

Comment

Vol. 31 No. 3

A publication of the Massachusetts Bible Society

Fall 2007

From the Executive Director: Anne Robertson

Deer Hunting with Jesus

Deer Hunting With Jesus by Joe Bageant is a sociological look at poor, white America by someone who grew up in its midst, left, and then returned with new eyes. So it's not a religious book per se. But since fundamentalist Christian faith is the bedrock of such communities, those who wish to engage fundamentalism in any meaningful way would be wise to steel themselves against the book's often vulgar language and try to understand a culture that has gained what is to many a frightening level of power and influence in our country.

Having begun pastoral ministry in rural, northwest Florida in exactly the kind of community that Bageant is describing, I found I couldn't put the book down. When I tell stories from my early ministry, people think I'm making it all up. They probably think Bageant is making it up also. But he's not. The characters he describes, with all their offensive language and uninformed opinions, are real in the backwaters of every state in the Union and more numerous than many think. And they break your heart because they can no more escape from their poverty and ignorance than they can muster the funds for decent health care or housing that isn't literally crumbling around them.

Bageant sees the issue of Christian fundamentalism as more a product of poor education than poor theology. From his chapter on "The Covert Kingdom:"

Lack of a broad higher education is a hallmark of fundamentalist ministers and goes completely unremarked by their congregations, in whose eyes a two-year technical school or community college, and especially a seminary of their own, is on par with nearly any of the vile secular universities. In fact, the "Bible colleges" are better because they don't teach philosophy, science, the arts, or literature in any form a secular person would recognize.

This rejection of "fancy learnin'" has been a feature of American fundamentalism since the backwoods-stump church days, and it continues to provide the nation with charismatic literalists whose analytical abilities are minimal.

I'm not a sociologist and am completely unqualified to judge

(continued on page 4)

News from the Executive Director

While summer is a slow time with many people away, things are still happening at the office. **On June 27, we officially turned over ownership of the bookstore at Andover Newton Theological School to the school.** Now that we are out of the physical bookstore business, our book services will focus more on special orders, book tables at events, and, of course, Bibles. New directions for that department include a much more customized level of book recommendation services for individuals and churches.

Some of those services will be tied to a new membership and partner church program, offering a much broader range of benefits to our partners. We have been working on that this summer and it will roll out during the fall semester, which should also see at least part of our new website go live. We've been evaluating proposals from web designers this summer, and we're excited about the possibilities!

My speaking schedule is also filling up, and I'm now accepting invitations for 2008. Check my website at www.annerobertson.com/speak.html to see when I'm currently booked, and give me a call if you're interested in having me come to your church or group.

A pet project of mine is to re-create the old horse-drawn Bible wagon in time for our 200th anniversary. Whether joining a parade or taking an engaging preacher on a preaching tour to partner churches, such a wagon drawn by a beautiful draft horse would certainly make MBS well-known across the state. But working out what we do for a horse is a challenge. If you know of people in the community who might be willing to work with me on the issue, please have them contact me.

We have lots of irons in the fire up here on Beacon Street. If you want to be in on the fun, be sure to attend the Annual Meeting on October 21. And for those of you in the Boston area, please mark your calendars for September 21, when we will sponsor Bert Marshall's presentation of the Gospel of Mark at Union United Methodist Church on Columbus Avenue. More information on both events can be found in this issue of *Comment*.

Announcing the 2008 Beck Lectureship

Even as we anticipate the exciting presentation of Barbara Brown Taylor this fall, we are looking to next year's event. We are pleased to announce that the Reverend Professor **Peter Gomes** will be our 2008 Beck Lecturer.

Boston Luncheons Continue...

Book Review: *A Wing and A Prayer*

The Society's luncheons for business and professional people provide an ecumenical setting for those who work in the Boston and Cambridge area to share a meal together and hear a presentation on biblical and theological themes that help empower faithful living.

A Wing and a Prayer: A Message of Faith and Hope

By Katharine Jefferts Schori

Morehouse Publishing, New York, 2007

Review by Rev. Lyn Brakeman, MBS Trustee

Upcoming Luncheons Include:

♦ On Wednesday, September 12th, **Dr. Jennifer Knust**, Assistant Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins at Boston University, will join us to discuss the theme *Loose Texts, Loose Women: A History of Jesus, An Adulteress, and the Gospel of John*, drawing on themes from her Luce Fellowship project on the tale of the adulteress in John 7:53-8:11. By tracing the transmission, reception, and interpretation of this extraordinary tale, "Loose Texts, Loose Women" invites a reappraisal of the multiple ways that confessing Christian communities work with and through texts to envision what it means to be faithful people of God.



Dr. Jennifer Knust

On Wednesday, October 10th, **Dr. Roger Gottlieb**, Professor of Philosophy at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, will join us to discuss themes from his book *A Greener Faith: Religious Environmentalism and Our Planet's Future*. As we become more aware of our impact on the planet, we can no longer divide our environmental perspectives from our work in faith. Dr. Gottlieb will discuss how people of faith can learn to be stewards of creation.



Dr. Roger Gottlieb

On Tuesday, November 13th, **Dr. Kwok Pui Lan**, William F. Cole Professor of Christian Theology and Spirituality at Episcopal Divinity School, will join us to discuss the theme *The Politics of Translating the Bible: A Chinese Perspective*. 2007 marks the 200th anniversary of Protestant missionaries in China. This lecture will discuss issues around translating the Bible, including orality and textuality, the arguments between the British and American Bible Societies, the relation between the Bible and colonialism, and the Bible in multi-scriptural contexts.



Dr. Kwok Pui Lan

Reservations are needed for these luncheons. Please call (617) 542-2230, or e-mail admin@massbible.org. The suggested donation is \$10.00. We would be pleased to add your name to the luncheon mailing list via post or e-mail.

* * * * *

§

Wise, witty, spiritual—and brief. What more could you ask for in this byte-sized, over-stressed age?

Katharine Jefferts Schori, the first female Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, has written this series of meditations. The title fits Katharine's religious vocation as well as her status as a pilot licensed to fly small planes, her chief modes of transportation when she served as the bishop of Nevada. Katharine is also a trained scientist who practiced oceanography, studying squids and octopuses in the north Pacific. Her first mission equipped her well for her second: serving God in the Church, a place as full of landed creatures as diverse, weird and lovable as those of the sea.

The book includes her homilies ("Homecoming" and "Saints On Fire") from her consecration and the Sunday following. Daily meditations contain strands of both science and religion, each interwoven and enriched by incarnational theology and spiced with personal experiences and images that tie it all down to earth. "God, With Skin" is my favorite chapter.

About love, Katharine says: "What does love look like? Getting out of the way, so another person can try. Blood, sweat and tears. Feeding one another. Above all, love liberates, love sets us free to be more than we thought possible."

Using the image of a drum and the metaphor of being "stretched on the frame of the Holy Spirit," Bishop Katharine encourages us to welcome tension and limitation so we can ". . . resonate like cowhide—boom, boom boom. How could we possibly predict that a dead piece of cow could produce such a lively sound? If we're willing to be similarly stretched, we can become instruments that can convert spiritual energy into a changed society. And every once in a while we'll make sweet, sweet music."

§

ANTS Bookstore Key Passing



Faculty and staff celebrate the official passing of the Andover Newton Theological School Bookstore from MBS to the school on June 27, 2007. From left to right: Rev. Nick Carter, ANTS President, Dr. William Herzog II, ANTS Dean of the Faculty, Ms. Joyce Simon, ANTS Bookstore Manager, Rev. Dr. Donald Wells, MBS Executive Director Emeritus, and Rev. Anne Robertson, MBS Executive Director.

§

Update on the Grants Program

More Best Books of 2007

The Society continues to provide Bibles and other related study materials to churches, prison and hospital chaplaincies, homeless shelters, and other similar institutions to assist in their outreach ministry. Recent grants have been made to:

Brigham and Women's Hospital, Boston (55 Bibles in various languages and translation for ministry with patients at this facility); **Harvard-Epworth United Methodist Church, Cambridge** (30 *NRSV* Bibles for distribution to AIDS orphans in Kenya by a church member's outreach program); **Eliot Presbyterian Church, Lowell** (28 Portuguese Bibles for use by a Brazilian study and outreach group that meets at the church); **Merrimack Valley Habitat for Humanity, Lawrence** (2 Spanish Bibles for presentation to new Habitat homeowners); **Norfolk State Prison, Norfolk** (100 *NAB St. Joseph's* Bibles for use by inmates in theology classes and lectio divina study groups led by chaplains and visiting

Appreciation from a Grant Recipient...

I received a wonderful box of Bibles yesterday and I wanted to say thank you so much!

The young people at my church said, "They just gave you Bibles? Wow! That's pretty cool!" I have to agree with them. Thank you so much for having an organization that can honestly give to those who are in search of spiritual truth. I and our other youth leaders are now better equipped with the tools to educate our young people about God. I'm sincerely grateful.

Ms. Louna Alexandre
Youth Ministries
United Exodus Christian Church

deacons); **Haley House, Boston** (25 *NRSV* Bibles for use in a Bible study for those experiencing homeless and extreme poverty); **Oblate Lay Associate Office, Lowell** (110 *Good News* New Testaments for distribution to children at an ecumenical summer Bible group who would not otherwise be able to afford copies of the Scriptures); **Bridgewater United Methodist Church, Bridgewater** (20 *NRSV* Bibles for ongoing outreach ministries at two halfway homes that are located adjacent to the church); **United Exodus Christian Church, Randolph** (30 *NIV* Bibles for youth ministries at this Haitian new church start); **Tufts New England Medical Center, Boston** (20 *NAB St. Joseph's* Bibles, 20 *Good News* Bibles, 20 *KJV* Bibles, 5 *Good News* Bibles, 5 Haitian Bibles, and 2 Portuguese Bibles for ministry to patients and their families, who are often far from home and dealing with difficult issues.)

These Grants are made possible by gifts from individuals and Partner Churches. At the close of Fiscal Year 2007, we had given over \$51,000 worth of Bibles to various institutions and projects, only a few of which are mentioned above.

Throughout the year, MBS has created a list of Best Books that are especially significant for readers of spiritual and theological works. Books are selected based on their ability to aid in the transformation of individuals, communities, and the world at large. **The complete list is available for purchase online at www.massbible.org** and through MBS Book Services at Beacon Street. *All 2007 Best Books are available to everyone at a 20% discount!*

The new addition to the list is:

The Most Famous Man in America: The Biography of Henry Ward Beecher, by Debby Applegate. (Doubleday Publishing, 2007. Paperback, 560 pages.)

Regular Price: \$16.95

20% Discount Price: \$13.56



No one predicted success for Henry Ward Beecher at his birth in 1813. Beecher surprised them by inserting himself into nearly every important drama of the era—among them the anti-slavery and women's suffrage movements, and controversies ranging from Darwinian evolution to presidential politics. He was notorious for his irreverent humor and melodramatic gestures, such as shipping rifles—nicknamed “Beecher's Bibles”—to the antislavery resistance fighters in Kansas. Thinkers such as Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, and Twain befriended—and sometimes parodied—him. And then it all fell apart. Featuring the page-turning suspense of a novel and dramatic new historical evidence, Debby Applegate has written the definitive biography of this captivating, mercurial, and sometimes infuriating figure.

The Gospel of Mark Alive!:

Friday, September 21, 7:30 p.m.

Union United Methodist Church, Boston



Rev. Bert Marshall

Hear Mark's whole mysterious, enigmatic story from beginning to end, as it may have been told in the early years the Jesus Movement, before the rise of institutional Christianity. Experience the power of Mark's gripping tale through the medium of oral tradition. Let the “good news” of Jesus Messiah wash over you in new and surprising ways! If you've never before experienced a telling of an entire gospel, this is an opportunity you don't want to miss!

Come experience this exciting performance by the Rev. Bert Marshall, Regional Director of Church World Service Northern New England. This event is jointly sponsored by the Union United Methodist Church in Boston.

For more information, visit the MBS website or www.gospelofmarkalive.com.

Massachusetts Bible Society

One Book, Many Voices

14 Beacon Street, Suite 510
Boston, MA 02108-3740

Return Service Requested

- ◆ **Beck Lecturer: Barbara Brown Taylor
October 21-23**
- ◆ **MBS Annual Meeting Invitation Inside!**
- ◆ **New MBS Office Hours!**

More on "Deer Hunting with Jesus"

(continued from page 1)

whether Bageant is correct in his analyses of how such communities got to be the way they are. But having lived in the stories that he tells, and having tried to minister in a town convinced that the parable of the Good Samaritan was really a prophecy that Jesus would return in the year 2000, his message strikes me as something that those of us outside that world need both to hear and to understand.

Bageant closes his chapter on "The Covert Kingdom" by quoting Frederick Clarkson's book *Eternal Hostility: The Struggle Between Theocracy and Democracy*. It sums up how I feel as well:

Once we have learned the lay of the land, Clarkson adds, "We need to figure out who we can talk to and who we can't." When you get down to the guy in the church pew, he says, "You will find that most conservative evangelicals and fundamentalists do not want a theocracy and are not inclined to civil war here or in the Middle East. Their intellectual and political leaders may be, but most of the congregation just wants to pursue happiness in pretty much the same way as everyone else. It is time to get to know our neighbors."

(continued next column)

(continued from left)

That's what happened when a divorced, Yankee woman preacher from a liberal seminary began ministry in Dixie County, Florida. And getting to know such neighbors is one of the chief challenges now facing the Massachusetts Bible Society as we swim in a cultural sea where the mainline churches read literature talking about a post-Christian society while politically battling attempts to create a theocratic state. Clearly there is a disconnect. Bageant's book is one attempt to help span the divide. §



NEW MBS OFFICE HOURS

In order to better accommodate programming demands that require our staff be out of the office more frequently, we have adjusted the official Beacon Street office hours. Our hours are now Tuesday – Thursday, 9 am to 5 pm. Staff may be available in the office at other times, and whenever they are in the office they will certainly respond promptly to any emails or voicemails you may leave. Please bear with us as we upgrade our technology to better serve you in this new structure; a new voicemail system is in the process of being installed. §

COMMENT is a publication of the Massachusetts Bible Society, 14 Beacon Street, Suite 510, Boston, MA 02108. Executive Director: Rev. Anne Robertson. Editor: Sandy North. For information about the work of the Society, call (617) 542-2230, fax (617) 542-1386 or e-mail: admin@massbible.org.