

AlbertMohler.com

From the Bible to “Intimacy Kits” — Goodbye to the Gideons?

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No more Gideons Bibles in hotel rooms? That is the point of an article published in the online edition of *Newsweek*. Reporter Roya Wolverson explains that the trend in upscale hotels is to include no Bible among the room furnishings.

The Gideons, founded in 1899, have distributed millions of Bibles and New Testaments in scores of languages worldwide. The availability of a Bible in millions of hotel rooms is explained by the fact that Gideons International was founded after two traveling businessmen met as both were staying in a hotel in 1898. After discovering that both were Christians they shared their evening devotional together. Later, along with a third man, they agreed to start a ministry devoted to the needs of the traveling public. This led to their spectacularly successful effort to get the Bible into millions of hotel rooms.

Now, it seems, some hotel chains think the Bible no longer belongs in the hotel room:

In the rooms of Manhattan's trendy Soho Grand Hotel guests can enjoy an eclectic selection of underground music, iPod docking stations, flat-screen TVs and even the living company of a complimentary goldfish. But, alas, the word of God is nowhere to be found. Unlike traditional hotels, the 10-year-old boutique has never put Bibles in its guest rooms, because "society evolves," says hotel spokeswoman Lori DeBlois. Providing Bibles would mean the hotel "would have to take care of every guest's belief."

What might be surprising to many Americans is that the Bible-free room isn't a development just in hip New York City hotels. Across the country upscale accommodations are doing away with the Bible as a standard room amenity. And in its stead have arrived a slew of "lifestyle" products that cater to a younger, hipper (and presumably less religious) clientele. Since 2001 the number of luxury hotels with religious materials in the rooms has dropped by 18 percent, according to the American Hotel and Lodging Association. The Nashville-based Gideons International, which has distributed copies of the Christian scripture to hotels since 1908, declined to comment on this trend.

This is just another dimension of our cultural situation. These days, providing (or allowing) Bibles furnished in hotel rooms is potentially controversial. As the spokesperson quoted above implied, allowing the Bible and not allowing other materials might be seen as pushing an agenda.

This is sad, but it is also a sign of the times. Gladly, not all chains and hotels have followed this example. The fact is that many persons have come to faith in Jesus Christ by reading a Bible supplied to their hotel room by the Gideons. Many others have turned to the Bible when in crisis. Some have even decided against suicide when they read from the Gideon's Bible. Are they now to look for salvation and solace from an iPod docking station or a goldfish?

Wolverson reports further:

The reason for hotels' shift in focus? Leisure travel is up, business travel is down, and younger generations are entering the hotel market. Leisure now leads business by more than 10 percent in U.S. hotel stays, according to travel

research firm D. K. Shifflet & Associates. With the lead in technology, design and nightlife, the boutique market is where Generations X, Y and young baby boomers want to be, says CEO Doug Shifflet. And with the boutique sector booming (boutique hotel rooms have grown by 23 percent since 2001, compared to only 7 percent for standard rooms), more traditional chains, which once catered to business clientele, are now desperate to emulate.

So the hotels want to be hip, and the presence of a Bible in the drawer is unhip? Perhaps this section of Wolverson's report explains the impetus:

Edgier chains like the W provide "intimacy kits" with condoms in the minibar, while New York's Mercer Hotel supplies a free condom in each bathroom. Neither has Bibles. Since its recent renovation, the Sofitel L.A. offers a tantalizing lovers' dice game: roll one die for the action to be performed (for example, "kiss," "lick") and the other for the associated body part. The hotel's "mile high" kit, sold in the revamped gift shop, includes a condom, a mini vibrator, a feather tickler and lubricant. The new Indigo hotel in Scottsdale, Ariz., a "branded boutique" launched by InterContinental, also has no Bibles, but it does offer a "One Night Stand" package for guests seeking VIP treatment at local nightclubs and late checkout for the hazy morning after.

So it turns out that the real story is not just the absence of the Bible in many hotel rooms, but the presence of very different materials, from complimentary condoms to erotic dice games. That does help to explain things.

This development is another reminder that we are living in a time of tremendous cultural and moral change. The absence of Gideons Bibles from an increasing number of hotel rooms tells us something about the secularization, sexualization, and extreme sensitivities of our age.

It also tells us that there will be no Bibles available in those hotel rooms when travelers need them, and that is a tragedy by any measure.

Think of this the next time you are in a hotel room. Check the bedside table for a Gideons Bible. When you find one, thank the hotel management. And, when you have the opportunity, thank the Gideons.

