The Harrell F. Beck Chair of Hebrew Scripture

SUSTAINING A LEGACY
AT BOSTON UNIVERSITY’S SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
To honor and sustain the legacy of Harrell F. Beck and his 33 years of teaching in the BU School of Theology, we seek to raise $500,000 in support of the Harrell F. Beck Chair of Hebrew Scripture at the Boston University School of Theology.

Your contribution to this endowment fund, through an outright gift or planned gift, will help us celebrate one of Boston University’s most iconic, influential, and memorable teachers.
Harrell F. Beck taught at the School of Theology for 33 years. He died in 1987, more than a quarter-century ago. How, and why, does he live on so powerfully in our minds and hearts?

He lives on because he was a consummate teacher, a thundering orator, and a preacher with an outsized passion for Hebrew Scripture. He could convey the lessons of Scripture as no one else quite could. He mesmerized congregations large and small, brought the Hebrew Bible alive for thousands, and personally embodied the power of faith. His scholarship was in his teaching and public oratory.

He even looked and sounded the part: big and broad, with a dramatic beard and a booming voice.

He connected instantly with people. He knew how to reach in and touch the core of whomever he addressed, whether a single student or an entire congregation, whether in a BU classroom or a dusty country church in Texas. Legions and generations of students adored him, each and every one believing that he or she was his special favorite. He taught them that Scripture was all about connection, inspiration, and celebration: the celebration of wisdom robust enough to withstand the harsh tests of time.

To recognize Beck’s enduring presence and influence, the School established the Harrell F. Beck Professorship of Hebrew Scripture upon his death in 1987—the professorship that we now seek to put on a firm and permanent financial footing.

Since 1987, something remarkable has happened. The fund established in Beck’s name certainly has kept alive his larger-than-life presence at the School, and also kept
alight the flame of his dearest traditions: his love of Hebrew scripture, deep affection for people, and profound enjoyment of teaching. It has done far more than that, however. It has become a platform from which to pursue significant scholarly research, write with deep understanding of the Hebrew Bible, and address contemporary theological issues.

Some legacies get smaller, in hindsight; Beck’s has only continued to grow. No one would have been more pleased by this development than Beck himself, who always challenged those around him to think more broadly.

Today, the School of Theology seeks formally to establish and fully fund the Harrell F. Beck Chair in Hebrew Scripture. The professorship will continue to honor Beck’s memory and legacy. In addition, it will recognize its incumbent for his or her compelling scholarship in Hebrew Scripture, and for building Beck’s passionate and humanistic relationship with the Hebrew Bible with similar passion, academic rigor, and teaching excellence.

If the fund were to be started today, it would require $2.5 million. But as a legacy endowment that already contains $500,000, it now needs to reach the first threshold of $1 million for the establishment of the Beck Chair, with the expanded opportunity to add to it over the next generation.
The Beck Scholars

SHAPING A TRADITION

Students and colleagues in the School of Theology already have benefitted immeasurably from the work of the two scholars who have been honored as Beck professors.

The first Beck Scholar of Hebrew Scripture was Simon B. Parker, the School of Theology’s late associate dean. Parker taught Hebrew Bible and was a world authority on Ugaritic, an ancient Semitic language.

Parker joined BU as an assistant to then-president John Silber, and soon became assistant provost. He was named associate dean of the School of Theology in 1981. British, educated at Johns Hopkins, reserved but possessed of a fabulous sense of humor, Parker was a scholar’s scholar. A graduate student once remarked that one of the most valuable things that Parker taught was how to use the Old Testament text as a lens through which to discover human history.
Parker died in 2005, and the current incumbent Katheryn Pfisterer Darr was installed as the second Beck scholar three years later. She vividly remembers that the ceremonial program for the event that day was printed in green—the color that, to Harrell Beck, symbolized a vital and growing faith.

Darr’s journey to that memorable day actually began years earlier: an outgrowth of a longstanding friendship between Beck—an ordained United Methodist minister—and Darr’s parents, both of whom were active in the United Methodist Church. As a young scholar on the verge of being awarded her PhD, Darr came to Boston University from a one-year joint teaching appointment with her husband at Baldwin Wallace College in Ohio in 1983.

That same year, Harrell Beck took a sabbatical, and Darr signed on to teach his course, Introduction to Hebrew Bible, which was required of all Masters degree students at the School. She team-taught the course with her senior colleague, Simon Parker. When Beck returned from sabbatical, he taught the course until his retirement three years later, while Darr taught other STH courses.

Darr’s passion for her work establishes her as a kindred spirit with Beck. “I’m one of those people who has been privileged to do what I always wanted to do,” she says.
“And I can honestly say that, if someone said to me now, ‘Kathe, you can go back and do anything else that you want to do,’ I would continue doing what I do now, here, at BU. I love the field, I love teaching, research, and scholarship, and obviously I love service to the University.”

Her scholarship dates back to her college days, when she first studied the Old Testament systematically (and discovered to her surprise that ordination was not a prerequisite to becoming a Bible scholar). She undertook her graduate work in Hebrew scripture at Vanderbilt University, and eventually completed her thesis on the Book of Ezekiel and Chapters 40-55 of the Book of Isaiah. She has published extensively, and is now studying biblical proverbs. Among her published works is *Isaiah’s Vision and the...*

---

**Beck on knowing the tune**

“Mark Twain used to swear a blue streak, and his good Christian wife put up with it for thirty years. When they moved into that beautiful house in Hartford, Connecticut, she decided she was going to be done with Mark’s swearing. So one day, when he nicked himself shaving, he let go with a classic paragraph and the whole room turned purple.

“She walked over to him, looked up at him, and repeated every word he said! He was enough of a 19th-century chauvinist to be taken aback—and then all of a sudden he smiled and said, ‘My dear! You’ve got all the words right, but you don’t know the tune!’

“I want to be kind of person who gets the words right—and knows the tune! Because it’s the tune that the world hears. It doesn’t matter how much you talk or show up at church, it doesn’t matter if you have a little fish on your bumper—it’s what people see in our lives every day.”

*Images of Hope: Christ the Dolphin*
March 10, 1985
Courtesy of www.harrellbeck.com
Family of God, in which she studies imagery in the Book of Isaiah through the lens of metaphor theory.

Darr is also the present chair of the BU Faculty Council—in effect, the house of representatives for professors in the University’s 16 schools and colleges—and she serves as the first council chair ever elected from the School of Theology faculty.

**THE LEGACY OF A BECK SCHOLAR**

Harrell Beck is an inspirational presence in Darr’s professional life. Like Beck, she has devoted her life to teaching Hebrew Bible, skillfully and energetically—“with all the passion I have,” as she puts it.

That passion is recognized and celebrated across the University. In 1989, Darr was awarded the Metcalf Award for excellence in teaching: BU’s highest teaching honor. The honor remains a treasured inspiration for Darr.

Asked what she would like people to say of her, looking back from the distant future, Darr reflects, and responds: “I’d like them to say, ‘Like Harrell, she loved the Hebrew Bible. She loved teaching. She loved every aspect of what she did. And she embodied a powerful tradition that didn’t stop, but went right on to the next person.”

Traditions and legacies are subjects that Darr has thought about frequently. She says that the future of Biblical studies at BU is bright, thanks in good measure to the legacy that Beck established. “He was fabulous at looking at the ancient texts,” Darr says, “and discerning their contemporary significance and conveying that to people in the classroom, the pews, and the pulpit every week.

“That tradition within the School is incredibly important. There is a continuing need for advanced scholarship in Hebrew Bible studies, and that’s what the Beck chair would honor.”
Supporting the Harrell F. Beck Chair

“A teacher affects eternity,” wrote Henry Adams. “He can never tell where his influence stops.” It is time to put the Harrell Beck Chair on a firm foundation for the future, and thereby sustain his legacy for generations of scholars and preachers.

Harrell Beck’s influence on the School of Theology, Boston University, and the broader world is palpable today. It lives on through his own words, through the contributions of Simon Parker and Katheryn Pfisterer Darr as Beck Scholars, and in the unfolding lives of the generations of students they taught.

To bring this fund to its first $1 million threshold will mean providing support to the academic chair at the School of Theology as the most fitting tribute to Beck himself, and the surest way to guarantee the unique blend of passionate teaching and deep scholarship that has emerged in his name.

Please join us, and please be as generous as you can.

Thank you, and God bless you.
Gifts in support of the Harrell F. Beck Chair can be made to
Development & Alumni Relations
Boston University School of Theology
Suite 109
745 Commonwealth Avenue
Boston, MA 02215
Tel: 617-353-2349
Email: sthdev@bu.edu
Web: bu.edu/sth/giving

Or, to make an estate gift to this fund, contact
Boston University Planned Giving
595 Commonwealth Avenue, Suite 700
West Entrance
Boston, MA 02215
Tel: 800-645-2347
Email: opg@bu.edu
Web: bu.edu/opg
On a Mission
The Campaign for the Boston University School of Theology