

## RELS 5134 Feminist Interpretations of the Bible

妇女释经

Lecturer: Prof. Nancy Tan

Mondays: 19:00 – 21:15 CKB 706C

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### Course Overview

This course introduces and equips you how to do feminist/gender critical biblical interpretations for your communities of faith. This subject is grounded in the ecumenical belief that all humankind are equal, and we worship an inclusive and loving God who nurtures all that God has created. It gives the biblical structure and foundation to Feminist Theology, Contextual Theologies, Liberation Theology and an essential counterpart to Biblical Theology and the other biblical courses as well. The course explains what is Feminist Interpretation of the Bible is all about and the need for doing so, especially when the Bible is set in a patriarchal world and male perspectives have dominated its interpretations since the biblical period. The course will introduce some of the approaches and methodologies. The course will show how traditional exegesis and interpretations continue to subvert the female gender and other marginalized groups, and at the same time, it commits to rethink and redo exegesis so as to proffer reconstructive interpretations to empower women and marginalized communities. This course compels and challenges readers to reread the Bible imaginatively and inclusively. It exposes patriarchy/*kyriarchy* and the political world of the Bible, to include and affirm all humankind and creation as deserving respect and justice.

**In Memory and in Honor for the Oppressed, Disowned, Tortured, Violated, Raped and Murdered Wo/men IN/FOR/BY/THROUGH the Bible and its users.**

### Learning Outcomes

#### Knowledge Outcomes

The student will:

- (1) identify gender interests in reading and interpreting biblical texts
- (2) recognize and reflect on the patriarchal/*kyriarchal* nature of the Bible in its context, and its impact and theological implications on the communities of faith
- (3) discern and explain how biblical texts when interpreted can influence the behavior of humanity
- (4) describe the general historical status of women in the biblical periods and some periods of church history
- (5) account for the methodologies on feminist interpretations proposed in the textbook
- (6) apply a few of these methodologies to interpret some passages in the bible
- (7) illustrate with examples how texts can be ‘redeemed’ to empower the marginalized when conventional interpretations suppressed them

#### Attitude Outcomes

The student will:

- (1) become more sensitive to the fact that the female gender and other categories of humanity continue to be oppressed by scripture and society even today

- (2) develop a conscious awakening for the equality and justice for all humanity because God is just and compassionate to all creation
- (3) develop keen sensitivity on how interpretation of certain biblical texts are used to limit not only gender, but also the oppressed within the communities of faith
- (4) be inspired to read and interpret biblical texts with sensitivity to the oppressed in the society
- (5) be vigilant to expose patriarchal/*kyriarchal* interests in biblical texts and also preach/teach texts of courage and exhortation to bring hope and restoration to all humanity

### List of Topics

Topic	Contents
Introduction to Feminist Biblical Interpretation (FBI)	This chapter describes what is FBI. It persuades why Christianity and people who reads the Bible for inspiration needs FBI. It also clarifies the misconception of FBI in faith communities. It explains the aims of FBI.
Note: As you will soon discover in your readings that each feminist interpretation usually covers all the aspects of the contents listed below, many of the chapters will overlap and be covered partially as each lecture progresses.	
Methodologies of FBI	This chapter will take up more than one lecture period. It will be revisited throughout the rest of the course after its introduction. The chapter differentiates the concepts of Feminist Hermeneutics, Methodologies and Approaches to FBI. It will first introduce the methodologies outlined in the textbook. And, as the reading progresses, we will discuss how scholars employ different methodologies and approaches for their interpretations.
Masculinity Interpretation of the Bible	“Masculinity Studies” as a subject has become a core course in many universities in recent years, and Masculinity Interpretation of the Bible may be considered as a counterpart to FBI. This chapter introduces what it is and how one may do Masculinity Interpretation of the Bible.
Historical Contexts of Lives of Women in the Biblical era	This chapter surveys the ways scholars attempt to reconstruct the lives of women in the biblical era. It will look into some of the resources available, and it will also consider the implications of the results of some of the discoveries – from archaeology, anthropology and textual studies.
Re-interpreting Fe/male Biblical Characters in the Bible	This chapter studies how Jewish and Christians rewrites scriptures and re-represent the female biblical characters through the biblical era. It presents the extant literature as resources to doing FBI.

Marginalized Groups and their Interpretation of the Bible	This chapter explores structures of oppression in society, and how to identify perspectives of marginalized groups and their interpretation.
Ethics of FBI	This chapter discusses the ethical issues scholarship has raised concerning FBI.

### Learning Activities

Each week comprises 2 hours and 15 mins. For each hour of class, students are expected to spend approximately two hours for output, excluding the final essays. Students will require about an hour to read the required texts before every lecture, and on average, an hour to do the required exercises from the textbook.

Students will also require approximately on average 1½ hour per week to complete the written essays (which include one presentation).

Classes will include mostly lectures, and class/group discussions on the assigned topics.

### Required Texts

1. The Bible including the marginalized scriptures of the Protestant canon, the Apocrypha or Deutero-canonical books.
2. Fiorenza, Elisabeth Schussler. *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation*. New York: Orbis, 2001.

Essays/Articles listed in the Course Schedule below.

### Assessment Scheme

Task Nature	Purpose	Learning Outcomes
1. Reading based assignments: <b>30%</b> Reflection Exercises from the Textbook, <i>Wisdom Ways</i> . Please read Appendix 1 on which assignments you may select to do. Grading scheme is also found there. <b>Final submission date: 13<sup>th</sup> April 2017</b>	To give students a guide to understand the related topics before the class lectures. To provide a foundation and basis for further self-directed studies.	1. Comprehend the general subject matter before the lectures. 2. List ideas that are of interest and relevant to the student's context. 3. Construct implications of the ideas presented in the text. 4. Evaluate the ideas and implications in the light of the student's contexts and consider short and long-term consequences.
2. <b>Presentation Paper 30%</b> <b>A Letter to the Biblical</b>	To engage the students to think reflectively on the portrayal of wo/men in the Bible passages.	1. Explain the background information of the biblical passage with the help of

<p><b>Author/s</b> Imagine you are one of the wo/man in the Bible, write a letter to the final biblical author/s to express: (1) how you feel and why; (2) what and how you think you should have been portrayed or emphasized about you in the scripture. You should consult the sources according to those recommended by your teacher. Please see Appendix 3. <b>Submission date: On the day of your presentation.</b></p>	<p>It will enable them to recognize oppressive structures and expressions, and consider the obvious or subtle unjust consequences in portrayal by biblical authors. To encourage students to think imaginatively and purposefully. To introduce students to relevant sources for FBI.</p>	<p>suggested commentaries. 2. Conduct a close-reading of the selected biblical passage. 3. Consider the perspectives of the wo/men in the biblical passage. 4. Evaluate the gender dynamics in the passage. 5. Account for the injustice to the wo/men. 6. Think of constructive ways how to express injustice.</p>
<p>The letter itself should be more than 1,500 words but not more than 1,800 words including footnotes but excluding bibliography. It must be submitted in its complete form on the day of presentation. For the presentation, you can use the Powerpoint. The presentation should take about 10 minutes and allow about 8 minutes for the class to appreciate, question and discuss the contents. Please see Grading Scheme/Rubric in Appendix 2.</p>		
<p>3. Essay 40% <b>A Letter to the Readers of the Bible</b> Imagine you are one of the wo/man in the Bible and you write to the readers who have read about you. You should consult the sources according to those recommended by your teacher. Please see Appendix 3. <b>Final Submission date: 26<sup>th</sup> April 2017</b></p>	<p>To engage students to think reflectively on the interpretations made by commentators on the wo/men characters in the Bible. To encourage students to think critically about “norms” of gender promoted in commentaries or communities of faith. To motivate students to consider approaches to overcome injustice through biblical interpretation.</p>	<p>1. Study the background information of the selected biblical passage. 2. Conduct a critical evaluation of interpretations in commentaries concerning the biblical character. 3. Account the relevance of the events related to the wo/men in the Bible and today’s wo/men. 4. Consider and account for the consequences of the “malestream” interpretation in relation to lives of wo/men today. 5. Point out the injustice to the wo/men through the biblical passage. 6. Think of constructive ways that marginalized communities can be empowered through biblical interpretation of the</p>

		passage selected.
<p>There are 2 parts to this assignment. The first part is a letter to the “malestream” commentators where you tell them in what way their interpretation has oppressed more readers (i.e., both male and female) rather than empower the marginalized or promote justice; the second part is what you wish the readers may take away or feel empowered through your story (even if it may be a negative story). You should give at least equal weightage to these two groups of readers. Otherwise, recommended ratio of first group to second group is either 40:60%; or 60:40%. This letter should be around 3,500 words but cannot exceed 3,800 words including footnotes but excluding bibliography. Grading Scheme/Rubric please see Appendix 2. Proper footnoting and bibliography is expected.</p>		

Note:

1. All hardcopies of the assignments must reach the mailbox of Prof. Nancy Tan at KKB before 18:00 hours of the deadline.
2. All electronic copies of the assignments must be submitted via VeriGuide. Please read the following, provided by the University’s recommendation carefully and take all plagiarism warnings seriously. Failure to do any of the steps prescribed will result in severe penalization.

Academic honesty and plagiarism

Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/>.

With each assignment, students will be required to submit a signed declaration that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures. In the case of group projects, all students of the same group should be asked to sign the declaration, each of whom is responsible should there be any plagiarized contents in the group project, irrespective of whether he/she has signed the declaration and whether he/she has contributed directly or indirectly to the plagiarized contents.

For assignments in the form of a computer-generated document that is principally text-based and submitted via VeriGuide, the statement, in the form of a receipt, will be issued by the system upon students’ uploading of the soft copy of the assignment. Assignments without the properly signed declaration will not be graded by teachers. Only the final version of the assignment should be submitted via VeriGuide. The submission of a piece of work, or a part of a piece of work, for more than one purpose (e.g. to satisfy the requirements in two different courses) without declaration to this effect shall be regarded as having committed undeclared multiple submission. It is common and acceptable to reuse a turn of phrase or a sentence or two from one’s own work; but wholesale reuse is problematic. In any case, agreement from the course teacher(s) concerned should be obtained prior to the submission of the piece of work.

For all MTh/DTh and MPhil/PhD students:

Assignment #1 will carry 20% of the grade. The other 10% of the grade you must write another Reflection Paper. This Reflection Paper can be for any one or two of the articles or essays from the Required Reading and it should be between 800-1000 words.

It is important to note that this is a Reflection Paper, not a Summary or Book Report. Should you summarize the book or parts of it, they should not take more than 20% of your paper. These are the points you should write about:

- (1) Before I read this book, what were my assumptions (from education, church life, social expectations) and how have they changed after reading?
- (2) Which point/s in the book left the deepest impact on me? Why?
- (3) Will I undertake changes on my part to promote justice in any way? (Think of small steps here.) Or, why will I not make any changes on my part? You may share the barriers as well.
- (4) You may cite other books which you have read and dialogue with the authors, but you must not lose focus on what you feel after reading Fiorenza's book.

### Feedback

Students are welcome to give their feedback to the teacher throughout the course. There will be a final Evaluation conducted by the University at the end of the course.

### Course Schedule

Key:



Required read



Additional read (not required to be completed before lecture, or during the course, but highly recommended)



Contents covered for the week

All readings (biblical texts and essays/articles) should be done prior to class lectures beginning from Week Three.

### Week One

09 Jan

#### Introduction to the Course and Requirements

📖 What is Feminist Interpretation of the Bible (FBI) all about? And Why FBI? Understanding the world of patriarchy/heterarchy/*kyriarchy* in the Bible and the Goals of FBI. Historical Contexts of Lives of Women in the Biblical era



Introductory Readings to Women in the Biblical World:

Levine, Amy-Jill. 1994. "Second Temple Judaism, Jesus and Women: Yeast of Eden", *Biblical Interpretation* 2.1: 8–33.



Meyers, Carole L. 2014. "Was Ancient Israel a Patriarchal Society?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 133.1: 8–27.

Brenner-Idan, Athalya. 2015. "Does the 'Twist' Point to Heterarchy?" Pp. 64–66 in Brenner and Helen Efthimiadis-Keith (eds.), *A Feminist Companion to Tobit and Judith*. London/NY: Bloomsbury T & T Clark.

## Week Two

16 Jan

- 📖 **Where is our Goddess/es?** Can we *really* live without Her/‘Therm’? Historical Contexts of Lives of Women in the Biblical era. The lives of women in historical contexts and textual contexts: from archaeology to texts.
- 📖 *Jer. 7; 44; 2 Kgs 22–23; Prov. 1, 8; Ben Sira 24; Wisdom of Solomon 7–9*
- 📖 Day, Linda. 2006. “Wisdom and the Feminine in the Hebrew Bible”. Pp. 114–27, in Day and Carolyn Pressler (eds.), *Engaging the Bible in a Gendered World*. Louisville/London: Westminster/John Knox Press.

## Week Three

23 Jan

- 📖 **Engaging FBI.** Introduction to Methodologies for FBI by Fiorenza
- 📖 Textbook, pp. 135–205.

- 👉 1. Fontaine, Carole. 1997. “The Abusive Bible: On the Use of Feminist Method in Pastoral Contexts”. Pp. 84–113, in Athalya Brenner and Fontaine (eds.), *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods and Strategies*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic.
2. von Kellenbach, Katharina. 1997. “Overcoming the Teaching of Contempt”. Pp. 190–202, in Athalya Brenner and Carole Fontaine (eds.), *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods and Strategies*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic.

## Week Four

**HAPPY LUNAR NEW YEAR!!!**

## Week Five

06 Feb

- 📖 **Eve: Bearing the Brunt of the First Woman**
- What did Eve do to deserve *this ...?*
- Re-interpreting Fe/male Biblical Characters in the Bible. Methodology of FBI.
- 📖 *Gen. 1–3*
- Kimmelman, Reuven. 1998. “The Seduction of Eve and Feminist Reading of the Garden of Eden.” *Women in Judaism* 1.2.

## Week Six

13 Feb

- 📖 **Honoring the Plotted, Raped/Sacrificed and Unnamed Dead Daughters of Israel**
- Historical Contexts of Lives of Women in the Biblical era. Re-interpreting Fe/male Biblical Characters in the Bible. Methodology of FBI.
- 📖 *Gen 34; Book of Susanna; Judg. 11; 19–21*
- Scholz, Suzanne. 2010. “Breaking the Silence.” Pp. 27–52, in *Sacred Witness: Rape in the Hebrew Bible*. Minneapolis: Fortress.

## Week Seven

20 Feb

- 📖 **She is my Sister!?** Re-interpreting Fe/male Biblical Characters in the

Bible. Methodology of FBI.

📖 *Gen. 12, 16 (Sarah and Hagar), 18–23 (Rachel and Leah and their hand-maids), David’s wo/men in 1Sam. 13; 15; 16:1, 16; 28; 2Sam. 21:1–14 (Rizpah)*

Exum, Cheryl. 1993. “Who’s Afraid of ‘The Endangered Ancestress?’” Pp. 90–113, in Exum and David Clines (eds.), *The New Literary Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic.

## Week Eight

27 Feb

Discussion of Topics for Assignments 2 & 3

⚔ **Motherhood, Sex and Barrenness** Historical Contexts of Lives of Women in the Biblical era. Re-interpreting Fe/male Biblical Characters in the Bible. Marginalized Groups and their Interpretation of the Bible.

Methodology of FBI.

📖 *The “Levirite” narratives: Gen 38; Ruth; The Barren: Gen. 12–21; 1Sam 1:1–20; Isaiah 54; Judith; Motherhood/Sex: 1Kgs 3:16–28.*

Tan, Nam Hoon Nancy. 2016. “Hong Kong Sex Workers: Mothers Reading 1 Kgs 3:16–28.” Pp. 157–78, in Gale A. Yee and John Y.H. Yieh, *Honouring the Past, Looking to the Future: Essays from the 2014 International Congress of Ethnic Chinese Biblical Scholars*. Hong Kong: Divinity School of Chung Chi College, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

## Week Nine

06 Mar

⚔ **Woman as Evil in the Jewish Scriptures** Historical Contexts of Lives of Women in the Biblical era. Re-interpreting Fe/male Biblical Characters in the Bible. Methodology of FBI.

📖 *Ezek. 16; 23; Hos. 1–3; Jer. 1–2; Prov. 1–2; 5–7; 9; 1 Kgs 16–21; 2 Kgs 9; 4Q184*

Everhart, Janet. 2010. “Jezebel Framed by Eunuchs?” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 72: 688–98.

## Week Ten

13 Mar

⚔ **Masculinity Interpretation of the Bible.** Masculinity Interpretation of the Bible.



Clines, David. 1995. “David the Man: The Construction of Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible.” Pp. 212–43, in *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Bible*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995.

👤 1. Haddox, Susan. 2016. “Masculinity Studies of the Hebrew Bible: The First Two Decades.” *Currents in Biblical Research* 14.2: 176–206.

2. Stephen Moore and Janice Capel Andersen. 1998. “Taking it Like a Man: Masculinity in 4 Maccabees.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117.2: 249–73.

17, 19 Mar

**Make-up Lecture at CK Lectureship: “Paul’s Instructions to Women”**

Compulsory Attendance for at least two out of the three lectures. Attendance

will be taken and your note-taking will be required.

### **Week Eleven**

20 Mar

Discussions of the CK Lectureship.

♠ **Marginalized by “canon” and Queering Scriptures?** Methodology of FBI. Re-interpreting Fe/male Biblical Characters in the Bible. Marginalized Groups and their Interpretation of the Bible. Ethics of FBI.



1. Guest, Deryn. 2008. “Looking Lesbian at the Bathing Bathsheba.” *Biblical Interpretation* 16.3: 227–62.

2. Townsley, Jeremy. 2011. “Paul, the Goddess Religions, and Queer sects: Romans 1:23-28.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 130.4: 707–728.

3. Mona West. 2001. “The Gift of Voice, the Gift of Tears: A Queer Reading of Lamentations in the Context of AIDS.” Pp. 140–51, in Ken Stone (ed.), *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible*. NY/London: Sheffield Academic.

### **Week Twelve**

27 Mar

♠ **Presentations (1)**



1. Fiorenza, Elisabeth. 1986. “A Feminist Critical Interpretation for Liberation: Martha and Mary: Luke 10:38–42.” *Religion and Intellectual Life* 3: 21–35.

2. Fletcher, Michelle. 2014. “What Comes into a Woman and What Comes Out of a Woman.” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*. 30.1:25–41.

### **Week Thirteen**

03 April

♠ **Presentations (2)**

### **Week Fourteen**

10 Apr

♠ **Conclusion and Creative Beginnings.** Ethics of FBI.

Bowen, Nancy R., “Can God be Trusted? Confronting the Deceptive God”, in Athalya Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets* (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 354–65.