiny of power, Jill Hicks-Keeton and Cavan Concannon’s outstanding book is a must-read for anyone trying to grasp the institutional juggernaut that is the modern religious right.

– Darren Dochuk, University of Notre Dame, author of *Anointed With Oil: How Christianity and Crude Made Modern America*

This book shows how contemporary white Americans manufacture the Bible they need to achieve the political future they want. In this incisive work, two brilliant scholars offer a coruscating view of how scripture operates as an ideological weapon. Required reading for students of religion, race, and politics in the U.S.

– Kathryn Lofton, Yale University

A compelling read and fascinating tour. As our author-guides walk us through the exhibits and back rooms of the Museum of the Bible, we come to see it as a kind of bible-making machine, built to produce and promote a form of biblicism that in turn reproduces and further promotes white Christian privilege. Along the way, we gain a deeper and richer understanding of the rise of American evangelicalism and the religious right.

– Timothy Beal, Case Western Reserve University, author of *When Time Is Short: Finding Our Way in the Anthropocene*
This fascinating book represents the pivot in orientation toward critical transdisciplinarity among academic scholars of the Bible that I have long called for. I especially appreciate the authors’ readings of “the Bible” and other cultural and political “scriptures,” which will make readers aware of the complex inheritance of and participation – with unintentional or willful ignorance – in the construction and ongoing advancement of white supremacy. With its honest questioning, analysis, and close reading, the book models the possibility of a refocused and reoriented field.

– Vincent Wimbush, Institute for Signifying Scriptures

Hicks-Keeton and Concannon provide an incomparable tour of the Museum of the Bible, placing it within the broader context of white evangelicalism and illuminating the theological and ideological agendas animating its work. Engaging and incisive, this brilliant book is a must-read for anyone who wants to understand the battle for the Bible in the American public square.

– Mark Chancey, Southern Methodist University

A keen, insightful reading of the white evangelical Bible that the Museum of the Bible hallows, magnifies, and markets with such zeal in the nation’s capital. A learned excursion through the museum’s acutely politicized exhibitions that is a tour de force both for biblical studies and American religious history.

– Leigh Eric Schmidt, Washington University in St. Louis

Does Scripture Speak for Itself leaves no doubt that the Museum of the Bible speaks loudly for white evangelicals. Hicks-Keeton and Concannon offer an eye-opening tour of the worlds within and around this new institution, shining a critical light on the values that inform its exhibits and the funders that underwrite its mission. Anyone interested in the still-bustling intersection of Christianity and American public life will find this an absorbing read.

– Heath Carter, Princeton Theological Seminary
DOES SCRIPTURE SPEAK FOR ITSELF?

Is the Bible the unembellished Word of God or the product of human agency? There are different answers to this question. And they lie at the heart of this book’s powerful exploration of the fraught ways in which money, race, and power shape the story of Christianity in American public life.

The authors’ subject is the Museum of the Bible in Washington DC, arguably the latest example in a long line of white evangelical institutions aiming to amplify and promote a religious, political, and moral agenda of their own. In their careful and compelling investigation, Jill Hicks-Keeton and Cavan Concannon disclose the ways in which the museum’s exhibits reinforce a particularized and partial interpretation of the Bible’s meaning.

Bringing to light the museum’s implicit messaging about scriptural provenance and audience, the authors reveal how the MOTB produces a version of the Bible that in essence authorizes a certain sort of white evangelical privilege, promotes a view of history aligned with that same evangelical aspiration, and above all protects a cohort of white evangelicals from critique. They show too how the museum collapses vital conceptual distinctions between its own conservative vision of the Bible and “The Bible” as a cultural icon. This revelatory volume above all confirms that scripture – for all the claims made for it that it speaks only divine truth – can in the end never be separated from human politics.

Jill Hicks-Keeton is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Oklahoma. She is the author of Arguing with Aseneth: Gentile Access to Israel’s Living God in Jewish Antiquity (Oxford University Press, 2018), for which she was awarded the Manfred Lautenschlaeger Award for Theological Promise.

Cavan Concannon is Associate Professor of Religion at the University of Southern California. He is the author of Profaning Paul (University of Chicago Press, 2021), Assembling Early Christianity: Trade Networks and the Letters of Dionysios of Corinth (Cambridge University Press, 2017), and “When You Were Gentiles”: Specters of Ethnicity in Roman Corinth and Paul’s Corinthian Correspondence (Yale University Press, 2014).
Does Scripture Speak for Itself?

The Museum of the Bible and the Politics of Interpretation

Jill Hicks-Keeton
Cavan Concannon
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