

RELS 5134 Gender Critical Interpretation of the Bible

Lecturer: Prof. Nancy Tan

Mondays: 19:00 – 21:15 ELB 207

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Course Description and Overview

The course introduces the approaches to reading and interpreting the Bible for the sake of gender equality and justice. It looks into the effects of gender injustice in the history of biblical interpretation (and theology) and equips students 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. Hence, reading and interpreting the Bible is a task towards gender inclusivity. It will cover both Feminist Interpretation of the Bible and Masculinities Interpretation of the Bible.

The course first explains what 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 and how to evaluate these interpretations. The course will show how traditional exegesis and interpretations continue to subvert the female gender and other marginalized groups. It will approach Masculinities Interpretation of the Bible in the same order as Feminist Interpretation, and how the portrayal of maleness in the Bible presents differing ideal masculinities and also subverts certain portrayals. This course commits to rethink and redo exegesis so as to proffer constructive interpretations to empower women and men 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. It enhances an appreciation of the religious, social, political, cultural contexts in which the gendered Bible readings take place. The student will become familiar with prominent academic positions in the field of feminist and masculinities biblical studies. The ultimate goal is to read and interpret the Bible so as 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 Women and also 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) distinguish feminist interpretations and masculinities interpretations
- (4) appreciate the developments and contributions of these two faculties in academia

- (5) recognize the prominent scholars contributing to gender critical interpretation
- (6) discern and explain how biblical texts when interpreted can influence the behavior of humanity
- (7) account for the approaches and methodologies on feminist interpretations proposed in the textbook
- (8) apply a few of those in (7) to interpret some passages in the bible (in class discussions and assignments)
- (9) illustrate with examples how texts can be ‘redeemed’ to empower the marginalized when conventional interpretations suppressed them
- (10) identify what constitutes biblical masculinities and how current masculinities study as a discipline evaluate them
- (11) articulate what is hegemonic masculinity and identify how are they portrayed in the Bible
- (12) apply and evaluate gendered critical interpretation of the Bible

Attitude Outcomes

The student will:

- (1) become more sensitive to the fact that the female population in particular continue to be oppressed by scripture and society even today
- (2) become more sensitive also that certain types of maleness are disdained by scripture and propagated as damned by God through some interpretations as well; and there are also other groups at large continue to be marginalized by certain groups of bible believers
- (3) develop a conscious awakening for the equality and justice for all humanity because God is just and compassionate to all creation
- (4) develop keen sensitivity on how interpretation of certain biblical texts are used to limit not only gender classifications, but also “others” within the communities of faith and extending to the society at large
- (5) be inspired to read and interpret biblical texts with sensitivity to the oppressed in the society
- (6) be vigilant to expose patriarchal/*kyriarchal* interests and hegemonic masculinity 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 topic 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.	
Approaches and Methodologies of FBI	This topic will take up more than one lecture period. It will be revisited throughout the rest of the course after its

	introduction. The topic 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.
Historical Contexts of Lives of Wo/men in the Biblical era	This topic surveys the ways scholars attempt to reconstruct the lives of women and fragmented men 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.
Masculinities Interpretation of the Bible (MIB)	“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 topic introduces what it is and the approaches scholars have undertaken so far to do MIB. One of the concepts to grasp for this course is hegemonic masculinities and why this is important for gender critical interpretations.
Re-interpreting Female and Male Biblical Characters in the Bible	This topic studies how Jewish and Christians rewrites scriptures and re-represent the fe/male biblical characters through the biblical era. It also introduces how the extant literature can be a resource to doing FBI and also MIB.
Marginalized Groups (especially the LGBTQ) and their Interpretation of the Bible	This topic explores structures of oppression in society, in particular, patriarchy and kyriarchy and what is hegemonic masculinity; and how these structures oppress both female and male in society. It also informs how to identify perspectives of marginalized groups and their interpretation.
Ethics of FBI and MIB	This topic discusses the ethical issues scholarship has raised concerning FBI and MIB.

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. 2001. *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation*. New York: Orbis. (Abbreviated *WW* below)

This is by far the most comprehensive book that explains what is and how one may do Feminist Interpretation of the Bible. It is also foundational to many other ways of doing interpretations for marginalized groups. It will also give an excellent foundation to appreciating and also doing MIB. Therefore we will start with this book.

Essays/Articles listed in the Course Schedule below.

Assessment Scheme: All Reading Based Assignments

Task Nature	Purpose	Learning Outcomes
<p>1. 35% Reflection Exercises from the Textbook <i>WW</i>. Please read Appendix 1 on which assignments you may select to do.</p> <p>Final submission date: 12th April 2019</p>	<p>To give students a guide to understand the related topics before the class lectures.</p> <p>To provide a foundation and basis for further self-directed studies.</p>	<p>1. Comprehend the general subject matter before the lectures.</p> <p>2. List ideas that are of interest and relevant to the student's context.</p> <p>3. Construct implications of the ideas presented in the text.</p> <p>4. Evaluate the ideas and implications in the light of the student's contexts and consider short and long-term consequences.</p>
<p>25% Book Review in not more than 2000 words. Mendoza, Manuel Villalobos. 2014. <i>When Men Were Not Men: Masculinity and Otherness in the Pastoral Epistles</i>. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix.</p> <p>Compulsory Chapters are Chapters 1–3 and 8; select 2 other chapters from 4-7.</p> <p>Final submission date: 12th April 2019</p>	<p>1. To give students examples how MIB has been and can be done – from different approaches and perspectives of critical reading of the texts.</p>	<p>1. Understand the purposes and the outcomes of MIB.</p> <p>2. Consider the ways how biblical authors and commentators had and have portrayed masculinities that may be relevant and irrelevant to reality.</p> <p>3. Identify the political issues in the portrayals as well as the interpretations done by the author.</p> <p>4. List, explain and substantiate the points of agreement and disagreement.</p> <p>5. List and construct</p>

		implications when taking seriously the points made by the author.
<p>For this book review, please note that before embarking, the required reading found in the Schedule by Clines on “David the Man...” is necessary. You should follow the following structure to write this book review.</p> <p>First part (about 200 – 300 words): Briefly outline the thesis of the author and how he achieved it.</p> <p>Second part (about 1000 - 1200 words):</p> <p>(a) Select 2 to 3 points in the book that challenges you the most – explain in what way – idea/s that you have not considered before, or you previously thought otherwise; and how you struggle with the author’s way of dealing with the point/s. Substantiate your views.</p> <p>(b) Select at least 1-2 points in the book that encourages you the most – explain in what way and how – idea/s that you have felt suppressed by social "norms" or teachings, etc., until you read the book.</p> <p>Third part (about 400 – 600 words): Which part of this book you think your community of faith needs and in what ways can you help to communicate this message to your community?</p>		
<p>3. Essay 40%</p> <p>A Letter to the Readers of the Bible</p> <p>Imagine you are one of the women or men portrayed or mentioned in the Bible. You are to write to the readers of the Bible who have read about you. You should consult the sources according to those recommended.</p> <p>Final Submission date: 15th April 2019</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To engage students to think critically and reflectively on the gendered interpretations made by commentators on the women and men characters in the Bible. 2. To encourage students to think critically about “norms” of gender promoted in commentaries or communities of faith. 3. To motivate students to consider approaches to overcome injustice through biblical interpretation. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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 women or men in the Bible and today’s contexts. 4. Consider and account for the consequences of the “malestream”/kyriarchal interpretation and the hegemonic masculinities portrayed or interpreted in relation to the lives of women and men today. 5. Point out the injustice imposed on women and men through the biblical passage. 6. Think of constructive ways that marginalized communities can be empowered through biblical interpretation of the passage selected.

This letter should be around 3,800 words but cannot exceed 4,000 words including footnotes but excluding bibliography. In your letter, give space to point out the patriarchal/kyriarchal aspects as well as the hegemonic masculinities portrayed by the biblical author/s and/or “malestream” commentators. Devote your concluding paragraphs what you, the biblical character wish the readers may take away or feel empowered through your story (even if the story may be a negative story).

Note: You will present your paper on the 2nd last week of the course. You are given 10 minutes to present your paper. You may choose to present part or all of the paper. The other 5 minutes is for your classmates to ask you questions about what you have done. You will have one week after your presentation to revise and update your paper before you submit. Your teacher will discuss if there are areas to revise or update.

Note:

1. A general grading rubric can be found at the attached pdf file. I will update the final one on Blackboard for each of the above assignments accordingly.
2. All assignments must be submitted via Blackboard.
3. All electronic copies of the assignments must be submitted via VeriGuide by the submission deadlines. 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.

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

07 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



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

2. *WW*: Chapters I-II.



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

14 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



1. 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.

2. *WW*: Chapter IV

Week Three

21 Jan



📖 **Engaging FBI.** Introduction to Methodologies for FBI by Fiorenza



WW, 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
28 Jan

⚔ **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*

1. Kimmelman, Reuven. 1998. “The Seduction of Eve and Feminist Reading of the Garden of Eden.” *Women in Judaism* 1.2.

2. *WW*: Chapter III.

Week Five
04 Feb

HAPPY LUNAR NEW YEAR!!!

Week Six
11 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
18 Feb

⚔ **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*

Week Eight
25 Feb

⚔ **Masculinity Interpretation of the Bible**

The start of MIB and its developments.

📖 1. 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.

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

Week Nine
04 Mar

⚔ **Men in the NT**

📖 1. Wilson, Brittany E. 2015. “Destabilizing Masculinity: Paul in the

Book of Acts and Beyond.” *Journal of the Bible and Its Reception* Vol.2.2: 241–61.

2. Mendoza, *When Men Were Not Men*. Chapter 3.

Week Ten

11 Mar

⚔ Illegitimate Masculinities in the Bible?

📖 1. MacWilliam, Stuart. 2014. “Athaliah: A Case of Illicit Masculinity.” Pp. 69–85, in Ovidu Creanga and Peter-Ben Smit. *Biblical Masculinities Foregrounded*. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix.

2. Briggs, Will. 2017. “‘A Man’s Gotta Do What a Man’s Gotta Do’: The Criticism of Hegemonic Masculinity in Judges 19.1–20.27.” *Journal for the Society of the Old Testament* 27.1:51–71.

Week Eleven

18 Mar

⚔ **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

25 Mar

⚔ **Presentations**



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

⚔ **Reading Week**

Week Fourteen

08 Apr

⚔ **Conclusion and Creative Beginnings.**

Ethics for Gender Critical Interpretation.

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