

Banishing the Bible

A headline in [The Washington Post](#) the other day caught my attention by proclaiming “Newspapers were once full of Bible quotes.”

The story explained how a [George Mason University professor](#) named Lincoln Mullen has recently been going through American newspapers from the 19th and early 20th centuries and searching them for biblical quotations or references:

“Bible verses were once everywhere in newspapers. Nineteenth-century periodicals printed Sunday school lessons, ran Bible clubs for readers and circulated sermons. Editorials alluded to well-known scriptural references, and verses even turned up again and again as the punch lines of jokes.”



But while these biblical references were once a part of culture common enough for American newspapers to spin jokes off of, the same is not likely to be said today. Like other cultural themes such as those found in Shakespeare, knowledge of the Bible seems to be on the wane, evidenced further by the Bible’s debut on the [American Library Association’s list](#) of most banned books earlier this year.

But so what, right? Doesn’t our abandonment of cultural references such as the Bible demonstrate our liberated and enlightened mindset? Does it not open us up for greater understanding and relationship to the world in which we live?

Philosopher and professor Allan Bloom didn’t think so. Nearly 30 years ago [he noted](#) that the disappearance of the Bible as a common cultural thread would diminish wisdom, order, and understanding of secular knowledge in the next generation:

“In the United States, practically speaking, the Bible was

the only common culture, one that united simple and sophisticated, rich and poor, young and old, and – as the very model for a vision of the order of the whole of things, as well as the key to the rest of Western art, the greatest works of which were in one way or another responsive to the Bible – provided access to the seriousness of books. With its gradual and inevitable disappearance, the very idea of such a total book and the possibility and necessity of world-explanation is disappearing. And fathers and mothers have lost the idea that the highest aspiration they might have for their children is for them to be wise – as priests, prophets or philosophers are wise. Specialized competence and success are all that they can imagine. Contrary to what is commonly thought, without the book even the idea of the order of the whole is lost.”

In recent years, we've shied away from the Bible – and other touchstones like it – because it fails to fit into our ideological framework. But in our haste to broaden our horizons and viewpoints, have we destroyed one of our common cultural threads? Can the Bible still unify and freely permeate in a progressive, ideologically diverse nation?