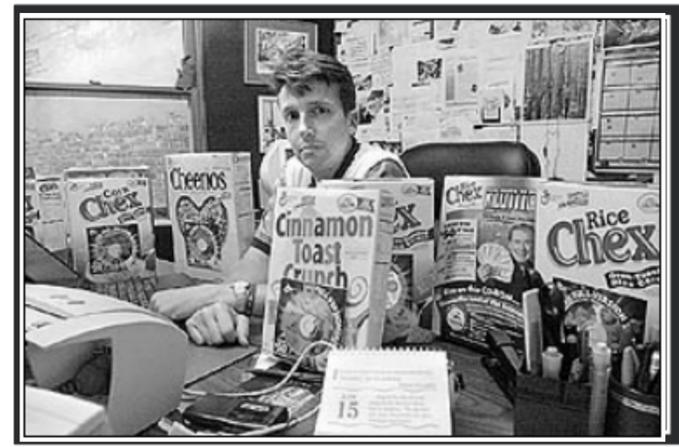


by Lynn Vincent
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Nixing Scripture

General Mills and Disney snub Christians, while the national media savage a Christian businessman



In America, even lots of atheists own Bibles. In fact, 92 percent of American households own at least one copy of God's Word, according to studies by Barna Research. Still, General Mills late last month deemed it necessary to apologize to all Americans for attaching a free software copy of the New International Version of the Bible to more than 12 million boxes of its trademark breakfast cereals (WORLD, Aug. 5).

Some pro-family groups see the food giant's national mea culpa as another example of family values turned upside-down. Tim Dailey, a cultural analyst with the Family Research Council, called General Mills' apology "mind-boggling" in light of a July announcement by four major national health associations that media violence, including PC- and video-games, is linked to increasing violence among children.

"On the one hand, there is a proliferation of software that's promoting violence and bloodshed," said Mr. Dailey. "On the other hand, we have here a software program that is nonviolent and promotes good values. Yet somehow it is the Bible that is considered offensive. It is disappointing that General Mills feels including the Bible on their CD is somehow undesirable."

General Mills' shying away from Scripture comes as other major U.S. corporations are rushing into the sanctuary of political correctness. On May 8, Procter & Gamble announced it would become the first major sponsor of Dr. Laura Schlessinger's upcoming fall television show. But a week later, the firm caved in to gay-activist pressure and, due to Dr. Laura's vocal opposition to homosexual behavior, yanked its sponsorship. In June, DaimlerChrysler Corp.,

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Ford Motor Co., and General Motors Corp. agreed to extend company benefits to "domestic partners" of their homosexual employees. The "Big Three" automakers joined companies like Microsoft, IBM, and Disney that already offer such benefits.

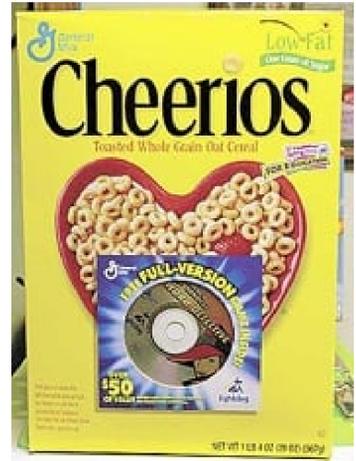
Indeed, in the case of the cereal CDs, Disney beat General Mills to the anti-Christian punch. Prior to the food-maker's learning about the NIV on its discs, Disney had demanded that the Scriptures be removed from the CDs that also carried one of its products. In negotiating content for the disc, Wisconsin-based CD publisher Rhinosoft Interactive, a subcontractor in the General Mills deal, had purchased the rights to a PC version of Disney's cash-cow game show, *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* Rhinosoft then physically merged *Millionaire* onto the General Mills CD with other software titles, including the Bible. But when Disney reviewed the total contents of the disc on which *Millionaire* would appear, the company nixed the Bible.

"The people from Disney didn't want [the Bible] on their CD-ROMs," said Ken Patterson, a Rhinosoft software developer. "It held up production when Disney had us pull it from their discs."

How did the Bibles wind up on the CDs in the first place? It happened when Lightdog, a Minneapolis-based promotions firm hired by General Mills, obtained free licenses from Grand Rapids-based publisher Zondervan to publish 12 to 13 million software copies of its New International Version on the premium CD. After General Mills had already approved the rest of the CD's content, including PC games, an encyclopedia, a thesaurus, and a Miriam-Webster dictionary, Lightdog gave its subcontractor Rhinosoft the green light to put the NIV on the CD.

What Lightdog didn't do was tell General Mills.

"Lightdog added the Bible to the CD and did not clear it with General Mills," Lightdog spokesman John Anderson acknowledged to WORLD. "We thought it would add value to the CD. It was incumbent on us to let them know and we didn't."



General Mills learned about the politically incorrect content it had unwittingly sponsored when Rhinosoft, a Christian-owned company, and Zondervan went to work on a joint press release announcing what would be the single largest one-time distribution of Bibles in history. When the two Christian companies sought a quote from General Mills to include in the release, the cereal-maker balked-and told America it was sorry.

"This was a very big surprise to us, to hear that General Mills didn't know about the Bible on the CD," Rhinosoft's Kathy Backus told WORLD. "We did not deal directly with General Mills on the issue, but we had worked very openly with everyone on the project. Based on what we were told, we thought General Mills had approved everything on the CD. In fact, [Rhinosoft founder] Greg Swan had asked in March that the presence of the Bible be clearly indicated on the packaging."

In the wake of General Mills' public penitence, Lightdog immediately owned up as the surreptitious CD content-adder, even issuing a printed statement to that effect. But it was Rhinosoft that was left swinging in the wind-courtesy of the national media. In a newspaper version of the "telephone game"-the party game where a message told to one player is passed down the line until it emerges in hilarious shreds at the other end-reporters across the country nearly scuttled Rhinosoft's relationship with both Lightdog and General Mills through inaccurate reporting. Within only a few days, press portrayals turned Rhinosoft founder Greg Swan from an upstanding Christian businessman into a Bible-smuggling stealth evangelist who had tried to foist his faith on unsuspecting American consumers.

The Detroit Free Press jumped on the General Mills story first. During an interview with Mr. Swan, reporter David Crumm tried to uncover the truth about how the Bible wound up on the promotional CD. "Lightdog says they added the Bible on later," Mr. Crumm told Mr. Swan. "That is a flat-out lie!" Mr. Swan replied angrily: "It was there from the start."

Though Mr. Swan didn't know it at the time, the problem was in Lightdog's wording. The firm had added the Bible on "later,"-not to the CD itself, but to the list of the CD's approved content, after General Mills had already signed off on the project.

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On July 22, the day after the interview, Mr. Crumm's story ran in the Detroit Free Press. His report described Mr. Swan as an evangelical Christian who had long wanted to combine his marketing profession with the sharing of his faith. It also noted that Mr. Swan had worked for nearly a year on a strategy to "soft-sell" the Bible by placing it on the disc in a section of other reference works, like the dictionary and thesaurus.

While Mr. Swan and Rhinosoft dominated the Free Press coverage, Lightdog received only a brief mention. The story included an apology from Lightdog that General Mills had not known the Bible was on the CD, but did not include Lightdog's admission that it had never submitted the Bible to General Mills for approval.

The story after that is complicated, but worth examining as a case study in poor journalism. When the Associated Press picked up the story on July 23, it spun Mr. Swan's comment on its axis and turned it into an attack on General Mills: "Greg Swan, founder of Rhinosoft Interactive of Wisconsin, the company that helped create the CD-ROMs, called General Mills' claims that it was unaware of the software Bible 'a flat-out lie.'"

On July 24, USA Today reprinted the AP gaffe: "Gregory Swan ... the founder of Rhinosoft told the newspaper General Mills knew the Bible was included."

But by July 25, the telephone game had turned ugly. CBS Marketwatch reporter Debra McGarry not only repeated the media-borne error that Mr. Swan's "flat-out lie" remark was directed at General Mills, she also drew erroneous conclusions from unrelated facts: "Swan, described as an evangelical Christian who wanted to combine software marketing with his desire to spread the gospel, told the paper he had worked on a strategy for nearly a year to slip the Bible into other content."

Mr. Swan called the Marketwatch story "libelous," adding, "These were blatantly irresponsible assumptions made without checking original sources [or] the facts ... with the intent, in my opinion, to stir controversy to create more interesting news."

While the NIV-on-disc didn't fly with Disney or General Mills, Mr. Swan still thinks including the Bible was a good idea-one he might use in future promotional projects with, of course, the full consent of all companies involved. He says he's working to legitimize the idea of the Bible as a reference tool. He hopes to include it on future CDs with other timeless works of literature that helped shape Western civilization, like Shakespeare or Homer's *Iliad*.

Meanwhile, Family Research Council's Tim Dailey is concerned about Western civilization's cultural decline. Once a missionary to the former Soviet Union, he says that next to illegal drugs, the Bible was the contraband most feared by Communist leaders. "Religious influence was considered to be harmful and dangerous," he said, just as it is now among many American secular elites: "The rejection of the Bible by General Mills is just one more example of that."



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Lynn is a senior writer for WORLD Magazine. She is the *New York Times* best-selling author or co-author of a dozen nonfiction books, including *Same Kind of Different As Me*. Lynn resides in San Diego, Calif.

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