

Steve Green's museum of the Bible and/or his interpretation of it

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Be sure to read [Michelle Boorstein's great WaPo magazine piece](#) on the Bible museum being built in D.C. by Hobby Lobby president Steve Green. Boorstein focuses on the major question here: will this museum, set to open in 2017, primarily reflect Green the major collector of Bibles and biblical artifacts? Or Green the conservative evangelical political activist, poster child of evangelical opposition to the contraception mandate?

As Boorstein details, it could be either or both: the plans certainly reflect Green's views in places, but they also involve some people with very different ones.

The article also points less directly to a more general, more familiar tension: between the older evangelical rhetoric of Christian American origins and more recent emphasis on religious freedom. Here's a striking quote from Green, on the subject of the museum's proximity to major federal government buildings:

I think seeing the biblical foundations of our nation — for our legislators to see that, that a lot of that was biblically based, that we have religious freedoms today, which are a biblical concept, it can't hurt being there.

Religious freedom as a biblical concept—that's something you're liable to hear about these days. Of course, to say that religious freedom is a biblical concept is not to demonstrate that its origins as a cultural and political principle are *primarily* biblical.

Green, to be clear, doesn't quite assert the latter here. But it's clear what rhetorical work the line is doing: by connecting this "biblical foundations of our nation" argument with the requisite religious freedom concept-drop, a circle looks that much squarer. If religious freedom comes from *the Bible*, Green and others can embrace simultaneously their longstanding discomfort with official American secularism and their recent appeals to a freedom that hinges on this very secularism.

And now there will be a Bible museum just off the Mall, a museum where it appears Green's claim that the Bible is fundamental to national origins will live alongside

other angles on the book. It's not clear yet how peaceful or equitable this coexistence will be. Maybe conservative evangelical views will be presented as normative, maybe not; maybe somewhere in between, a sort of first-among-equals thing. The museum project looks as complicated and fraught as, well, evangelical rhetoric around religious freedom and America.

Yet I deeply appreciate something that comes through in Boorstein's article: Green really, really loves the Bible. Not just as a tool for x or y, but for its own sake.

So do I, and I can't wait to visit this museum when it opens. It'll be pretty different from the infamous Creation Museum, a place I have no interest in visiting. Whatever else Green's museum does, it will house a great collection of Bible-related materials—and it promises to spur interest in the Bible itself, not just what people already think they know about it.

Perhaps Green quietly hopes that if people learn to know and love the Bible as much as he does, they'll come to interpret it his way, too. Still, someone who loves the Bible deeply is partnering with people who study it critically to create something that will draw people into it in compelling ways. That all sounds to me like a mostly positive thing for American Christianity.