

CHURCH FOLK AUTHOR STOPS AT REAL EYES BOOKSTORE

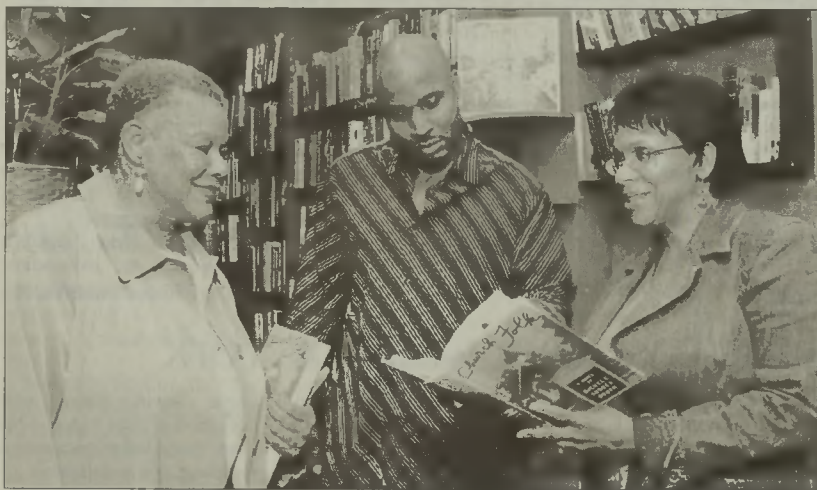


PHOTO: CALVIN FERGUSON

Michelle Andrea Bowen, author of Church Folk and Second Sunday, explains her faith based novel to Gloria McClain and book store owner Darren Vincent. Bowen, who lives in Durham is an Essence Bestselling author and is working on her next novel.

Bible text steers clear

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Wheaton College in Illinois, who calls the book "a triumph of scholarship and a major publishing event."

The book applies principles in a 1999 accord, "The Bible & Public Schools," endorsed by seven major national educational associations and a variety of religious groups. It'll be interesting to see how these same organizations assess this textbook.

The lavishly illustrated book is filled with biblical references from literature, art, music, history and popular culture — things on which educators and pollsters find disheartening ignorance among American teens.

A recent Chicago Tribune editorial said that when public schools decline to impart knowledge about such an important subject, they are not doing anything to preserve the separation of church and state. They are merely failing their students."

The book, written by 43 collaborators, took five years and \$2 million to produce. It sells for \$67.95 retail, \$50 for school orders.

The editors are Cullen Schippe, just-retired vice president with McGraw-Hill/Macmillan textbook publishers, and New York City venture capitalist Chuck Stetson, who chairs Bible Literacy.

The book comes as a relief for Charles Haynes, religion scholar at Freedom Forum's First Amendment Center. Hundreds of perplexed public school districts have consulted Haynes about Bible textbooks. He says "The Bible and Its Influence" is the first he's able to recommend.

The only previous textbook dates from 1976 and, in Haynes' view, slights religious aspects of the Bible's influence.

Nor does he favor a program, used by hundreds of schools, from the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools of Greensboro. It prints a rough teacher's outline and has students use only the Bible as the textbook. The council says that's nonpartisan but its material, promoted by evangelicals, has provoked local conflicts.

Some educators and citizens might assume a public school Bible course is illegal, considering that federal courts have forbidden Ten Commandments displays and such in schools.

But the U.S. Supreme Court's decision barring schoolroom Bible recitations said "the Bible is worthy of study for its literary and historical qualities" and favored "objective" classes "as part of a secular program of education."

Four decades later, Bible courses finally seem doable. On the Net: Bible Literacy Project: <http://www.bibleliteracy.org>

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