

# The Reactor

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## Free speech, the Bible and the bald

The First Amendment was alive and well in last week's Tribune. John Hoffman, conservative Republican, Bill Crist, whom I would classify as liberal to radical, Ron Root, who I think of as somewhat reactionary, and Mark Reynolds, who interprets the Bible, were all represented and rooting for the causes each one believes in with a passion. I have some disagreement with each, but I also appreciate what each had to say.

Some fellow Democrats criticize voting for Republicans like John Hoffman in local non-partisan offices. "It only encourages them." But I feel we need all the intelligence and all the diligence we can get, from whatever source derived.

I find it fascinating Mark Reynolds can be so sure he knows

what the Bible means. Here is a book written by hundreds of different people, copied laboriously by hand over and over during hundreds of years, translated and re-translated, published in version after version, each one different.

Meanings are argued endlessly by scholars, yet folks quote it as if it was written with the precision of American laws, and as if each word means precisely what each reader thinks it means. How can Mark, or anyone, know they get out of the book what was originally put in? Selective interpretation works wonders, but walk on eggs until you understand better what those ancient writers really meant.

Mr. Reynolds perceives the evils of racial disharmony, so he chooses

to interpret the Bible as not racist. Others with equal authority use the Bible to favor racism. Who is to say which interpretation is correct? Since the Bible was written by many different men over several centuries it's reasonable they would contradict each other, or themselves, from time to time. Which verse do you prefer?

I write in English in the late twentieth century. My readers read English in the late twentieth century. I've discovered it's amazingly easy for two people to read entirely different meanings into what I write. How can we be really certain what a writer 2,500 years ago meant? He wrote in Hebrew or Aramaic or Greek. His words were subject to distortion in the course of repetitious copying, or by translation piled on translation, or when words changed meanings? The writers of the Bible had no modern insights into the construction of the Solar System, the Milky Way Galaxy, the Universe, atomic structure, radiation, gravity, or the age of the earth. We can assume they were just as ignorant of human psychology and sexuality. For that matter, we can also be certain they knew things we have lost sight of. We are also ignorant, but on different subjects. What would the ancient writers have thought about homosexuality if they knew then what we know now?

The answer is: we don't know. We never will. We use the Bible to reinforce our own feelings. We use the Bible like a mirror. If we are racist, we see reasons for racism. If we are homophobic, we see reasons for homophobia. If we dislike bald men, we can find verses to justify criticizing those who find themselves tonsorially challenged.