

Did Thomas Jefferson “write his own bible”?

Excerpted from, *THOMAS JEFFERSON – Accuracy vs. Revisionism – An Exposé*

by Catherine Millard © 2020

Introduction

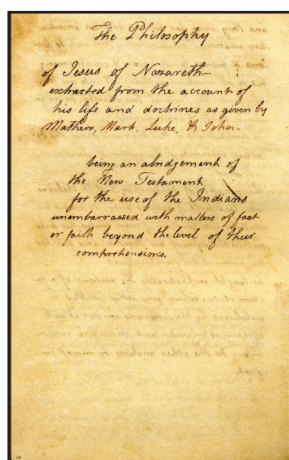
On January 9, 1816, Thomas Jefferson wrote to his life-long friend, **Charles Thomson**¹ praising him for the accuracy of his “Synopsis of the Four Evangelists;”² emphasizing its “usefulness, to those, who, not taking things on trust, recur for themselves to the fountain of pure morals.” He announces to his Revolutionary-era friend that he, also, has made a wee little book from the four Gospel, naming it “The Philosophy³ of Jesus,” and that it is “a paradigma⁴ of His doctrines,⁵ by cutting the texts out of the book, and arranging them on the pages of a blank book, in a certain order of time and subject.”



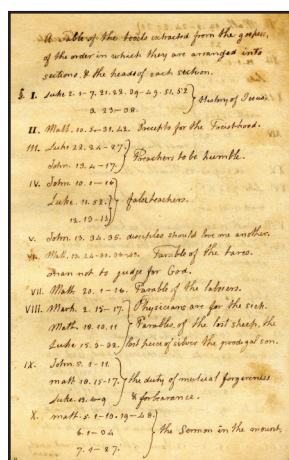
Statue of Thomas Jefferson, by Rudolph Evans. Jefferson holds the Declaration of Independence in his left hand. Jefferson Memorial, Washington, D.C. Photograph: John W. Wrigley © 1990

it comes from your hand. This work bears the stamp of that accuracy which marks everything from you, and will be useful to those who, not taking things on trust, recur for themselves to the fountain of pure morals. I too, have made a wee-little book from the same materials, which I call the Philosophy of Jesus; it is a paradigma of his doctrines, made by cutting the texts out of the book, and arranging them on the pages of a blank book, in a certain order of time or subject. A more beautiful or precious morsel of ethics I have never seen: it is a document in proof that I am a real Christian, that is to say, a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus, very different from the Platonists⁶, who call me infidel and themselves Christians and preachers of the gospel, while they draw all their characteristic dogmas⁷ from what its Author never said nor saw. They have compounded from the heathen mysteries a system beyond the comprehension of man, of which the great Reformer of the vicious ethics and deism of the Jews, were He to return on earth, would not recognize one feature. If I had time I would add to my little book the Greek, Latin and French texts, in columns side by side...

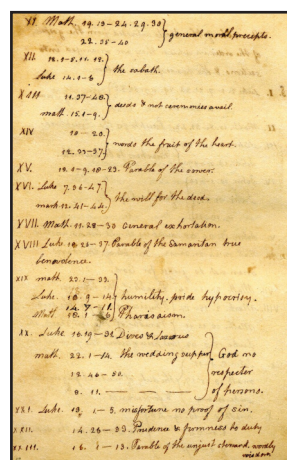
An acquaintance of fifty-two years, for I think ours dates from 1764, calls for an interchange of notice now and then, that we remain in existence, the monuments of another age, and examples of a friendship unaffected by the jarring elements by which we have been surrounded, or revolutions of government, of party and of opinion. I am reminded of this duty by the receipt, through our friend Dr. Patterson, of your Synopsis of the Four Evangelists. I had procured it as soon as I saw it advertised, and had become familiar with its use; but this copy is the more valued as



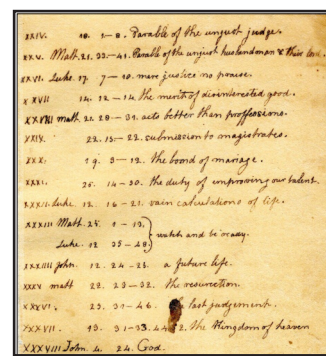
Thomas Jefferson’s handwritten *The Philosophy of Jesus of Nazareth* extracted from the account of His life and doctrines as given by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, being an abridgment of the New Testament for the use of the Indians, unembarrassed with matters of fact or faith beyond the level of their comprehensions. Jefferson did not sign, nor did he put his name to this compilation of the teachings of Christ for the use of the Indians. Rare Book Collection, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.



Thomas Jefferson’s handwritten *A Table of the texts extracted from the gospels of the order in which they are arranged into sections, and the heads of each section.* Rare Book Collection, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia



A page of Thomas Jefferson’s handwritten, *A Table of the Texts extracted from the gospels of the order in which they are arranged into sections, and the heads of each section.* Rare Book Collection, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.



A page of Thomas Jefferson’s handwritten, *A Table of the Texts extracted from the gospels of the order in which they are arranged into sections, and the heads of each section.* Rare Book Collection, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.

Jefferson's "wee-little book"

In a prior letter to his former pastor, Charles Clay, dated January 29, 1815, Jefferson writes the following concerning his "wee-little book:"

Probably you have heard me say I had taken the four Evangelists, had cut out from them every text they had recorded on the moral⁸ precepts⁹ of Jesus, and arranged them in certain order, and although they appeared but as fragments, yet fragments of the most sublime edifice of morality which had ever been exhibited to man.

However, in this letter Jefferson disclaims any intention of publishing his little compilation saying, "I not only write nothing on religion, but rarely permit myself to speak on it."

"The Philosophy of Jesus of Nazareth – An Abridgment of the New Testament for the Use of the Indians..."

The entire Title given by Jefferson to his "wee-little book," is:

The Philosophy of Jesus of Nazareth extracted from the account of His life and doctrines as given by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, being an abridgment of the New Testament for the use of the Indians, unembarrassed with matters of fact or faith beyond the level of their comprehensions.

Its **Table of Contents**, hand-written by Jefferson, reads:

A table of the texts extracted from the Gospels, of the order in which they are arranged into sections, and the heads of each section.

In perusing Thomas Jefferson's hand-written "A Table of the texts extracted from the Gospels..." – the Scriptures he selected, and their corresponding descriptive categories – a true follower of Jesus Christ cannot but marvel at his belief and implementation of our Redeemer's solemn teachings. His categories prove his belief in eternal life; the resurrection; the last judgment; Christ's deity; His Kingship; the Judge of all men; eternal life for His true believers; and everlasting punishment for the wicked (cursed), cast into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25: 31-46); the Kingdom of Heaven; the Sabbath; humility and mercy, and Christ's admonition to watch and be ready. Jefferson's acknowledgment of sin, vain calculations of life, worldly wisdom, pharisaism, pride, hypocrisy, Heaven and hell (Dives and Lazarus) stand out. It should also be noted that at Calvary, Christ's full identity was written upon His cross: **JESUS OF NAZARETH KING OF THE JEWS**, in fulfillment of multiple Old Testament prophecies.

His inclusion of the miraculous, as In Matthew 25:31-46, proves his belief in the Last Judgment, when true disciples of Jesus Christ, King of kings, **inherit eternal life**; and the wicked are cast into everlasting punishment:

When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory: And before Him shall be gathered

all nations: and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, **Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:** For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed Me: I was sick, and ye visited Me: I was in prison, and ye came unto Me. Then shall the righteous answer Him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee a hungered, and fed thee? Or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, **Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:** For I was a hungered and ye gave Me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited Me not. Then shall they also answer Him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee a hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall He answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me. **And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.** Matthew 25: 31-46.

And again, his selection of Matthew 22-29-32 is evidence of his belief in the resurrection:

And Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead but of the living. Matthew 22: 29-32.

A striking Scripture verse chosen by Jefferson under his category for Almighty God is John 4: 24:

God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.

Jefferson's acknowledgement that Christ's Kingdom was not of this world, but of the world hereafter, is amply proved by his selection of John 18: 36:

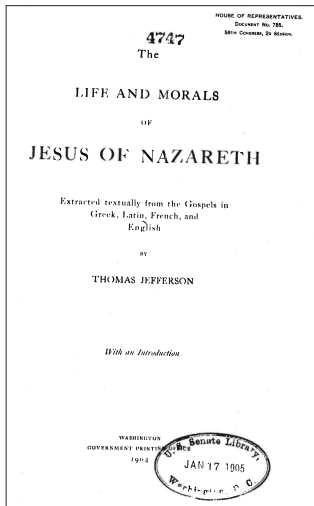
Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.'

“The Philosophy of Jesus of Nazareth...” contains many more supernatural Scriptural events.

Jefferson’s “wee-little book” – “The Work of 2-3 Nights at Washington”

His “wee-little book” of a harmony of the teachings of Christ, compiled for the benefit of the Indians as a prelude to their understanding the entire Bible, cannot possibly be misconstrued to mean that the founder of America’s political thought “wrote his own bible, removing the miraculous,” – the latter being widely publicized by the enemies of republication liberty, who have wielded his political tool to denounce Jefferson as an “infidel, atheist, deist and/or anti-Christian.”

As Jefferson recalled years later, “It was the work of two or three nights only at Washington, after getting through the evening task of reading the letters and papers of the day.” On March 4, 1804, the 46-page, “wee-little book” had been completed. Years later, Jefferson added a comparison of his English “Philosophy of Jesus of Nazareth...” with the corresponding Greek, Latin and French Scriptures, in four columns.



The circa 1904 Title Page of “The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth extracted textually from the Gospels in Greek, Latin, French and English.” “By Thomas Jefferson” and “With an Introduction” was added to Jefferson’s original compilation which he neither signed nor put his name to. House of Representatives Document No. 765, 58th Congress, 2nd Session. Printed by the Washington Government Printing Office, 1904. Photograph: Christian Heritage Ministries © 1990.

from the Gospels in Greek, Latin, French and English,” with its Table of Contents, “Table of the texts from the Evangelists employed in this Narrative and the order of their arrangement.” This one-of-a-kind museum piece was neither signed, catalogued or printed by Jefferson. Neither did he put his name to it. The Congressional order was executed as follows:

That there be printed and bound, by photolithographic process, with an introduction of not to exceed twenty-five pages, to be prepared by Dr. Cyrus Adler, Librarian of the Smithsonian Institution, for the use of Congress, 9,000 copies of Thomas Jefferson’s Morals of Jesus of Nazareth, as the same appears in the National Museum; 3,000 copies for the use of the Senate and 6,000 copies for the use of the House.

1904 – Jefferson’s “wee-little book” becomes “Thomas Jefferson’s Bible”

Thus, in 1904, the “wee-little book’s” new title page proclaimed – “by Thomas Jefferson,” thus giving the false impression that Thomas Jefferson “wrote his own bible.” Subsequent to the printing of this unique museum piece by the 58th U.S. Congress as “a Government Document,” the Smithsonian lost no time in using it as a powerful political weapon to discredit the founder of America’s liberties, by promoting it as “Thomas Jefferson’s Bible.”

Jefferson’s “wee-little book” and the Smithsonian Institution

The question arises: How did Thomas Jefferson’s “wee-little book” get into the hands of the *Division of Political and Military History*, at the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of American History? Its conveyance there, where it is housed, is chronicled as follows:

The History of Jefferson’s “wee-little book”



Photograph of Cyrus Adler (1863-1940) while serving as Librarian of the Smithsonian Institution.

In 1895, Cyrus Adler, then Librarian of the Smithsonian Institution, persuaded Carolina Randolph, eighth daughter of Jefferson’s eldest grandson, Thomas Jefferson Randolph, to sell the “wee-little book” with the corresponding Greek, Latin and French Scriptures in four columns, to the Smithsonian’s National Museum for \$400. Adler had been a Semitics student at Johns Hopkins University. In 1904, seventy-eight years after Jefferson’s death, Adler persuaded the 57th Congress, first session, to order the printing of 9,000 copies of “The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth, extracted textually

2011 – Jefferson’s “wee-little book” becomes “The Jefferson Bible, by Thomas Jefferson”

In 2011, the Smithsonian Institution republished Jefferson’s one-of-a-kind artifact in their possession through Smithsonian Books, under the bold new revisionist title, “The Jefferson Bible, by Thomas Jefferson.” However, the latter neither signed, nor put his name to it – nor did he title it a Bible. As a companion to this publication, Smithsonian Books published “The History and Conservation of the Jefferson Bible” by Harry R. Rubenstein (Curator of the *Division of Political and Military History*, National Museum of American History) and Barbara Clark Smith, © the Smithsonian Institution, printed in China through Oceanic Graphic Printing, Inc.

Its Foreword, written by Brent D. Glass, Director of the National Museum of American History, contains statements contradicting the Christian philosophy of Thomas Jefferson, heretofore proven from factual evidence. They are as follows:

“...no one can quarrel with the legacy that he valued most. Jefferson championed the ideals of the Age of Enlightenment...”

As previously discussed, the “Age of Enlightenment” is equated with the French Revolution’s atheistic “Reign of Terror,” – which is at antipodes to the Scriptural ideals embodied in Jefferson’s greatest works undergirding the American Republic – *The Declaration of Independence* and his *Act for Establishing Religious Freedom*, as well as many others.

The Foreword continues,

“...Jefferson’s Bible – The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth – offers further evidence of the personal philosophy that guided his public life. Any discussion about Jefferson’s religious beliefs must reference this extraordinary text as a primary source...”

The above-referenced “wee-little book” is neither “Jefferson’s Bible,” nor could it possibly have guided his public life, being non-existent until 1804, at the completion of his “Philosophy of Jesus of Nazareth...An Abridgment of the Gospels for the use of the Indians...,” four yours prior to his exiting public life. This he did during two to three nights at the White House. Jefferson’s custom of reading his large Old and New Testament Bible, which he called *his* Bible, on a continuing basis, refutes this statement.

Under the chapter heading, “History of the Jefferson Bible” by Harry R. Rubenstein and Barbara Clark Smith, we read,

“...This then was Thomas Jefferson’s Bible; it contained the one form of Christianity – however misshapen it appeared to others – that Jefferson believed.”

Firstly, Jefferson did not entitle his compilation, nor did he call it, “a Bible.” Secondly, his large Old and New Testament Bible, which Edmund Bacon, his Monticello overseer for twenty years, witnessed him reading, “many and many a time” is preserved in the Rare Book vault of the University of Virginia, catalogued as “Thomas Jefferson’s Bible” circa 1752. From *The Private Life of Thomas Jefferson*, we read Bacon’s eye-witness account,

Mr. Jefferson had a sofa or lounge upon which he could sit or recline, and a small table on rollers, upon which he could write, or lay his books. Sometimes, he would draw this table up before the sofa, and sit and read or write; and other times he would recline on his sofa, with his table rolled up to the sofa, astride it. He had a large Bible, which nearly always lay at the head of his sofa. Many and many a time I have gone into his room and found him reading that Bible. You remember I told you about riding all night from Richmond, after selling that flour, and going into his room very early in the morning, and paying over to him the new United States Bank money. That was one of the times that I found him with the big Bible open before him on his little table, and he busy reading it. And I have seen him reading it in that way many a time. Some people, you know, say he was an atheist. Now if he



Thomas Jefferson’s large personal Bible, containing the Old and New Testaments, opened between the General Epistle of Jude and Chapter 1 of the Book of Revelation. King James Authorized translation, Oxford: 1752. Rare Book Collection, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia. Photograph: Christian Heritage Ministries © 2013.



Above: The Smithsonian Institution’s 2011 edition of “The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth...” bearing their newly invented title: “The Jefferson Bible, by Thomas Jefferson,” published by Smithsonian Books. Below: “The History and Conservation of the Jefferson Bible” by Smithsonian Books, a companion to the above publication, by Harry R. Rubenstein (Curator of the Division of Political and Military History, National Museum of American History), and Barbara Clark Smith. Photograph: Christian Heritage Ministries © 2019.

was an atheist, what did he want with all those religious books, and why did he spend so much of his time reading his Bible?”¹⁰

This is Thomas Jefferson’s personal Bible, a King James Authorized translation of the Old and New Testaments published in 1752. Both his Bible and Prayer Book, constant companions, were omitted from his catalogue of books sold to the Library of Congress in 1815.

Smithsonian’s “The History and Conservation of the Jefferson Bible” narrative continues

“...it offers insight into the individual who created it, the thought of his times, and the American Revolution.

It can be read as an historical document that illuminates the new nation...”

Jefferson’s “wee-little book” as he called it, was initially completed in 1804 during two or three nights at the White House. The American Revolution spanned the years 1775-1783, concluding with the Treaty of Peace signed on September 3, 1783. This disqualifies his “wee-little book” from being credibly touted by the Smithsonian Institution as “an historic document that illuminates the new nation.” Neither does it “offer insight into the thought of his times, and the American Revolution,” as it was compiled twenty-three years subsequent to the final surrender of the British at Yorktown on October 19, 1781.

“Three Charters of Freedom” of the American Republic

The three great Charters of Freedom of the American Republic were signed as follows: *The Declaration of Independence* – July 4, 1776; the *U.S. Constitution* – September 17, 1787 and the *U.S. Bill of Rights* – March 4, 1789. These “historical documents that illuminate the new nation” did not originate from a compilation entitled, “The Philosophy of Jesus of Nazareth...being an Abridgment of the New Testament for the use of the Indians unembarrassed with matters of fact or faith beyond the level of their comprehensions,” circa 1804.

Jefferson’s Writing Desk

The Foreword of “The History and Conservation of the Jefferson Bible” informs the American public that their project is aimed at bringing,

“the book to a wider audience through exhibitions, a website and this publication...The National Museum of American History was able to conserve and exhibit Jefferson’s Bible through a public-private partnership – generous gifts...Through their work, Jefferson’s Bible will take its place with the portable writing desk as twin reminders of the private and public life of one of America’s greatest leaders, a complex and influential man who defined his own times and continues even today to shape our understanding of what it means to be an American.”

Thomas Jefferson’s writing desk is associated with the greatest documents of American history shaping the nation’s political thought today – *The Declaration of Independence* (1776), the *Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom* (1786), *An Appeal to Arms* (1775), *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785), *A Summary View of the Rights of British America* (1774), the first draft of the *Virginia Constitution*, his *Anti-Slavery Bill* (1778), his *Autobiography* (1743-1790) and numerous others – which cannot possibly be equated with what he himself titled “a wee-little book of the Philosophy of Jesus” and “a compilation which took me two to three nights at Washington,” in 1804.

Least of all should it be sold by the federal government to Americans as “Jefferson’s Bible” or “The Thomas Jefferson Bible,” being a falsehood of the highest order – implying that Jeffersonian freedoms stem from a book first published in 1904 as a Government Document by the Washington Government Printing Office – at the behest of Smithsonian Librarian, Cyrus Adler. The fact that the liberty was taken by Adler to inscribe Jefferson’s name thereon against his will, is proven by a letter dated April 25, 1816 to Mr. Fr. Adr. Vanderkemp, in response to a request that he use an “extract” in a publication of his own. Jefferson agreed, under the following terms: **“I ask only one condition, that no possibility shall be admitted of my name being even intimated with the publication.”**

Inauguration of Smithsonian Books’ 2011 “The Jefferson Bible” – A Deliberate Fake

The grand inauguration of Smithsonian Books’ 2011 publication entitled, “The Jefferson Bible – The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth extracted textually from the Gospels, in Greek, Latin, French and English by Thomas Jefferson – Smithsonian Books, 2011,” with his portrait thereon, took place on November 11, 2011.

An article in the October 2011 issue of *The Smithsonian* by Wayne Clough, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, informs its global readership that,

...the conserved Jefferson Bible will be unveiled in an exhibition (November 11- May 28, 2012) at the National Museum of American History’s Albert H. Small Documents Gallery. The exhibition will tell the story of the Jefferson Bible and explain how it offers insights into Jefferson’s ever-enigmatic mind...The exhibition will be accompanied by an online version. Smithsonian Books will release the first full-color facsimile of the Jefferson Bible on November 1, and the Smithsonian Channel will air a documentary, *Jefferson’s Secret Bible* in February, 2012...Now, nearly two centuries after he completed it, the Smithsonian Institution is sharing Jefferson’s unique, handmade book with America and the world.

Hence, the Smithsonian Institution’s 2011 publication of Jefferson’s “wee-little book,” with a counterfeit title and cover, inscribing his name thereon against his will, and advertised globally as being “Jefferson’s Secret Bible” – which he wrote, is a **deliberate 21st century fake**. As such, it needs to be immediately removed from the Washington, D.C., Museum of the Bible’s permanent “Impact of the Bible on America” exhibit and returned to its publisher, *The Smithsonian Institution*, prior to further deception being wrought upon an unwary American public.

Footnotes

- ¹ Charles Thomson (1729-1824) served as Secretary of the Continental Congress and the Congress of the Confederation from 1774-1789. A scholar of the Greek Bible, he published in 1789, the first American translation of the Septuagint (Greek Old and New Testaments.)
- ² A Harmony of the Four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
- ³ Philosophy: Way of Life. Acts of the Apostles 22:4 and 24:22: “I persecuted this Way unto death” and “...having more perfect knowledge of that Way,” respectively.
- ⁴ paradigm: example, pattern, a model. From Latin and Greek, to show.
- ⁵ Doctrine: (Latin) *doctrina*: 1. teaching, instruction, from doctor: a teacher, instructor; from *docere*, to teach. 2. something taught, as the principles or creed of a Religion.
- ⁶ Platonists: Followers of Plato (427-347 B.C.), who was a Greek philosopher, a student of Socrates, and teacher of Aristotle, who further developed many of the principles of Platonism in terms of preaching, sciences. The Aristotelian Platonistic thought of the 13th century attempted to incorporate the body of Greek doctrine into Christian theology. Works in this direction have become the official attitude of the Roman Catholic Church.

⁷ dogma: n. Greek: *dogma*, that which one thinks true, an opinion, decree, from *dokein*, to think, seem. A positive, arrogant assertion, dogmatic utterance. Dogmatic: an asserted a priori or without proof.

⁸ moral: a. relating to, serving to teach or in accordance with, the principles of right and wrong. Morality: n. a change of heart and moral character from being an enemy of God, to love of God and a holy life. Moral: n. the practical lesson inculcated by any story or incident, the significance or meaning (as in the parables of Jesus

Christ.) A rule of action or conduct. *Webster's 1828 Dictionary*.

⁹ precept: n. to take beforehand, to admonish, a commandment or direction, a rule to be implemented.

¹⁰ Pierson, Hamilton W., D.D. *Jefferson at Monticello. The Private Life of Thomas Jefferson*. From entirely new materials, with numerous facsimilés. New York: Charles Scribner, 1862, p. 119.

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